

## The joy of Dharma<sup>1</sup>

How do we know when the path we are taking is the “right” one, that is, it is one heading towards awakening? The simple answer is that we feel joyful about it as our understanding grows with our practice (which includes studying the suttas and listening to the Dharma). There are two important terms that help us appreciate this process.

The two terms are ***attha,veda dhamma,veda***—which we can translate as “joy in the meaning” and “joy in the teaching.” We can also translate both the expressions as a single phrase, as meaning, “joy in the meaning and purpose of the Dharma” or “inspired knowledge in the goal and the Dharma.”

Before we examine these two words, it helps to remember that many, if not most, Pali words are polysemic. They have multiple meanings, all of which can apply at the same time, which helps us understand more fully what we are to do, and how to practise it.<sup>2</sup>

We should understand ***attha*** as having the senses of “meaning,” “goal” (or purpose), and also “benefit.” The **Dharma** or lower-case dharma gives us both the meaning of our quest or practice (from what we have studied in the suttas) and what we do with this understanding. When we feel joyful at such simple acts, then surely we are heading towards the path of awakening. ***Veda*** is the joy and inspiration connected with both the historical Buddha’s Dharma (*dhamma*) and its “meaning-purpose-benefit” (*attha*). Note the polysemy here.

Here is the related passage from **the (Anussati) Mahānāma Sutta** (A 11.12) for us to examine:

... the noble disciple, Mahānāma, having directed his mind to the Tathagata, his mind that is straight  
gains inspired knowledge in the goal;  
gains inspired knowledge in Dharma;  
gains gladness connected with Dharma; ... (A 11.12), SD 99.3<sup>3</sup>

Here is another passage, which shows how any of the 3 jewels – that is, their recollections – can bring us the same joy and inspiration to energize our meditation and fuel our journey on the path of awakening:

When that monk [meditator] is endowed with wise faith  
in the Buddha, ... in the Dharma, ... in the Sangha,  
he gains inspired knowledge in the goal;  
he gains inspired knowledge in the Dharma;  
he gains gladness connected with Dharma; ... (M 7,8), SD 28.12

The rule of thumb for Dharma progress is that we enjoy our practice – in fact, we feel happy with everything that is wholesome in and around us. Even the most negative people or event cannot remove that Dharma joy which radiates from us.

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<sup>1</sup> This reflection is based mostly on a section on “right speech” in **Ariya Atth’āṅgika Magga**, SD 10.16 (3.4.3).

<sup>2</sup> See Reflection R462, [Freeing Buddhism from words](#), 2016.

<sup>3</sup> See also [SD 15.3](#) (4).

The joy grows even greater when we discover that there are others who are cultivating this joy, too. Then, we feel the joy of spiritual friendship on the level of common practice, a coming together, a going together, a joyful togetherness (*sāmaggī*) (Dh 194).

Imbued with the joyful inspiration of knowing the Dharma (*dhamma, veda*) and joyful inspiration working its purpose (*attha, veda*), whatever we think, talk or do feels joyful, too. This is more precious than the “golden touch” of king Midas of Greek mythology, who sadly turns even his beloved daughter into a golden statue when he touches her.<sup>4</sup> The Dharma touch gives us love, life, light and liberation. Incidentally, these four qualities are the 4 L’s of the clockwise Buddhist swastika.

This “joyful touch” of the Dharma **en-joys** (puts joy into) what is in our heart, what is before us, and into the lives that we touch. With this transformative joy, our life is enriched even with whatever worldly activities that we engage in that is creative or intellectual in nature. We can now transform any suitable topic that is (was) “animal talk”<sup>5</sup> into Dharma reflections. This becomes a bridge for others new to Buddhism to cross over to explore and taste the Dharma.

The books we read, the literature we study, enrich our vision of the Dharma, so that we see everything anew in the Dharma light. What is true and beautiful in literature, poetry, art, music, the work that we do for life, for love, for leisure, shine out with Dharma joy, so that it is all worth doing. These are the 84,000 Dharma-doors all open to us. Yet, all we need is just one door, the one that opens to the path to nirvana.

When we see others experiencing this, too, we simply rejoice in it, too. Even when we have done what needs to be done, even not doing them, not having to do them any more, we feel a sense of calm ease that we now have more time for the Dharma, for life, and to move on up along the joyful eightfold path.

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<sup>4</sup> For the myth of Midas, see SD 10.16 (3.5.5.2).

<sup>5</sup> On “animal talk,” see SD 10.16 (3.5.2).