

2006-04-24 Sympathetic Joy

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SPEAKERS

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So this is a guided meditation on sympathetic joy begins by bringing to mind some person that you know who is happy. Maybe you could think of the happiest person you know are some persons whose success or brought a sense of well being and good fortune to that person. Person perhaps something really wonderful has happened. Thinking about someone who's happy or sad, some wonderful good fortune in their life. See if it's possible to appreciate the good fortune of the happiness the person has. What would it look like what would feel like for you to have some deep heartfelt appreciation of this person's well being happiness, good luck, success, good fortune. Maybe it's someone who you feel close to Cz to kind of almost share in their happiness. Sometimes we celebrate people's successes or accomplishments. graduate from high school from college, variety of things and it's a lot of rejoicing and happiness. Thinking about someone quite happy or accomplish something wonderful, possible to put aside any even subtle forms of envy or jealousy, in favor of reflections of appreciation of delight in this person for this person and then the Practice of sympathetic joy involves finding inside of yourself the wish that this person's happiness continue. This person's good fortune continues. Can you find such a wish? It's a wish that is hopefully flavored. By sense of delight to rejoicing, deep appreciation of the person's good fortune and out of your own happiness or delay or this person, then wishing them to be happy. wishing it to continue. As you did this little exercise, can you identify anything that might stand in the way of you feeling delight or joy? in someone else's happiness so I'm going to say a couple of words, few, a few words here. And then we'll pause to do something and then I'll give the talk. And so the so these last two weeks and then today, I'm giving an offering a four week series of talks on what's called the Brahma viharas. Before divine abodes, and I think of them as four forms of love, or ways of relating to other people that are highly praised and cultivated and developed in Buddhist practice. And the first one is loving kindness, loving kindness. The second one is compassion. And then for the third one we're talking about today is sympathetic joy. And the fourth one is equanimity. And it said that of those four, that sympathetic joy is the rarest. That's the one that people do the least. And sometimes sometimes it's the hardest one to do. That. It's easy to have compassion. They say, easy to have friendliness or loving kindness but sympathetic joy to rejoice or

really deeply appreciate somebody else's success and well being so much so that we can feel kind of happy is much more rare. And it's said that that it said that there are enemies to this quality of sympathetic joy. And enemies are those things which kind of destroy it. In the far enemy is envy and envy is when we hate the fact that someone has success or someone's happy. So it's clearly they don't go together well. And that's a foreign to me. And the near enemy is that quality which looks like it might actually be the ideal, but it's not. In the near enemy of there's a variety of things which can Do the near enemy of sympathetic joy. But one of them is giddiness. giddiness so it's kind of like a little bit superficial kind of like kind of kind of getting high on the delight and the joy that's there and getting kind of high and kind of giddy. So you're not really connected to the person anymore. You're connected more to your own excitement about the joy and delight and kind of getting off on it. You're kind of giddy as they say. So, that's my introduction. And if you would be so kind, and what I would like to ask you to do is to turn to someone next to you. If you don't want to, you can just sit quietly and tell the person about the person you thought about who was a happy person, or who recently had some great happiness or some accomplishment or some good fortune or something. And tell about that person and tell them what it was like for you what it's like to relate to that person to the point of view of appreciation or, or delight in their good fortune. And so, we just take a couple of minutes with a smile to take, you know, choose someone and then to be your partner. And then one person starts and after about two minutes or so ring the bell and you can just switch to the person talking about the person. Okay? If you don't like to do it, just sit quietly. So there wasn't too much giddiness. So it said it says sometimes that to be able to be happy oneself, it helps a lot to be able to feel delight in the happiness of others. So that the cultivation of sympathetic joy is not only to feel joy for other people, but also to be able to cultivate To develop our own capacity for being happy. The I think that the experience of sympathetic joy or appreciative joy comes from when one of the ways it comes is when the mind is quite relaxed and quite open. And so when we're in the presence of someone who's having some, some good fortune, or some wonderful things happening to them are wonderful happiness, that, that they just kind of a natural way that the mind or the heart responds to that happiness. So that joy just feels delight. It kind of resonates in a nice way. And, but it's interesting, you know, all all the things that can get in the way of that kind of shared joy. Sometimes it can be a feeling of, certainly of envy or resentment can arise that that person shouldn't have it. I have had, and really what comes to mind is a story from when I was in Burma. Practicing there. And there were a small group of Westerners practicing at the same time. So they're some of them knew each other from being in America. They were kind of friends or acquaintances. And they're just one woman who had some great success in her meditation. She had some great, really, really deep, deep thing happened to her meditation practice. And he was a great thing. And this Westerner who's newer from back in the States, he came up to me and said, I know her, it couldn't have happened. Maybe it couldn't have been but did. And so the idea of you know, so sometimes when There's a lot of, there can be resentment often sometimes we compare ourselves to other people and other people are feeling happy, or have success in life, then somehow measure it against ourselves and then we're not good enough or we're not up to it or, you know, life's basically a one upmanship, right. That's the important thing in life, right? And so if you don't if you're playing that game, then somebody else's success then they're one up on you. So that's not good. So you got to kind of do what you can do to to change the change that right. And you sitting

around being happy and delighted and rejoicing in their happiness is not going to help you get ahead, right. So where there can be fear as part of the barrier to feeling delight in someone else's joy? One of the ideas about why you sympathetic joy is harder to experience than compassion, or kind of a pseudo compassion is that with sympathetic joy, it's kind of like you have to be, have been a friendly relationship to the person. It's kind of open friendliness with them with compassion or pseudo compassion. You don't have to look at that poor person. You know, and a poor person who's like suffering and Mother Teresa now, you know, you know, think well about them. And, and so you don't really, it's not that kind of pseudo compassion. It's not really, really opening up your heart to really kick in and receive the person with sympathy, sympathetic joy, it's closer to kind of being, you know, you know, being friendly with them or, you know, treating them as some some intimate sometimes we can have people will feel a lot of joy. If someone who's really close to us, succeeds in something, but not for others. And I go to my son's Little League games now. And, and it's really great to see the sympathetic joy that the parents have for the kids. There's a lot of it. I mean, I mean, it's something that doesn't make a lot of sense. I mean, they're just yeah, it's, you know, most amazingly just the fact that they, you know, get up to bat is a sign of rejoicing. They're so happy and, and then, you know, they somehow connect with the ball, men sleep, that's sign for great happiness and rejoicing. And if they happen to make a debase that's a sign for rejoicing, if they get out that sign of rejoicing doesn't matter. But it's mostly for the kids on your team. Sometimes they'll rejoice for the other team, but you already start seeing the separation. You know, that kind of choosing who you're going to join For the better for everybody. My son likes baseball a lot. And so we kind of following the baseball world. And it's kind of fun to watch the NFL a little bit, kind of theater games, but actually find a little bit painful these games because, you know, that story is the one that someone's going to lose. You know, and it's, you know, I kind of feel for the people are gonna live happier people win kind of, but winning at the expense of other people. So it's kind of a strange way of feeling joy, but the way it's done, but there's a, but to feel joy in other people. And so when we did this little guide at this little reflection on who we you know, we feel happy for who, who we know is really happy and I thought people know in recent time, who've had really transformative experiences in the meditation practice, and I just felt so much delight and so much like, like You can melt into lightest, Wow, it's so fantastic and just delighted in them, that should happen to them. And it's just because like the best no one had told us, meditation is not spiritual practice is not a competition. So that's what's really beautiful capacity. and to what degree it's true that it's a rare sentiment is for you to decide. But the Buddhist tradition claims that it's relatively rare. Firstly, those four and it's something that can be cultivated and developed. And, and there's, I think of a number of reasons why it's useful to cultivate and develop it. One is that it's just a delight. It's a great thing. And it's sometimes better than alternative mean sometimes when I'm driving around town or doing something about some, you know, to actually do some kind of practice with my mind is an infinite improvement to just letting my mind do whatever it wants to do by itself. And so, you know, I could just go be thinking about all kinds of things I can think about, you know, silly things, all kinds of things. It doesn't really change my state of my mind or my heart, it doesn't really make me feel good, particularly. Or I could spend some time little time reflecting on things like sympathetic joy, like who do I know is really happy, who I know, has some success or some accomplished major, some good fortune in their life right now. And I do that for a little while. Then. I stopped feeling a certain certain

level of joy and delight, that joined a life comes with a feeling kind of, I call it melting or open heartedness are kind of softening in my chest that I really like. nice feeling. And I find that this learn to appreciate joy. Good fortune is very closely akin to me to the idea of gratitude. feeling grateful. And the reason I can make that connection connection, I think is that from the point of when I was in Asia practicing in Burma, people there with call America, a heavenly realm, a heavenly realm, Dibble and dabble around, heavenly realm. And, you know, people who are the people who got born in America generally had some really good karma. Though of course, it's better to be born in the Buddhist country, into the into if you're Buddhist right, but their heavenly realm and even more heavenly than In the heavenly realm of America, generically, is in their eyes was some of the retreat centers in America, some of the Buddhist retreat centers. I mean, they were considered to be the upper echelons of heavenly realms, like spirit rock or something. And so they would look at America, you know, and we know that America is a mixed bag. There's a lot of other things going on here besides heavenly things. But it's phenomenal, what good fortune we have in this country. For most of the people, for a lot of people, even some, even some people who are pretty poor, have it have relatively in relative to some other places in the world, have a lot of good fortune. So, that kind of reflection of gratitude. You started realizing that there's a lot of people around us who have good fortune. And to appreciate kind of Oh, yes, a lot of good. A lot of good going on here. They're good health. Recently when I was doing this kind of little bit of sympathetic joy, reflection, I saw a couple. I don't know, maybe they're about 30 years old, out for a jog for run. And normally, I would have just seen all those people running. Because I was kind of doing a sympathetic joy thing. I thought, wow. They're still young enough to be able to do that. They're so lucky. You know, that's great. It may continue that way. They continue for a long time. Are they lucky? That's great. And that's silly to think that way. Or is it so is it very easy to take for granted, but we have situations as they are and not realize that it's really wonderful to the precious so simply enjoy practice just a nice thing to do in itself. And other nice reason to do it is that it goes together with the other four. Brahma vihara is that it's one of the ways to begin allowing the mind the heart to become more flexible, more fluid, more lubricated, so that when we encounter different situations, we're less likely to be guarded or resentful or slightly less likely to meet the situation with some some attachment, some clinging, some resistance, some way in which the heart our heart is frozen or, or you know, and so, whether we might not have loving, sympathetic joy for the people who might be some other emotions appropriate. But having practice sympathetic joy begins by stretching or softening or making the mind more fluid so that as we encounter different situations, we can meet it in fresher ways and You're always in ways that are more healthy and healing than if we meet it with our usual attachments. Another reason to do a sympathetic joy is that it can actually be healing for some of the wounds that people carry in themselves. Some people carry wounds of that take that and take the expression of resentment, or anger, or fear or hate, and sometimes beginning to experience sympathetic joy or it's close. It's close kin. Gratitude is a way of somehow and hopefully an appropriate way in a right way of touching someplace inside of us which needs to be healed and soft and softening it relaxing it, mending it in such a way that that wound up getting in the way of our healthy relationships. I noticed sometimes when I've done sympathetic joy practice, that the real juice of the practice, or the real kind of value of the practice of times was not to sympathy instead of joy I could feel, but rather becoming really familiar with the opposite obstacles to it. And, and somehow that doing

that practice, showed me the obstacles. And if Oh, I have to work on that, you know, I'm not really that hurt that that person, I can see the person's happy, but am I going to feel happy because they're happy? Am I going to want their happiness to continue? No, not that person. And after that way, none of that what that person did to me. So the interesting thing about this some you know, all the Brahma vihara practice. And he's cult is that we cultivate it first for where it's easiest. And then we start doing it for where it's more difficult. It's meant to also do an advanced form to the practice to what's They're enemies. So people would normally be quite difficult to feel that. So why would we do that? To explore that. Now one of the areas there's be quite difficult to do sympathetic joy, practice, for some people is for themselves. And in Buddhism, it's considered to be a virtue and very helpful thing to be able to rejoice in your own good deeds and your own happiness and your own good qualities. And this is for a religion that teaches it basically, in simple simplistically says, you know, you have to realize that there is no self. So that's interesting. So, and I know a few key not a few people I've met too whenever they're told to reflect a little bit about their own good qualities. can't find any or they're going on good deeds, the good things are done their life, they can't find anything, in fact, and they might protest and saying what's selfish, it's inappropriate to think about oneself that way. But in fact, the suggestion in Buddhism is that there is a healthy way of reflecting on your own good qualities, your own good deeds that you've done the good fortune, so that it actually helps you to become a softer, happier and Kinder person who says there's a healthy way of taking it in and that strengthens strengthens the various sources of happiness within us. And there's a practice in Buddhism called unmoved anumodana. Anumodana is sometimes translated into English as rejoicing and, you know, we have Kinda like this. Sorry to say this perhaps the wrong thing to say. But in a lot of the kind of Buddhist circles in the West that I traveling, there's like a white Protestant flavor to it. You know, you know, you know, and we could rejoice more. You know, I've heard that, you know, there are some Protestant denominations that are they just a lot a big thing they do, isn't it? And because, you know, is white Protestant types, you know, we don't do that. But it's not inherent to Buddhism to be kind of like, you know, Even all the time. The you know, you could you know, there's lots of Buddhists but you go to Asia and they have, you know, a pretty lively times. I once went to a Buddhist temple Buddhist celebration festival at a temple in Kathmandu. And in this little alcove of the temple, there were these musicians playing that kind of traditional Indian music, musical instruments, tabla and sitar and stuff. And they were singing or chanting the refuges. The classic chant when there's when the scent most central chants in Buddhism, triple refuge. Buddhism sutra namanga Jami. dama, sudden I'm good Gianni. And in Thailand, and in Japan, places like where I've been, it's basically a chance to kind of in a monotonic way, kind of even a little bit resonates with the products. Kind of labor. And. And they're in Nepal. They were rocking out. I mean, it was like this really beautiful, passionate Indian devotional music. And my first thought, My apologies to the Indians who were here. My first thoughts was, Oh, this is Buddhism influenced by Indian culture, as a way of kind of like kind of it was not really Buddhism rights. And then my next thought was, wait a minute. The Buddha was Indian. And in fact, you know, there's not a lot of living Buddhism left in India. But if you go back to historical records, the festivals and the rejoicing and who's going on in Indian Buddhism seems to be recorded have been quite lively. And anumodana, rejoicing, that people would imagine or kind of remember or think about all the wonderful good deeds and good qualities of all the people in the whole world and they bundle it

all up in a big package, and then they all rejoice, you know, they didn't say hallelujah. But, you know, and you get a flavor sense of this from some of the ancients, the freezes the sculpture that some of the ancient you know, 2000 year old temples that are still survive. And there's one panel that shows when a festival in a Buddhist temple and there were several times in one panel has you know, someone has their finger in their mouth whistling, here's the only thing you can make sense as a whistle. You know, that's not it's a lively thing to do. And then there's another panel that shows you musicians kind of play music. And the center of the of the, of this panel is this guy who's spinning around dancing. And the reason you know he's spinning is because while he was kinda like a toga, I guess they would call it and, and the toga and the dress dress he's wearing his toga is is is flipped out to the side like it's spinning right spinning around, and he's not wearing any underwear so you see his butt. So yeah, that's, I call that lively to rejoice to feel the light To feel a certain level of rejoice and delight in one's own good qualities when doing good deeds, to take time to take that in, to appreciate that appreciate yourself for that to feel joy in that. Not the joy that pumps you up your egos, but the kind of joy that actually maybe softens your ego and just kind of makes you more more relaxed and more at ease, the happier person. And so, sympathetic joy the Pali word I didn't even get to say here today is mudita. And there are many different words for different flavors of joy and happiness and well being In the Buddhist texts and as always different kinds of joy, but joy is not something that Buddhism has a monopoly on. But you can't really practice Buddhism in over a long period of time and not begin feeling Joy. Joy needs to be part of it. If you've been doing it for several years and you haven't started feeling some joy from it, then maybe she could talk to a teacher and say where's the joy? You know, maybe we should have you know, Where is it? Where do you find it? How do you have it? So sympathetic joy is the practice of it is one of the one of those vehicles to having more joy, experiencing it. Enjoy or it just kind of happiness to thank joy In return, makes it easier to do further practice. It's easier to get concentrated, if you're happy. So what does it take for you to be happy? Does it take to feel some joy, even just a little bit to kind of crack the crack the crack open to that. Sometimes when I've done sympathetic joy practice in kind of an informal they can just about town. A little voice comes in and says to me in some way or there says, You shouldn't be doing this. This is not real. Or this is you know, you have to give them you know, here's a very quickly it's not real. This is real voice. This is not real. You're feeling something else. You shouldn't be doing this now. And sometimes it's true. I shouldn't be doing it. I should pay attention somebody else is going on. But I find that that it's very interesting to listen to that voice and allow that to be like salting my day, putting all the flavor in my day. So I offer this talk today as a suggestion that maybe you could over the next week, you could kind of reflect on this one quality, sympathetic joy, appreciative joy, and see if you can make it more part of your daily life as you go through, look for opportunities for it. And look for opportunities to lead kind of grow or simmer inside not to you not that you kind of skim over it, touch it to it, you know, go on, do something else but kind of stay linger with it and see what happens. And one of the ways to do this informally in daily life, is to actually express it express it to other people say to other people, it was really great mayor. Everything was like made you happy as continue. This is great. I'm really happy for So, I will teach you now how Buddhists say hallelujah. And, and so there is a sometimes I go to Burma and you listen to a Dharma talk at the end of the Dharma talk. The audience will say this. But it's not really, you know, with a kind of fire that you could have it, you know, Gospel Church, you know. But

anyway, it's you say three times you say, Deuce do sod. And Sato means Excellent. Excellent, cool.
So can we say that three times so this is the thank you