

Gladness Pentad (4 of 5) Nourished by Happiness

December 8, 2022

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

sukha, pleasure, mindfulness, cheerleader, conveyor belt, delight, joy, lightness, clarity, tingling, vibrating, energized, contentment, evaluative, awareness, absorption, cyclic, nonreactivity, protecting, feeding

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This is the fourth talk on the gladness pentad. The fourth of these five qualities is happiness (*sukha*). Because *sukha* is sometimes translated as “pleasure,” there are two conclusions about the kind of happiness we are talking about. One is that pleasure is something we mostly feel through our body – there is a physicality to it. This happiness is a sublime pleasure in the body. But it is not an excited pleasure. It is settling and quieting.

The other conclusion is that *sukha* is not happiness *about* anything. But rather, it is happiness in doing – in activity. It is about being immersed in activity. It is about the immersion, the absorption, giving ourselves over to really be here, not forgetting ourselves or disconnecting. In mindfulness, we really give ourselves over to and immerse ourselves in the world of practice. As the strength of practice builds, that immersion in the practice is not something that we will – about which we say, “Okay, now I’m going to do this,” but rather, something we enter into and settle into. It opens up for us strength in the practice and the ability to not be caught in thoughts.

There is momentum that builds through practice. It begins with faith, trust, and inspiration from the practice itself. We want to practice, and when we sit down, we are glad to be able to practice. We feel: “Wow, I’m glad. I’ve been busy running around like crazy all day, and it’s so good to finally sit down quietly and not be so busy.” Or: “Wow, this practice is so important for me, and I do it every day. What comes from this practice is at the center of how I want to live my life. I’m so glad to be back here at home in this practice.”

For each of us, it will be different, but there is a gladness. That gladness is a cheerleader, an encouragement to start really giving ourselves to doing the practice. When we sit down to meditate, we might find ourselves preoccupied with a challenge we have with a neighbor, and how the neighbor is not behaving right or is being unfair. That might be an important topic. But if we sit down to practice and do that, that is not what meditation is about. We are finally home, with something we love doing. We are so happy to be able to do it. The concerns with the neighbors can wait for another time.

So there is a momentum of feeling glad to practice. When we practice, we start feeling hooked in or plugged in to being mindful. We feel like mindfulness has a life of its own. The practice is doing itself for us now. We do not have to constantly come back and constantly apply ourselves. Now we are on the conveyor belt. Our engagement in that conveyor belt feeling of being in the practice starts to feel delightful and joyful. We feel a very subtle, pleasant thrill or a little excitement: yes – we are here. We are present. That thrill might be felt in the arms, the chest, sometimes in the face. It feels as if something is vibrating or energized. There is a lightness, a clarity, a tingling, or a sense of flowing pleasure in that immersion.

We are so happy to be doing it that something relaxes and lets go: “Oh, I’m here. I can trust this. I can now relax more fully.” So there is no longer any need to apply oneself so much in meditation. Something about the tension of application relaxes, and the body relaxes and settles. With that settling, quieting, and tranquilizing of the body, the gladness and joy transform into a kind of happiness, contentment, an embodied pleasure. This is not a hedonistic pleasure. It feels very satisfying, but it no longer feels right to call it “pleasure.” Maybe we can see it more as a kind of happiness that feels light, quiet, and still. The mind feels more settled and gentle than in the joyful immersion that came earlier in the practice.

So, this momentum begins happening. Finding ourselves on the conveyor belt of practice is one of the great things about practice. At this point, some people will describe the process not as “doing the practice”, but as “being practiced.” It is almost as if the practice is doing us, rather than us doing the practice.

At this point, a big part of the practitioner's role is making sure we do not mess it up, we don't get in the way of it – we don't get caught up in thoughts, or control, or trying to make it better, or fixing it, or holding on to it. We mostly just stay out of the way. If there are too many cooks in the kitchen, it doesn't work. The extra cook is you. You have to stay present for sure, but you mostly have to stay out of the kitchen.

One way to understand this pleasure, and to make it more accessible, perhaps – because the idea of being on a conveyor belt and being carried along might seem a bit much – is to be content and happy about how subtle and how small the happiness can be. One way of doing this, as we cultivate mindfulness practice and get used to being aware and present, is to be in the moment here and now, recognizing what is happening. We offer our presence and our attention to what is happening here. Whether we are drinking tea, eating food, opening a door, being with our breathing, or listening to someone, there is a heightened attentiveness and a deliberateness about being present and receptive to what is happening.

Then we can begin to recognize that there is some pleasure, some goodness, something healthy, some happiness, and joy in being aware itself. Some of this happiness might be evaluative, like all the different steps of the pentad. It might be the happiness of being inspired: "I'm doing this practice! Look at me – look Ma, no hands! Look at this! I was aware of three breaths in a row. Look at this! When I was listening to my friend, my friend said something difficult, and I didn't habitually lash out as usual. I just stayed present. Wow, this is good."

That is evaluative gladness. Then you keep listening, and it just feels good to have the ability to be attentive and open. While your friend is complaining, you see that something shifts in them because you are just present in a nonreactive way. You start appreciating your nonreactivity in a deeper way, and that allows you to relax into it. In that relaxation, you see that there is some subtle happiness, contentment, and pleasure in the awareness itself. This is not evaluative, but rather, in the tone and the texture of awareness.

It is very useful to stay gently aware of that pleasure and goodness, and what is healthy about that kind of awareness, because what we pay attention to is what influences the quality, texture, and state of our mind and heart. If we are only aware of and focus on what is painful and difficult with our anger, our grief, our sadness, our conceit, and our discouragement, we can get too absorbed in them without being aware. Then that is cyclic. It influences the mind and heart, then we feel worse, then we become more aware of it, then we feel even worse.

We have to step out of the loop of these things affecting us negatively. One way to do this is to have enough awareness to feel the goodness of being aware, and the goodness of not being lost in something or in the grip of something. Keep the bar very low. Feel even the subtlest forms of contentment, happiness, joy, and satisfaction that come with awareness.

If you are aware of and mindful of something difficult, and while you know the difficulty, you also know the satisfaction of being mindful, then your practice is really getting strong, because you are not glued to or being influenced by the difficulty. Mindfulness is protecting you from being influenced by the difficult mind states you might have. Not only is it protecting you from being influenced by difficult mind states, it is also feeding you the goodness, happiness, and satisfaction of the practice of being mindful. Even if this is very, very small, it is fantastic food. It is fantastic for the heart, mind, and body to appreciate and feel that.

As you go about your day, you might experiment by noticing the times during the day when you get really absorbed in some irritation, anger, desire, or fear about something. Maybe it is not imminent and right in front of you – it is more the mind projecting and thinking about the future, or about someone somewhere else. But when you find yourself caught and involved in that in a strong intense way, turn your awareness towards the way that you are caught. This could theoretically have a very negative influence on you if you imagine being fed a diet of this. Turn around and be mindful of it. Really know that it's there, and see how clear the mindfulness has to be, and how much you have to step back or open up in awareness to really know *this is what is happening*: I'm really angry here, I'm really afraid here. Stay aware until you come to the place where there is satisfaction – maybe the satisfaction of not being caught – and where there is the joy of having this wonderful practice that is an alternative to being caught. Or the happiness that can come, where you are so content: "Wow, it is so good that I'm being nourished in my mindfulness, even though I'm present with a difficult state."

This is a homework assignment about noticing the difference between being immersed in something, lost in it, and influenced by it, and stepping back until you find the happiness of mindfulness. Some of you may not know that you were really caught up in something until after it's over. Later, while reviewing the day, you might be able to do the exercise then and find where that happiness is. Thank you very much. I look forward to the conclusion of this pentad tomorrow.