

# 2012-02-05 Cultivating Joy

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

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So, I wanted to talk a little bit about joy today. And then more specifically about mudita, which we usually translated by the English sympathetic joy or appreciative joy. We had a Dharma practice day on Friday on the, on the practice of sympathetic joy. So it's kind of fresh in my mind. And so one of the lights for me in my encounter with Buddhist practice, is the amount of joy that it has brought into my life. certainly wasn't automatic and wasn't right away necessarily. But I feel like my life is much more filled regularly with joy delight, and probably would have been without the encounter of Buddhism. And the reason for that there's a number of reasons for that. But I can point to a few maybe it's interesting for you.

One is the activities in my mind that prevent joy or operate much less than they used to. So, for example, if we're stressed out, there's not much room for joy. If we're anxious, there's not much room for joy. If there is, if we're preoccupied caught up in our thoughts and concerns, there's not much space for joy. There's also not much space for appreciation, appreciating what's going on. If you're caught up with a particular thing. You don't notice the wider range of what's happening in the present moment. And in fact, when we're stressed out anxious, upset caught up preoccupied ambitious, greedy. Chances are our attention is narrowed to the particular thing that we're interested in or worried about or focused on. And we don't notice a lot of other things. And in the present moment, there are a lot of things going on, and sometimes has been pointed out, and I kind of believe that probably more often than not, this is true. That things usually there's more right going on than wrong. So the question, you know, what's right with this moment, is perhaps a more relevant question, then what's wrong with this moment? Because there's usually more right going on, but we focus on too often on the narrow sliver of the present moment. And that narrow sliver is often what's wrong. And so it's not that we have to I don't It's not to deny there are things that are wrong not to kind of whitewash over it and just kind of kind of be Pollyannaish about everything and say everything, you know, we should just focus on what's right and ignore what's wrong. Buddhist practice is meant to be realistic and to take in realistically what's going on. But what realistically what's going on is we're often preoccupied many people or when we're suffering and stressed out, we often are actually not seeing the full picture of the present moment. And so one of the functions of mindfulness practice of meditation practice is to begin to relax. those activities of the mind that keep us preoccupied and keep us anxious, keep us caught up. So to settle down and to come down to a place where the mind is somewhat calm or settled. So that when we Step back into the world, we are not so predisposed to see it through the lens of our the preoccupation of the moment of the occupation of the day. So meditation is a little bit like clearing the field clearing the lenses. So that we can we can begin looking with, you know, a blank slate with a clear slate, look more fully, more completely what's going on. So I like to think sometimes of meditation practices, moving the mind, back to simplicity, moving the mind back to zero, moving the mind back to a time and a place a way of being where it's not preoccupied by anything. So there's a freshness, freshness and malleability

and softness and openness, that they you know, nowadays in the West, we have this beautiful term, Buddhist term beginner's mind, where we kind of do kind of begin to kind of this beginning or you Interesting what's here, what's what's going on. And so to come out of meditation, maybe a little bit more that way than when you went into meditation. And then what happens? Sometimes what might happen is you can get immediately locked into your preoccupations again, quickly. Or if you're relaxed, and you stay a little bit, relax, then we start perceiving what goes around us. And it'll then broader way we have a broader vision of what's happening. And it's not uncommon for people who meditate to come out of meditation, and just feel kind of like things are still and quiet or peaceful or nice, relaxed, or kind of just to kind of look at something that's maybe an ordinary thing you've seen many times, and just kind of be a little bit amazed. Wow, isn't that amazing? It's amazing. I mean, I've had the experience, mostly on retreat, I think of coming out of a meditation hall and seeing a piece of trash on the ground. candy wrappers something and, and rather than mind getting meetly going, how could someone have, you know, discarded the candy wrapper is every tweet center are people supposed to be mindful?

Like who these people think they are but rather just kind of come out and my mind doesn't go that way that direction very quickly. Rather goes it's kind of it's almost like non conceptual so I guess looking at it's quite beautiful the candy wrapper, you know the silver and shiny and has some nice colors perhaps and I just kind of like you know, just wow. You know before our I think what I'm trying to say I think that a relaxed mind open mind is more is not so predisposed to see what's wrong. Again, it isn't that there aren't things that are wrong sometimes. But I think that we if we bias ourselves too. to focus on what's wrong, we miss out on the opportunities for appreciation and for joy, which are much more often. So recently someone told me that little teaching that I did some time ago, made a huge difference in her life. And it had to do might feel to some of you heard this. But she was apparently plagued by insomnia. So he wakes up in the middle of the night and feels very anxious. And, you know, it was a difficult time to wake up the middle of night for but I gave a little teaching once where I said, when you wake up in the middle of night, the suffering you have around that chances are that's not always the case. But chances are that some of the suffering around that has to do with anticipatory suffering. anticipating what that's going to be like tomorrow when you wake up, not getting enough sleep. At least that's how it's been for me. And so I worry and I'm anxious you know, I'll fall asleep giving a Dharma talk or something. And but if I pay attention to the present moment and mindful of what's actually going on when I'm awake in the middle of the night, I find that I'm often quite nice. I'm safe. I've usually had enough to eat it. I'm usually warm under my covers. It's comfortable. No one's bothering me. I don't have to prove myself to anybody. I don't have to do anything. I just have to, you know, basically the situation is actually pretty cozy. Except for the mind that telling me stories. This means skill. This means you will tomorrow. It'll be difficult than, you know, my mind will tell stories and the stories if I get caught by the stories, then I feel unhappy and anxious. But if I just focus on actually what's happening here now and let tomorrow take care of itself, who knows about tomorrow? I have a very bad record. extremely bad statistics around successfully predicting tomorrow in the future, good mostly because, you know, I've always dire ideas about what's going to happen. Anyway, so. So the idea of, you know, So this, you know, this woman, her this teaching that I gave, and it made a huge difference for her because she in fact, she found that she was quite cozy and quite happy and she found that by focusing on that, rather than the anxiety about the next She would feel cozy and he would fall asleep. So, what sliver? What sex segment of the present moment reality do we focus on? And how biased are we do it how inclusive our way what's going on. So, one premise I'm offering today is that by sitting and being quiet, meditating, and letting the mind quiet down, and not be caught up and preoccupied, it gives a freshness and an openness to the mind to see more broadly what's going on here. Then doing that, it's simply just simply the fact we're no longer caught so strongly by our preoccupations. We're not moving towards suffering distress. We're open we're available. And then we might just happen to notice that there's more good going on, we might notice the candy represents pretty silly idea, right? But we might

notice that the sun is shining, might notice that there's many things actually a lot of things we can notice in the present moment, that might actually be good.

But there's another choice. And that is the issue of choice itself. Very important part of mindfulness practice is getting mindful enough and settled enough. That we have, we can see where we have choice about where we direct our mind what we do with our mind. We're not we don't have to be the passive in the passenger seats of our mind. And just kind of go along wherever the mind takes us think whatever the mind is thinking. We could actually have some choice about what we choose to focus on or think about or perceive what's going on around us. So coming out of say the example of coming out of meditation, you're calm, you're settled, the mind is open and relaxed. You put aside your preoccupation or concerns. There's choice there. You can choose then what do I want to focus on here in the present moment? What do I want? If I took if I open my eyes and look at what you know, I have a wide range. So when I, when I come out of meditation here at IMC, and just sitting here with all of you, I could focus on a lot of things. I mean, for one, one thing I could focus on, we have this great building. And I'm delighted that we have this building. Imagine that I remember when we didn't have a building of our own. And that, you know, we have this little place in Palo Alto where we met in the library of a church. And we had to carry our stuff back and forth and was kind of crowded and claustrophobic and now we have this room. It's beautiful, I think. And so you know, maybe you don't want to go around spending your time thinking about rooms and space. But you know, it brings me to light to focus on that. And then I can focus on all of you It's pretty awesome. I think for me that there are this many people who on a Sunday morning, want to come and meditate and want to kind of hear the Dharma and come with your interest in sincerity. I it brings me a lot of delight and enjoy a lot appreciation that this should be the case. Of course, I could be thinking about other things. I could immediately open my eyes and look at all of you and worry with these people. These people, these people are probably going to judge me and I probably don't have a good Dharma talk and I better kind of spruce it up here and this is not going to be a good day and you know, and you know, I could kind of get caught up in my little preoccupied little self world, right? Do I have any choice about which direction My mind goes? As I'm settled and relaxed and mindful, I do have I find I do have choice. And in that choice, I can certainly choose not to do some things. But I can also choose what direction is useful for me to go. And this is one of the principles of Buddhist practice. It's not simply about being mindful of what is because what it is, is actually a lot of different options. A lot of things going on in the present moment. And so if you just say simply passively, so I'm going to be present for what is who gets to choose, what is then is your mind that other people is the advertisers? What What is it? And so, one of the things that Buddhist Buddhist practice encourages you is to have some sense of a possibility of a potential, some sense of a direction that you can go and then to use and make your choices based on what supports that direction until your direction And hopefully is a good direction that you've chosen. So the classic one in Buddhism would be, to suffer less, to let go of your clinging to experience, the joy and happiness that's here. And maybe move in direction of greater love greater compassion. So then, so those kinds of as a kind of guidepost, then what do I pay attention to here? And now, what can I do? What can I focus on here that supports me to suffer less that supports me to have greater happiness that supports me to have more compassion and love. And so then what's, what is supportive? So one of the things that's supportive, is to have mudita and mudita is a Pali word Buddhist word. That as I said earlier, usually translated into English as simple Static joy, or appreciative joy.

The word mudita by itself means just simply means joy, delight, rejoicing, being pleased, being pleased, being appreciating something. And it's the feeling that comes. Feeling or sense comes when we see or experience something that we appreciate. You know, appreciate in such a way that it brings us a kind of delight, or lightness or happiness or joy. So, you know, there's a lot of things that can do that. But for example, this morning, I walked down here, and it brings me a lot of appreciation that I get live close

enough that I could have walked to work. Walked IMC in the morning. takes me about half an hour. And I feel so lucky. Now I could just kind of be walking here kind of grumpy and so No, I mean, you know, I bet I think of a good talk these people you know, this is scary. Certainly these people are so scary, they're gonna judge me. If the risks are pretty high, I'll say something silly like what I'm doing right now. And so I could focus on that, or I could, you know, focus on, you know, the appreciation of the walk coming down here. And then, so which of those conditions me which which are those predisposes me in a good way? If I focus on my fear of speaking in front of a crowd of people, that conditions me in certain way, if I noticed that this is great, well, I'm so lucky. It's good weather. It's February in California, and the trees are blooming. Blue skies, and I get to walk isn't this pretty cool? This is nice. So. So I did that walking down here for a few moments and I could feel that that nourishes me in a nice way kind of actually nourishing for my heart to experience that. And that nourishment as simple nourishment is a condition for greater peace and greater calm, greater kind of openness. If I was worrying, being scared about giving this talk that would that would condition something else, I wouldn't feel nourished in that case. So if the principle if the if the purpose is in the present moment, I would like to experience more less suffering, more joy, what can I focus on, that brings that about and to some degree, it's really useful to, to focus on the things that you can appreciate For most of us, that just means expanding the horizon from our narrow sliver of reality we pay attention to to to become aware of more. But what is it that we can appreciate? There's a lot that we can appreciate. If we're caught up in our little world we can in our troubles and our difficulties which might be real. Sometimes we're blinded to how much good is going on how much right is going on? Because I partly grew up in Europe. In the, you know, my parents were, I was born in Europe, in Norway, and I grew up with my the generation before me, my parents were people who went through World War Two. And I grew up with, you know, the Vietnam War I was tractable and draft age I didn't wasn't drafted but the idea of war was an stories of war. People who went through war was a big part of my growing up And one of the things that I appreciate is that I've never been in a war it's quite phenomenal you know, and here we live in this, California and the peninsula. And I don't worry about tanks going down the street. I don't worry about bombs exploding. My mother got out of bed one morning when she was a young child. And I don't know when it was 1942 or something. And then a second or two after she got out of bed. This huge piece of Chaparral when busted through the window of her house and went right into the pillow where she was laying

German German boats had exploded in the harbor. And it was a munitions boats. So it just it's quoted really well. And piece of that boat in her bed. So, you know, there's luck. So is that is that a valid thing to think about that, you know? Is that what why should we think about that? I mean, that's so. So abstract, abstract. You know, Buddhism is about concrete being present for what it is. But actually, there's a lot of safety here. And I know that I could get caught up in the details of my little life. But I could also focus and I'm reminded often of this because of how it was brought up, and I feel nourished by the safety that I feel here. relative safety. There's certainly there's all kinds of ways in which people are not safe. You don't have to go back to the war, but there are communities in our society where people don't feel safe. But here feel somewhat safe or have a roof over my head, there was a time that I was homeless and I didn't have a roof over my head. So it was meaningful to have a roof in a home. And then I hate focus on while the home is so small. You know, and you know, it's certainly not big enough for these two teenage boys who are jumping off the walls. You know, and I get caught up in that world, but actually, you know, it's pretty cool. So, we could choose and so, the appreciated practice of mudita is a practice is that are taking on as a practice. Periodically, sometimes that practice of noticing what you can appreciate, and particularly the practice of mudita is to appreciate what you can appreciate with other people. What can you improve by others and as you feel what can you appreciate so that it brings you joy brings you the detail and the answer that's nourishing for you. So that it nourish you in such a way that it helps and supports it makes it easier to spiritual life makes it easier to be mindful and present less caught up less preoccupied. Do people have good qualities that we could

appreciate? Maybe a few people have good qualities, right? Just a little bit. I would say I believe that everyone has good qualities. Even though sometimes they're not obvious. What is it like to actually begin focusing on What we can appreciate the people what happens? Can we bring joy to ourselves? Can we bring joy to them? I think that one of the important things about human psychology is that we mirror each other, we support each other. And to the degree to which we appreciate others. They feel appreciated. And if they feel appreciated for their goodness for their What's good, that gets strengthened in them. If, if, if what we notice in people is there, what's wrong with them? And we have the great wisdom to point that out. Chances are, it's kind of a downer for them. Chances are it doesn't really you know, for you know, complain a lot and say, you know, the things are, you know, what you're doing is wrong and you know, it's kind a downer doesn't really support what's good in them. So there's an art, to a practice of focusing on what we appreciate. And part of that also is to appreciate appreciate, when people are happy, have it good. When they're joyful when they're happy when they're successful, to appreciate the heavy job to appreciate that they have a home to appreciate that, your friend to appreciate that, you know that they have success in their lives.

And so Buddhism has actually a practice that's done in meditation, practice of appreciation, where it's practices to actively reflect on what we can appreciate in other people, especially to appreciate when they have success, whether it's spirit Success, emotional success in terms of happiness and joy, or whether it's even material success, like, you know, they got a new job or got a raise, to rejoice. And so here are the word mudita also means rejoice, to rejoice with them to delight in it. And it said that this is a hard practice to do. They say that this experience somebody is practicing mudita or they're feeling appreciative joy is a rare phenomenon. People are much more interested in loving kindness. People are more interested in compassion. And people are more interested in the practice of equanimity than they are with the practice of sympathetic joy. Perhaps compassion is interesting because there's a lot of sufferings we want to deal with. I cope with a suffering compassion is away. An image is interesting because it's difficult to cope. And so we will find this hard find some equanimity with it. And so we're often dealing with life and sympathetic joy, appreciative joy, maybe seems to pollyannish it seems not real, it doesn't really address the real problems and issues. So it said that in Buddhism, that this is actually a rare practice. And it's also they said, there's a lot of resistance to doing it. And the common resistance is envy and jealousy. Sometimes it has to do with comparing yourselves to others, you know, while they're having success, but you know, what does it say about me? You know, I'm still struggling and I didn't make gotten a raise in 10 years and, and so then rather than focusing on how good it is for them, we turn around hundred 80 degrees and we use it to compare ourselves and feel bad about ourselves or, you know what? Wanting what they have to envy jealousy. So part of the practice of mudita is learning to recognize the resistance the blocks to it, and relax and soften. And this is one of the again, one of the delights of practice that I've experienced, is the increased capacity to share in the joy of others and the success of others to rejoice with it, and not in any way. refer back to myself. But is currently being an open channel. Just say wow, yes. It's like saying, yes, this is great. Sometimes when people do this as a meditation practice, and it goes well, it brings on a lot of peace. It tends to bring calm and subtleness the joy that's being focused on here sometimes it's called serene joy. As opposed to the confused form of joy in this group is called giddy joy. Or frivolous joy. Sometimes people start feeling joy and they get kind of folk they rather than continue to focus on what they appreciate the other person or what they're delighting in the other person. They focus on the fact that they're feeling delight. And then we get kind of they get kind of giddy or a little bit frivolous kind of, you know, this is great, I'm feeling kind of good. So okay to feel good. But but the pure form of mudita practices, you don't focus on yourself so much get caught by that. But you let yourself keeping an open channel by feet, focusing on the other person's joy and success. And just feel it, experience it, be with it.

So, maybe that's enough. So we sit to be mindful. And when we're mindful, we recognize we have more choice. And in knowing how to make choices, wise choices, we can choose based on what is helpful and supportive for us. This just in this morning is that it's helpful and supportive, to choose to focus a certain percentage of your time maybe more than you have on what you can appreciate and what is joyful and what is good with the goodness and other people. And what you might discover that doing that has consequences. It changes how the situations unfold into the future. It changes generally inclined situation to unfold in better ways than if you were inclined to focus on what's bad or wrong. If you are inclined to focus on the good and saw other people and appreciate the good and other people, that part of them tends to become come out more strongly and they come out more Stronger towards you, and you benefit. So

I hope that this talk suggests a way for you to have more joy today. And that as you go into the day, that maybe you reflect and think and be challenged, to bring in more appreciation, more sympathetic joy. to notice what's good, notice what's right. And let yourself be nourished by that. So we have about five minutes or so before the scheduled time to end. So does anyone have any comments, questions, reservations, protests,

I've been reading the I read the Mercury News on Friday and Saturday. And of course, they're awash with the up and coming IPO for Facebook and the immediate billionaires coming up. And I have a version two. I mean, sympathetic joy is a good practice for these up and coming billionaires who, you know, we're making all this money on chatting with each other, I don't know, advertising.

So anyway, it's possible that the better and the more appropriate attitude is not sympathetic joy but compassion. But they have succeeded in some ways and we immediate Least sort of, or at least I do sort of vilify them.

Yeah. So yeah. So this is interesting that, to the degree to which the attitudes that we have here in the west towards wealth is interesting to a store, there's a whole range of different attitudes people have. Some of that has to do with status. Some of that have to do with comparisons to other people, some have to do with vilification, you know, even think wealth is bad and all that. And so it's certainly worth looking at. If we go back to the time of the Buddha, the Buddha was quite appreciative of legally or morally attained wealth. He thought that was a worthwhile thing to do was to become wealthy if it was done moral ways. He hadn't read marks and so on. But, you know, but so it's good. You know, it's good to concede it's good karma. It's something to actually feel happy for when it's raised in a good way. And then a little bit The question is, what do people do with their wealth? And they use it in a way that is provides more happiness and well being something we can rejoice in or not. And some people use their wealth in ways that, you know, you wonder, you know, this doesn't really seem something to really appreciate. When other people use our wealth in ways that there's a lot of joy, it brings a lot of joy and rejoicing. So I don't know if this answers your quick concern, but I know what we're talking about but but the word I'm talking about, but but the you know, we have a lot of different attitudes around well, and in many, many situations in life mixed. In. So what part of the mixed bag do we focus on? And so do we focus on the part of the mixed bag that you know what's wrong? Or do we focus on what's right? Do we have blinders one way or the other some people have blinders on, they only focus on what's right. And remember, there was a woman who came to to IMC many years ago, who I took it took a lot of care, but I had to, I had to gently open up open her up to the fact that we were not living in a pet store or early romantic world, that everything was beautiful and fine. We were both supposed to float on the cloud. And, you know, it was she had a lot of resistance and a lot of fear, I think to not because she was holding on desperately to everything so beautiful and wonderful and, and that's not the case. So for her I had to open you know, to kind of take those blinders down, focus in the other

and then there's people have blinders on the other way. What's wrong? And so then we gently try to open the other way. That is to be open to the full spectrum and range. And then to learn how to be wise about how to what to focus on. So if you're invited to a tastefully done party of someone who became a billionaire through Facebook, and their families there and they're all happy and my son's done well, you know, you know, smile when you're there. One more here.

I struggle somewhat with a related issue. It's when I see someone who's done well, by violating the natural order, and of course, I guess I'm the one who gets to decide what natural order is. But early during the occupation of Iraq, I found kind of to my horror that I would hear of some terrible reversal for US troops. And I would, you know, feel glad about this, because somehow my natural order was being upheld. And I argued with some friends about this sort of who were more in favor of the war and I use the analog. Your child is using drugs and he's caught. How do you feel and at some level, one could feel relieved that the child is not getting away with using drugs, but I don't think I'm seeing this clearly at all.

You know, these kinds of issues that you you're brought up, I think are complex and multifaceted. You know, Are you know when we talk about our wider society and some like a war and countries fighting and major economic kind of startup companies and what goes on, I mean and how it influences our society it's it involves many, many, many factors to look at. And I can't sit here with you and explore all the different aspects of what goes on and what we should focus on. But I think what how the practice can help is the practice can help us not be so caught up in abstract abstractions. So that we can have an experience of relaxing and settling and, and then having this fresh, more of a fresh mind to see a fresh a new. Sometimes when you have a fresh and open mind, relaxed mind. We see more realistically what's going on and we do if we seeing through our abstract abstractions, if you were in Iraq when the reversal of these happen, and you're you're meditating came out of your meditation, walk down the road to the village where they were fighting. And you saw the consequences of what it had just happened, even though they, you know, it doesn't matter who won or lost. I think that you'd feel heartbroken. And that's right. So, I put a lot of trust and value in finding a beginner's mind having a mind which is not caught up in abstractions and preoccupations. That's a basis for how things I think more clearly and accurately what's going on. How well we can think when things are more and more abstract in our complicated society and what we actually focus on and understand and that's a whole other issue. I can't answer Well, except that there's way too much simplistic thinking going on in our society. simple answers for complex issues, and it's often very good to spend time doing research and understanding the what's you know, the wider out ramification of what's going on. But, you know, but the foundation I think is often good to come back. Because if we have a good foundation of beginner's mind, then you're less likely to be biased when you do to do the exploration investigation of what's going on in our world. So I think okay, so please know that I appreciate all of you. Thank you.