

2009-08-31 Emotions Gratitude

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SPEAKERS

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So, good evening. And I thought we would do tonight a little different than we usually do. And perhaps as a preface, in order to encourage you to stay is to say that a spiritual path that has no risk is not worth its salt. A spiritual path that doesn't make you uncomfortable sometimes. Just not worth your time. So if today, this evening you get a little bit uncomfortable or feel it's risky. Stay it's not gonna be so bad. So first thing I'm going to do is different is I'm going to test you. And I'm going to read a passage. And I'd like you to about an emotion. And I'd like you to guess, everyone but Rob guess what emotion this passage is talking about. And this is a continuation a sense of the series of talks I've been giving Monday nights on emotions. So whilst many emotions and personality traits are important to well being, there's evidence that this particular emotion may be uniquely important. First, a longitudinal study showed that people who have more of this quality of emotion coped better with Life transition. Specifically, people who had more of this, before the transition were less stressed, less depressed and more satisfied with their relationships three months later. Second, two recent studies have suggested that this emotion may have a unique relationship with well being, and can explain aspects of well being that other personality traits cannot. Both studies showed that this quality this emotion was able to explain more well being, then I understand this, but then the big five and 30 of the most commonly studied personality traits, and know what the big five is, but the 30 most commonly studied personality traits. So what is this emotion

equanimity, joy, to gratitude, compassion acceptance Forgiveness Umer compassion, happiness. empathy. Willing, if you're willing to participate in your willingness could be one. optimism. I cried here. Peace, love,

gratitude. So to votes for gratitude so we'll say then that gratitude wins. And it is gratitude is the word and I'll read a different paragraph that I didn't read the same article. A large body of recent work has suggested that people who are more grateful have higher levels of work. Being grateful people are happier, less depressed, less stressed, and more satisfied with their lives and social relationships. Grateful people also have higher levels of control of their environments, personal growth, purpose in life and self acceptance. Grateful people have more positive ways of coping with the difficulties they experienced in life, be more likely to seek support from other people be interpreted and grow from the experience and spend more time planning how to deal with a problem. Grateful people also have less negative coping strategies, being less likely to try and avoid the problem that neither is a problem, blame themselves or cope through substance. substance use. Grateful people sleep better. And this seems to become this seems to be because they think less negative and more positive thoughts just before going to sleep. It's quite impressive. That's the front Other great authority in all matters, Wikipedia.

But this particular passage was extensive footnotes. And the footnotes looked like they were very serious journals and studies so. So some people think that gratitude is important. And, in fact, I think many religious traditions put the emphasis on the importance of gratitude. And certainly the Buddha talked about its importance. He said that anybody a virtuous person, or a good person is someone who would feel grateful. And you know, what is gratitude and thinking about it for the last couple of days, couple of days. And I think that certainly if you look in the dictionary Gratitude is closely connected to appreciation. There's some appreciation of something and that somehow overlaps or transfer translates into a kind of thankfulness or express expression, acknowledging that appreciation that in something or someone know that you appreciate something that has happened, some sense of well being some sense of pleasure or joy, some sense of safety, maybe it's been, you know, someone protected you from some dire consequence. So you're grateful for not getting the trouble. Gratitude is a, I think, a very beautiful emotion or quality, but it's different than a lot of other emotions. Or I say it this way, I think of gratitude as being this poor use of words perhaps, but I think of it as kind of a secondary emotion or a overview emotion. Because it's secondary, because something else has to happen first. And because of this first thing that happens, we feel grateful. So we had something happens, we feel some pleasure. Often, some appreciation is a kind of pleasure, we appreciate something. And then we recognize that appreciation from the appreciation comes a thankfulness comes a feeling of gratitude. So it comes from ability to step back and have an overview of the situation. If we're caught up in the pleasure of the appreciation, for example, someone does something nice to you, and you feel some nice feeling. And if you're kind of caught up in it, and that this is great for the great person, I am more of this pleasure. And you kind of lost in that world of that pleasure and appreciation, then maybe there's no there's no gratitude. But if we can somehow step back, or have an overview of the situation enough to recognize in ourselves, oh, here, there's some benefits here. There's some well being then One response that people can have is gratitude. And so I think it just kind of requires kind of a secondary step word overview. And there's a variety of things that that allow us to have this overview. One is that is the intensity of the experience we had. If it's a really big by happen, then it's hard not to feel grateful. But the other other thing that's really supportive of it is, is I believe, especially in the ordinary circumstances of life is not being caught up in our thoughts and what's going on in the world. Nothing so caught not being caught up because we're caught up we there's no room for this overview, the sense of it, this the appreciation of our appreciation, the joy and the joy, which is part of what gratitude can be. And, and so for example, Some of the things that can destroy gratitude is ups and kind of doors, you know, is incompatible with it often is regret. And, and anxiety. If we're dreading what's going to happen, it's hard to appreciate what is happening. So this ability and so another, so this ability to not be preoccupied then also helps us to be present here, and more often than not, I think gratitude is over his ability to have an overview and this idea to add gratitude requires some ability to be really present. Again, if it's a big things in life, someone goes to the trouble of paying your way through college. You know, maybe then it's kind of obvious that you should know you're grateful. But But what about the ordinary things? Everyday kind of things. So what what, what allows us to go through life having a Attitude of Gratitude and attitude appreciation as we go through our life. So that's my introduction. And now we come to the riskier part. So

if you think about your life, your life story, what's happened to you in your life? Is there maybe some person you can think about? Who was really significant for turning your life in, in a new direction, important direction really made a big difference in your life? For whom you feel grateful? Is there such a person? The risky part now is I'd like you to turn around and form little groups of three Yeah, I warn you, this spiritual life is risky, uncomfortable, and you and you've chose to come.

So you don't have to do this. You can sit quietly if you'd wish. It's not obligatory. And I say that importantly, because not only is gratitude, gratitude cannot be obligatory. And I think I from my understanding of Buddhist Buddhism and Buddhist practice, Buddhist practice holds no obligations for us. So I don't want to obligate any of you. So you can sit in come the uncomfortable silently. No, you can't eavesdrop. If you're not going to participate then then I don't think that's so good. So the instruction is turn to tab three of Formula groups of three and then One of you be the timekeeper. So, each person is going to talk for about four, three minutes about their feeling of gratitude. How how the impact of that gratitude they had on themselves, why they felt gratitude what gratitude felt like in relationship to this person talked about that gratitude you feel for that person, so it makes sense. And if it doesn't make too much sense, that's okay. Because it just kind of a very open question for you to kind of see what comes out. And also, there's a lot of people who can be talking. So if you could do what you can, to not not talk too loud. It helps I think.

I feel a little bit apologetic that you came here to meditate and be quiet. You did all this work of sitting quietly for 45 minutes and then you got louder and louder and so it's a little bit jarring perhaps. And

I'd like to hear a little bit from a few of you what that was like. And could be anything you want to say about doing that cool discussion of reflection, but in particular I'm interested in how reflecting on what some gratitude you feel felt feel for some person. How did that change you? How you change your mood or your state or your your kind of way of being here and now back that you spent a little time exploring this. So you can pass the mic back there behind you first, then you can

just talking to Oh, I did

When I feel gracious, I feel very grounded. And I have a tendency to kind of spin and get all tense. And so when I feel gratitude it, it grounds me and I feel like I'm part of the bigger hole. And that I may be a ripple in water, but I'm part of the water. And so it's very grounding for me.

So grounding that this discussion was Gandhi. It was awesome. Great. Thanks. Thank you.

I loved the opportunity, first of all, to just talk to other people here. So thank you very much for that. And we all talked about how much we'd love that. But I had a very uncertain day and hearing other people talk about people and things in their lives that were so important and life changing for them. And then speaking about my own two people really just sat me down The meditation tonight was I was like trying to herd cats. I mean, my mind was everywhere. This is what allowed me to kind of take the deep breath, even more so than 45 minutes of sitting. So thank you very much. It was

great. Thank you. Go ahead.

I really appreciated the opportunity, as he said to talk to other people here instead of just coming, meditating and leaving. And I had a lot of grief when I came here and just listening and in hearing about gratitude. I just feel like I'm buzzing with a lot more love in my heart. It feels really good.

Great, thank you. Please.

I was going to say about the same thing I

was feeling okay. When I walked in at the moment, I just want to sit and grin at everybody.

It's just like, so cool.

Thank you.

My heart feels very full right now. Like

I could almost cry with gratitude at how realize how such small actions everywhere, not just for the people in my life, but it's clear how we all just affect each other.

Thank you.

If I may I want to speak for the three of us.

It was really interesting how we had so much in common, and our take on gratitude was a little different than yours. It seems like for all three of us, gratitude arose out of experiencing difficulty with people and how That experience actually helped transform us. And so the gratitude was gained from that

transformation. The opportunity the difficult person gave you to work through something.

And then they turn it for me. It actually has helped me. And that's transformed the relationship. So it's kind of this never ending cycle.

Great. Thank you. Did you ever go back? Do you ever go back to them and thank them?

I could imagine Yes.

I actually have, I actually have thanked my father for You know, some, you know, some pretty horrific views and I say, you know, if it wasn't for that I wouldn't have had to, you know, I've had to overcome so much. And it's, it's, it's, it's created this profound spiritual experience. And I'm just so grateful for that if I hadn't had it, you know, it's like, well, who's gonna come and seek, you know, this, you know, your people are not going to do it. And so I'm really grateful because, you know, because the suffering has been so horrific and my motivation is off the scale and I'm just like, so happy. And the other thing is, you know, it's like, there's times when I feel like crying with gratitude, because I love the Dharma so much, and I'm, you know, and I these free books and I keep reading this stuff and you know, these books are so transforming and reading you know,

pronounce his name. Thea. Yeah. Thea, yeah.

Yeah, all these, these, these Abbott's, and these monks are writing these books and, you know, it's just wow. It's really really, really, really powerful, really profound. And I'm and I'm just really grateful, very grateful for all my suffering. Great.

Thank you. Someone back. Yeah. So, um, when you started talking about gratitude, and I was listening to that, and I was thinking, Oh, yeah, I totally get that you know how it can bring so much happiness? And then you started thinking about well think about it in your own life and who have you been grateful toward and start kind of going through this list of people who I like sort of retro actively felt gratitude toward and then I was thinking like, hmm, did I ever really actually express that gratitude very well to

those people? And so the exercise for me, I mean, it was it was great talking with you know, some other people at the center and everything. But it was also a really interesting opportunity to sort of recognize that there are chances as we go through life to practice gratitude and that, you know, that I could do that a lot more and that that would. That'd be nice, you know, not just for me, but for other people. And so I'm grateful that I had that opportunity tonight. Think about that one. Thank you.

That was great. It's nice to hear all that then. I didn't know what the effect would be. When I thought of asking you to break up and talking about this.

It was risky for me to

the so you might as you think about more about gratitude, and I hope you think about it this week. Think about ways your gratitude things you're grateful for people you're grateful for. And also the nature of gratitude, what it means for you and the different shapes and forms it takes. And one of the things I'd like to suggest you include in your reflection, is the role of simplicity, in helping us be grateful, if great gratitude is an important value and really helps us in our life in important ways. And if simplicity supports gratitude, how can we cultivate more simplicity, what's the role of simplicity, in gratitude? So one of the things I'm thinking about is that I have a suspicion that the more complex our technological consumers society becomes, the more clear it is that there's a lot of people who make our life possible. You know, back when we were hunters and gatherers who were just Local people in our tribe and you know that then we went out and hunted and but now like who Hudson Hudson gathers the food anymore? You know, we have many of you and and in this complex over consumptive society I think there's people are less grateful for how much supports their lives than they are when people are when they're living on the farm or living in the woods or living in some kind of place in nature where it's kind of clear that connection you know, you know, it's so awesome that we have the telephones telephone service. And if we call the telephone company say we needed to telephone a new telephone line, and they say like, we can't come for three days. That's that's like pretty outrageous. How could they, you know, you know in many places in the world It's, that's, that's like record speed. That's amazing. Three days, like, wow, I'm so grateful they can do it. But here's three days. And you know, they're gonna close the Bay Bridge in a few days, right? or How could they do it? Don't they realize that? You know, we're grateful for the people who build our roads and make it possible get around and you know, there's so much there's so much that supports the kind of life we live. And why is it that there seems to be if I'm accurate, this theory I have, why is it Why might there be this is this kind of correlation between the increasing way in which we are supported in this complicated life we live and then less gratitude that life seems to elicit why that connection? And why what what's the role of simplicity in helping us be grateful. So now and with the story once upon a time There was a man young man who wanted to go to the monastery to be a monk. But he couldn't. Because his sister and her husband had died and left two children and he was sick then was raising the kids and his elderly parents are needed a lot of support can use to work support them all and busy life for life. Do we care caring for all he couldn't leave at all? Can't be a monk. But he went to the monastery and talked to the Abbess about this. said to her, you know, I can't, I can't my heart My heart really wants to become a monk and follow the spiritual life but I can't do it given my life. What's happened to me caring for these people? What can I do that second best. And the abbot said, Oh, if you can't come to the monastery with second best is to be grateful. So if some of you can't make it to the monastery, maybe You can cultivate more gratitude. Thank you