

# Aspects of Love (4 of 5) Appreciative Joy

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So hello, my friends, and welcome to this fourth talk on the aspects of love. I feel pretty fortunate to be able to talk on this topic. It brings me joy. The first day was Anukampa, which I translated as care. It's a care that is deeply connected to respect for others. I like to think of it as a respect where we see everyone as kin.

Maybe we're not directly family, but we're kin, we're related, we're part of a global family. That kinship then leads us to want to be friendly, inclines us to be friendly to whomever we meet. Why would anybody be an enemy? Why would anybody be someone who we would not be happy to see?

Just being happy to see people—maybe that's what friendliness is. We offer some of our happiness to them in the way we say hello—maybe that's all it is, hi. Then when people suffer, we want to help, we are motivated to see their suffering end. They're kin; of course we want it to end. So if we can, maybe we can do something. If we can't, then we are a witness. We recognize, we help people not feel so alone. We accompany.

Today, the theme is appreciative joy. When people are having success, when people are doing good things, when people are happy themselves, when things are going well for them, we don't want to end up being envious or jealous. Rather, when we're kin, we cultivate this openness, this respect that we're happy to see people. When people are having success, we feel joy, we feel happiness. To feel that happiness—to take time for that, to not overlook it, to not race beyond it—but to appreciate.

In Buddhism, there's a whole meditation practice on appreciative joy, where we focus on the well-being that other people have. May that well-being continue. May that well-being fill me with inspiration, with joy. May this well-being of others spread out through the world.

So there are different ways of highlighting appreciative joy. One way to do this is with the words, another way is to take the feeling of appreciation of joy, and let it radiate. That takes time. You have to pause a little bit, not just kind of rush on with the conversation to something else.

Someone tells you that they're really happy, and you say, I'm so happy for that, but you know, I'm really challenged with my car, and my car is not behaving properly. You've changed the subject to something that wasn't necessary to talk about instead of staying and lingering, to appreciate, make room for that happiness. Sometimes it's invaluable for people to really feel they were heard, really

feel like you're there for them, that you make space for them, to make more come out: tell me more. This is so good that you graduated from high school. It must be really great that you accomplished this. Tell me more.

So this idea of appreciative joy— joy in the joy of others— can be cultivated and developed. All of these forms of love can coexist with their opposites, with the things that interfere with them. Part of the value of practicing love and joy, or bringing them up and reflecting on them and letting them be a guide through our day, is that sometimes it can highlight the opposite, what interferes.

So for you, what interferes with appreciative joy and the joy of others? I mentioned envy or jealousy, which can be quite a strong current in some people's lives. So in mindfulness practice, we wouldn't berate ourselves or criticize ourselves for that. We do something more important — we study it. We would take a good look at that. What's that about? What are the emotions that come along with jealousy and envy? What's the sense of self? What's the belief system that's operating? Can we sit and just feel that for a while? We accompany ourselves in those feelings. Because accompaniment is so powerful. Accompaniment allows something to settle.

What else gets in the way of appreciative joy? It might be your own desires, your own preoccupations, that you want to get what you want, and you don't have time to take other people into account. It could be fear. It could be fear that if you take in and appreciate others, take in their joy, that it makes you susceptible to be taken advantage of, or people want more from you, or something might happen. Maybe it highlights your own unhappiness. Because if you really recognize happiness in others, then you feel worse about your own unhappiness and how your life is difficult.

I'd like to propose the opposite, that appreciating the joy in others can be an inspiration for us, food for us; it helps us be able to practice with our own difficulties. So appreciative joy is not meant to be a distraction from our own suffering, from our own difficulties, but rather it creates the ambience in which it's easier to focus on our own joy, to be present for our own joy, to give a wider context for it.

In some ways, appreciative joy for others is probably not going to make you Pollyanna-ish. Because in Buddhist practice, what comes up clearly is an emphasis on suffering. Not to drown ourselves in suffering, but to find freedom from suffering. So, with this emphasis on suffering, I don't think you have to worry about being Pollyanna-ish.

If others are suffering, then you don't want to paint it over with joy and show things on the bright side for other people, or even for yourself, as a way of ignoring the difficulties that are going on.

But when things are going good, when things are delightful for people, when they're happy, share that happiness. Accompany that happiness. Take time to take it in. Just take time to say, wow, that's great, in a way that brings a smile to your face, in a way that brings you delight.

It's phenomenal how great this appreciative joy can be in us. Sometimes it can feel that you're the

one who's benefiting from it more than the other person. Maybe it sets something inside free, a flow of joy, of delight, of happiness, because you've become an open channel for these wonderful feelings. Sometimes people who are doing meditation on appreciative joy will feel kind of a shivering—shivering may be an imprecise word—but a wonderful vibrating feeling of joy and delight that courses through them when the appreciative joy is so strong.

So, appreciative joy. For some people, during this holiday time, there's a lot of joy in seeing each other and being together with each other. Share in that joy. Delight in that joy. Celebrate that joy. Toast that joy.

And on those holidays there's also many people who suffer more. People feel left out or lonely or something. So that also should get our care and our love. Appreciating them and not rubbing it in for them by emphasizing the joy when they're not having it. Maybe then we emphasize calm attention. Calm, loving, compassionate attention.

So the care we have for others is something that's morphing and shifting and changing. Sometimes it's compassion, sometimes it's friendliness, loving kindness, sometimes it's appreciative joy.

And one of the great joys, one of the great aspects of this practice is the fluidity by which we can shift and change, move between these aspects of love. There's a way that allows each of these to have their own time and maybe even become stronger. It allows us to let the aspect fade away as we move into a different circumstance and another one is needed. We can be friendly with someone for a while. We go to another place and we have compassion. We shift. We go someplace else to be with someone else and they're joyful. We then kind of shift with it. We morph. We meet the circumstance. It's not because we're rejecting or being unloyal to the people who are suffering when we feel joy, rather we're loyal or present for how it is now.

Each time we meet this circumstance, not carrying past circumstances with us. Moving between these different states—care, kindness, compassion, and appreciative joy—the more we're fluid, the more we're not stuck in any one of them, the more these can live in our lives in a wonderful way, feeding us, in a way that they're always available. And they are much more available than people realize. These are treasures. The Buddha called the Brahmaviharas a practitioner's wealth. So if you want to be wealthy, the real wealth is to have these wonderful qualities.

Tomorrow we'll finish with equanimous love. In the meantime, may you look for opportunities today to either privately in yourselves so no one knows, or out loud, to appreciate the goodness, the joy, the success of other people. Make that a theme. See what happens if you accompany and recognize people for their joy and their happiness.

And may it bring you joy. May you be delighted by all the success and goodness that there is in this

world. For all the terrible news we get, I suspect there's more goodness every day than what is difficult and painful. Thank you very much.