

Gladness Pentad (2 of 5) Joy of Practice

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

joy, gladness, grow, dance, play, inspired, concentration, give, support, surrendering, distractions, difficulties, unfolds, preoccupied, motivate, fully

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Hello everyone. This is the second talk on the gladness pentad. As I said yesterday, the remarkable thing about the gladness pentad is that it is a natural phenomenon. Just like a seed, with all the conditions in place, will grow. When the seed is planted, nourished, and supported in us, this amazing natural process unfolds. It requires the momentum of practice. It is really supported by having cultivated and developed some modicum of concentration – the ability to really dive deep or be present in one's experience mindfully. Momentum in the practice picks up this good energy, good feeling. As the practice grows, we allow this to grow. It transforms.

This pentad begins with something that inspires us. The classic thing in Buddhism is our faith, confidence, and trust in the practice. Sometimes it is our own integrity, our own virtue. Something about our virtue that we feel happy about and inspired by. It can be someone else's virtue that really hits us in some deep way and moves us. We can be inspired by another person who maybe has a lot of maturity, wisdom, and joy themselves – Dharma joy.

Whatever the inspiration is, as we practice that inspiration can first lead us to gladness about how good it is to be involved in this practice, this dance. We feel the good fortune of it – not many people have the chance to practice. Buddhism considers it phenomenally good fortune to be able to do any degree of practice even though it is hard. Feel the contentment of it, the happiness with that.

As we allow for that contentment, happiness, and delight as the practice develops, the momentum of practice begins to carry that along and transforms it into a joy in the engagement. The joy of practice; the joy of waking up; the joy of being aware, being mindful – this is phenomenally good fortune. It is a great thing. It is not so much mentally reflecting on the good fortune. It is more like we can surrender ourselves to the practice – give ourselves over to it fully. In the fullness of giving ourselves over to it is where the joy begins to arise.

Sometimes the joy can be quite strong when all of who we are is absorbed or connected to the practice we are doing. This is immersion in the activity of practice. We are not daydreaming, not thinking about something else. We are not preoccupied with an itch we have. We are just fully present. Even though that language “fully present” is kind of grand language, as we approach that, as we give ourselves to that purpose, there can be this joy that wells up in the engagement.

This is like the joy of giving ourselves over to a dance, maybe surrendering to our partner, surrendering to our breathing. It could be the joy of singing, playing, playing with children, or being a child, delighted, squealing and playing – so much fun just to be active and moving. Some people feel joy in exercising. Something that we give ourselves over to and are fully there. This pleasure, joy, and wholeheartedness comes with surrendering to that activity, partly because we are not caught up in our usual ruminations and preoccupations.

The importance of this is that it supports Dharma practice to have joy in the practice itself. Sometimes what we are mindful of, what we include in our practice, is quite difficult. There can be difficult emotions, difficult physical sensations, pain, other kinds of difficult circumstances that we are practicing with. Even with all those difficulties, if we have recognized the joy of giving oneself to the practice, trusting the practice, practicing with the difficulties is more important than the difficulties.

It is not like we are practicing to overcome the difficulties. We are practicing to be present with the difficulty. Like with a difficult dance partner, we can give ourselves fully to that dance. It is a very different perspective. Most people live their lives preoccupied with problems of wanting things and not wanting things. The path of this meditation practice is different from that. It is engagement in the practice and mindfulness. Really showing up is where the dance is, the play is – immersion in the experience.

It is a shift in where we are looking for our well-being. The advantage of making that shift is we can learn to get out of the way of the natural growth of this joy. A big part of a Dharma practitioner's job, when we start getting in the flow of the present moment, is to get out of the way and allow this present moment to do its thing – allow the joy to grow, for example.

It helps if you recognize that it is there. Once we recognize it is there, then we have more incentive to not get distracted. Distraction is like nighttime coming, so the sun can't shine down on the plant that is growing. When distractions go, it is like the clouds have parted and the sun is out. Then the plant can grow in the sunshine, the sunshine of awareness. An important part of practice is to make sure that there is space and clearing for awareness to shine on our experience, to shine on the joy and delight of engaging mindfully with whatever is here.

This Dharma joy should not be the primary thing we're focusing on. It is an adjunct. It is like the music of the dance, or part of what comes along. The art of this is to not get attached to it or try to pump it up. Allow the natural process of it to grow and develop by staying present, making room for it, allowing for it, and staying with the practice we are doing. For mindfulness of breathing, keep with the breathing.

Why do we do this? Why do we give ourselves over to the practice so that we enjoy it? One reason is it is a lot easier to be with the difficulties. The difficulties are not the whole show. The difficulties are just part of what is happening. The other part, maybe a bigger part, is our mindfulness, awareness, which feels great to be active and present with so it grows.

This gladness pentad is something that we allow to grow, with growing concentration, until the fifth quality of the pentad, concentration itself, which we'll talk about on Friday. That sets us up to see things as they are. Gladness, joy, tranquility, happiness, *samādhī* is the sequence. Then the unfolding is to become aware of suffering.

If we are suffering, that can inspire us to practice. That can motivate us. But we are not really ready to address and work with suffering directly when we first come to the practice. Partly it is being motivated by suffering, but not being too concerned about it in the beginning. Let it support the faith and inspiration to practice. Engage in the practice for a while, as if you're tilling the soil, you're preparing the ground, for something different to grow and develop.

At some point, when this gladness pentad progresses so there is enough well-being, stability, and concentration, then we're in a whole different place to see our suffering in a new way, a new perspective. In that sense, the joy is pragmatic, practical, very useful. It is not joy for its own sake, though it almost is. If we get involved with trying to make it happen and make it grow for other purposes, it interferes with the dance, the play, with giving ourselves over fully to the activity at hand – our mindfulness, our awareness.

I just realized this morning that we're doing this gladness pentad, which ends with concentration and the practice progression continues. The next step is seeing things as they are, which is seeing suffering, having insight. I think it is kind of coincidental that on Saturday I am going to do a day long retreat on the Four Noble Truths, on suffering. I think that you'll be in a much better place to understand and follow this day-long on the Four Noble Truths if we're building on this gladness pentad as the background support for seeing suffering in a new way.

So gladness, joy, tranquility, happiness, *samādhī*. These are the five topics for this week. For today if you want to do some practice in daily life, look for opportunities to do something, maybe physical, wholeheartedly, as if it is a dance, a game, or play. Like you are playing a game or are a child on the playground so delighted to be in the sand making sandcastles.

Just give yourself over to the enjoyment of the activity without resistance, distractions, or ruminations about the challenges of life. Just be there for the activity. It can be cleaning, washing dishes, cleaning the house, doing laundry. It can be driving, going for a walk. It can be anything that is physical. See if you can discover the joy of giving yourself fully to the activity. Do it in your way, the way that works for you, your body, and your circumstance. Whatever way it works, see if you can find the joy of giving yourself to it.

Thank you very much and I hope you enjoy your day.