

Dharmette: Four Truths of Happiness (1 of 4) There is Happiness

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So hello and welcome. And this will be the beginning of a four-part series, following the five-part series on the *Four Noble Truths*, which are the truths of suffering. And now I'll offer you Four Truths of Happiness. And these don't come directly from the Buddha's teachings, but hopefully I've been so involved in the Buddhist teachings for so long that this can be a kind of a reformulating it in some way that is useful for you all. And begin with the ideas that happiness is a very important part of Buddhist practice. That it might be overlooked if the emphasis is so much on suffering.

Some people are quite inspired, and maybe even inspired in a happy way. People have told me this, that they've come to hear the Buddhist teachings. Some Dharma teacher was emphasizing how much suffering there is in the world, naming it directly. And that it was such a relief to have someone say that, that there is suffering in this world. There's lots of suffering in this world. We suffer a lot.

Because so many of the people around were denying it, or trying to pretend otherwise, or painting it over with some kind of, you know, bright picture of how things were, you know, wonderful and inspiring, or they would just ignore it, and something like that. And so to hear someone name it, so that we say that I like to say that in Buddhism we stop for suffering. We stop to look at it, to be with it, to see it for what it is, to study it, to find our way through it. But not so that we can suffer better, but rather so we can become free of suffering and in that freedom to find happiness. And one of the primary description of someone who has matured in this Buddhist practice is, emotional description, is that they are peaceful and they're happy.

And in the time of the Buddha, there were people who were surprised to be around the Buddhist monastic community to see how much they smiled, how happy they were, the joy that was there. And so to come to a place of happiness, to come to a place of joy, without denying that there's suffering, without becoming the victim of the world's suffering, without reacting to it, but finding a whole different way of being honest in the middle of it, and finding some way to have a genuine, appropriate kind of well-being, there is happiness in this world. So that's the first truth of happiness. There is happiness. There's possibility of happiness. It's healthy to experience that happiness.

It's okay to experience that happiness. There are religious traditions and cultures, including ones at the time of the Buddha, that mistrust joy and happiness. And I've had people come and ask me explicitly as a Buddhist teacher, is it okay to experience joy? Because somehow where they grew up, joy somehow belonged to the world of, I don't know, indulgence and to really be a good religious person. You're supposed to suffer better, actually. You're supposed to suffer, and if you suffer well, then something good will happen to you after you die.

Something like that was happening at the time of the Buddha. When the Buddha discovered a deep meditative joy that one of his first big insights was, this is a healthy joy. This is a joy that's onward leading to greater freedom. And he said, this is a joy not to be afraid of. So there is happiness. And to not dismiss it, to not overlook it, to not think that there are other things that are more important.

It would be like saying that there are really important things to do in the world, people to take care of, do all kinds of things, that we shouldn't really stop to eat any meals. We shouldn't stop to eat any meals and enjoy the meals while we're eating them. But in fact, it's healthy to eat. We should stop and eat, take care of ourselves. And it's actually healthy to stop and eat calmly and clearly in a way that enjoys the food, enjoys the occasion. All kinds of things can go better physiologically for us if we're not living in a stressful, hurried way.

And so happiness is a phenomenally important possibility for human beings. And it's a condition, it's a support for all kinds of other things. Happiness is almost like opening a certain kind of joy and happiness, dharmic happiness, is almost like it opens the door to the depths of our hearts, depths of our inner life. Recently I saw someone define the soul, not in a religious way, but more of a psychological way, as the soul is the inner depths of a person. And inner depths are often not experienced and felt and made time for. And part of the function of being settled and calm, peaceful, and happy is to have the conditions in place to receive and sense and feel our depths, the wisdom, the creativity, the challenges, the processing, the unresolved issues that are there, that all do well to be seen and received in consciousness in

the deep way.

And so, what is the happiness you have in your life? Can you avail yourself of more happiness, joy, well-being? Are there small joys through your day that you are overlooking? Because you have such important things to do, or you're in a hurry, or you're on a device that, you know, surfing the web, and maybe with a little bit of addictive mindset, you know, going to the next click, the next click, looking, and not quite able to get off when the time is to get off. And so, how does that limit you? Could you stop and just look out the window and enjoy and feel happy about what you see?

Some people now are experiencing winter starting, and there's snow outside the window, or there's foliage changing color, or all kinds of things. There might be a squirrel that's bouncing around. There might be small joys. There might be small joys to experience with the food you eat. Take time to eat it and appreciate the fact that you have food. Not everyone does.

And not to feel guilty for it, but to feel a certain kind of well-being, joy, happiness, safety. To take time to walk, when you have to walk from a parking space with your car to some place you're going. To show up a little bit early and take your time to walk, even if it's just a couple of hundred feet. Maybe take a longer walk than the most direct walk, so you can walk close to some nice trees and just appreciate the trees or appreciate a little view, or see something that's kind of enjoyable for you. Don't overlook the small joys, the small enjoyments, the small pleasures, when they're available. Don't have to chase them.

Don't have to crave them. Don't have to try to make them up too much. But there might be through the day all kinds of things that just slow down a little bit. Look around. Pause. See.

And there might be much more well-being than you usually allow yourself to feel. Even in emotionally difficult states that are quite difficult and maybe emotionally painful. There are things we can do to bring some joy and happiness in with us. I suspect that this is part of the function of cat videos. That some people, it really takes them out of their own difficulties because they're so delighted by kitten behavior or cat behavior. And so I'm not necessarily recommending that, but there are things that we can do that we can bring, sprinkle more delight, joy, happiness through the day.

And not just that, but as we experience it, to allow ourselves to experience, to let it register in a deep way. So the first truth of happiness is there is happiness. There might be more happiness and well-being that we can avail ourselves than we usually do. And it's a good idea to do it. It has a good effect on us to do that. It supports other good things to come.

That there is a happiness that opens the doors of the heart. And maybe you'll discover your heart more deeply. So happiness. Happiness has a place in this world, in this suffering world, this difficult world we have. So then we'll move on tomorrow to the causes of happiness. That is kind of a parallel to the causes of suffering, which was last week's theme.

So thank you, and I look forward to continuing, and I kind of feel delighted by the prospect that many of you might be a little bit happier today, experience a little bit more joy, delight, or well-being today with this assignment to avail yourselves of more joy and happiness that's available to you, that's already available, that you're overlooking. And in doing so, may your joy and happiness be contagious for others. Thank you.