

Wednesday dharma talk: Gladness

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So the topic for today is gladness. And so I was very glad and delighted to look through the tiles and see the online community here. And maybe, you know, for those of you online, when I sit down for the Dharma talk, if you can briefly turn on your video, I'll see you. It's kind of nice. It made me happy just now to look down and scroll through.

So to begin this topic, the third natural step of liberative dependent arising, the idea is we're describing that liberation itself is nothing, nothing is responsible for it happening exactly, but it doesn't happen without certain dependent conditions being present. And then whatever the dependent condition for liberation, that has a dependent condition, and that has a dependent condition. It goes back all the way to suffering, suffering, faith, and today gladness, *pāmojja*.

And I want to begin by referring to an analogy that the Buddha used for mindfulness, for *sati*. He used several wonderful analogies for it. But this one has to do with there being a hilltop overlooking a town. And rather than being lost in that town, all the drama of the town, a person stands on this hilltop and can look and see everything very clearly. And what stands out is the clear seeing, the clear understanding. The person is not enmeshed with everything, not trying to navigate, debate, or protect. But everything is seen for what it is in a very clear way because the seeing is so clear.

And so as mindfulness gets stronger, that's one of the analogies, that now we can see more clearly. And in the seeing, we're not caught in the middle of everything. There's some kind of healthy clarity, healthy understanding, vision, where the vision of seeing is kind of like on a hilltop.

Another analogy he used is that of a cowherder who, once all the rice has been harvested, has no danger that the cows will go and destroy the farmers' rice paddies. Then the cows can

more or less roam freely. And so the cowherder now can just lean against a comfortable tree and just kind of keep an eye in the distance, kind of open, wide, relaxed view. And now he can just make sure that they don't wander off too far. There's no real danger or fear anymore about destroying crops.

So at some point, mindfulness is not just standing on top of a hill and looking, having this independence, this freedom standing above everything. But there's also now a kind of ease and openness and kind of a wide perspective of mindfulness that's at ease and peaceful. Yeah. So both these analogies, mindfulness, is a kind of seeing, a kind of knowing, a kind of clear attention to what's here.

And that clarity can grow over time, that ability to get higher up on that hill to see more and more clearly what's going on, or to be more and more at ease or peaceful, to be able to gaze upon things just enough so that everything is safe. And so that's the practice of mindfulness, the practice of seeing clearly, knowing clearly, feeling, sensing clearly, until we kind of do not get caught in the things we see. There's clarity in relationship to it. Nothing has to be gotten rid of. It just has to be seen clearly.

So that's the practice with everything, but suffering gets a certain kind of priority. And when we suffer, we want to know it, we want to see it. And then there can be this deepening connection to suffering. And many people don't know that. They think suffering is suffering, and it's just a drag, and better not feel it.

But what we're doing in that practice is learning, actually, that we can, in fact, observe it, be with it, attend to it, because in doing so we grow. We grow in clarity. We grow in certain independence. We grow in a variety of different ways, almost naturally, because the seeing gets clearer.

So I keep emphasizing this at the beginning because that's kind of the primary function of mindfulness practice, to get the lens of observation, the lens of knowing, clearer and clearer. So it's not ruffled. It's not clouded over with judgments and fears or conceits. The knowing, the seeing, becomes simpler and simpler and simpler. It's not coming with a lot of baggage.

And learning what the baggage is that we carry along with us is part of the practice. Seeing, as I said, and talking about suffering, seeing what we contribute to our suffering, and beginning to see that clearly, and leaving it down in town, leaving it, you know, putting it aside, so that we can see without that obscuration that it provides.

And so to see, to be mindful, to be aware, to be present for our experience of suffering, there's

a deepening that happens. First, as I said, it can be a huge thing, the fact that we see it rather than being lost in it. As we see it more and more clearly, we see that there is a contribution we make. As we begin clarifying this, and maybe contributing less to it, it gets simpler and simpler.

At some point, this delightful thing happens where we're able to just be with the suffering as a present-moment phenomenon, with no history really. No past and future, or they are irrelevant. It's just tactile, experiential sensations that we have in the present moment, the sensations there, lived experience in the moment of what the suffering is, the tension, the contraction, the tightness, the resistance, the heat, the numbness. There are all kinds of things that it might be.

And so we no longer need to look for our contributions. We're no longer needing to know why it's there. But now the seeing has gotten so simple that we're just seeing it as a lived experience of the moment, and there's a lot of freedom that comes to that. There is a lot of ease that can come when it's that simple.

So there's this deepening that happens, and it kind of happens naturally, organically. This is not something you have to now go looking for. But rather, what we try to do in practice is not look for anything, but just look more clearly. Just be more present, be more available. Try to see without a lot of judgments, or any judgments. Try to see without the fears that we might have.

And of course, there might be judgments and fears. That's some of the suffering we have to stop and look at. So it's just another opportunity to see a different variation of suffering. And so we're slowly, in its own way, you know, there's no hurry. It's almost best not to have a project with it and try to fix anything and try to attain anything. Just getting clearer and clearer, oh, this is what's happening, and this is a simple way of knowing it. And this is a simple way of knowing it and allowing it to be there while I'm stepping away, while I'm seeing it from a distance, while I'm kind of no longer contributing what makes it worse.

So with that, that process slowly begins to develop. There's the arising of faith, and faith can take different forms as well. Maybe as the experience of suffering deepens, so the experience of faith deepens. So the same thing happens with the next step, that with faith as a condition, with faith as a support, there's the arising of what's usually in English called gladness.

I would like to propose for today to translate *pāmojja* as appreciation. And the reason for that is that appreciation is a little, at least in my mind, a little bit more clearly involving a recognition of something, an understanding of something. This is good. This is really important.

This works. This shows me the way. This is a practice that I know supports me a lot.

There's a knowing. There's a kind of an evaluation. It's kind of a recognition that is building on what's happened already. And what is often not recognized in mindfulness practice is that you're allowed to use your intellect. It isn't that you're supposed to check your intellect at the door, right, your intelligence and not use it. You want to use it.

The wonderful thing, my little pet Buddhism teaching, is that whatever intelligence you used to suffer, that's all the intelligence you need to get out of suffering. Isn't that convenient? You don't have to be more intelligent than you are. You have all the intelligence you need. You just need enough intelligence that gets you into suffering to get you out of it. And the rest, you know, that's just extra.

So people who are really smart sometimes suffer really well. They just have really smart suffering. So they sometimes have to use more of their, you know, really. And if a person is not that smart, you're kind of fortunate because maybe the suffering is not so smart. So it's just a little bit easier to free up.

But the more important thing I want to say here is that you're supposed to use it. And learn how to use it to help you be peaceful. To help use it so that you feel like you're growing in wholesomeness, growing in mindfulness and kindness. Use it so you're growing in non-reactivity, non-striving.

And so in order to use your intelligence well, you have to understand how to use it so it's not stressful. So the intelligence, the way you're thinking about things and figuring things out, is not stressful. It's not adding strain or adding more attachments or trying to accomplish something in a way that's not helpful. So it takes a while to learn how to navigate your inner life and what you can do and not do.

But the idea is we're supposed to learn. We're supposed to become our own teacher. And really be able to rely on yourself to do this practice. So here we come to this third step of liberative dependent arising. And it involves some intellect, some appreciation, some understanding. This is good. This is good what's happening.

And so here too, there are five levels that I'd like to present. The first one is appreciation. The second one is gladness. Then there's delight. Contentment. And inspiration.

And so the first one, the appreciation, is to have a very simple appreciation that seeing suffering, stopping and looking at suffering, is valuable, that you have a practice for it. There is a practice. There is a value in it. There's a known path that you can know through suffering

to the other side. And just to know that in a simple way and to recognize that, you know, I'm suffering, I'm suffering a lot, as opposed to just suffering and that's the whole story.

Some people are so identified with their suffering, so immersed in it, so obligated to it. Some people have a strong sense of obligation that they're supposed to suffer. Some people build an identity around suffering, all kinds of ways in which they're kind of lost in the suffering itself. And so appreciating that you don't have to do that anymore, just that appreciation, that knowing that is possible.

And then with that appreciation sometimes, there's room to appreciate the ordinary delights, the ordinary pleasures of life. There's maybe now space to appreciate the warmth of the sun or the color of the flowers or, after the rain, how vibrantly alive the leaves are. Like, the leaves look like they're smiling after a rain. At least, you know, if I had to glorify, if they could smile, they'd be smiling.

It's just kind of, you know, just to see, hear the birds, and how nice. And there might be a lot of simple pleasures here at IRC that, if you're not too involved in your suffering, you might see and feel. And it can actually be very nourishing. It can be very helpful for your whole psychophysical system to take time to enjoy simple pleasures.

Then the less you're caught and lost in your suffering, the more those simple pleasures can be reassuring, can be settling, can be inspiring, can do something to your whole system that could be, you know, a little bit good for you and supportive. So the appreciation of simple pleasures, appreciation of not suffering, that it's possible, is invaluable.

As our experience of practicing with suffering gets deeper, then there can be a gladness. There can be now a gladness in a variety of things, gladness that there's a practice to do. Now I've learned some skills here, how to meet my suffering. I'm so glad to have those skills.

I've learned through this practice, or through somehow, there's a lot of goodness in me. I haven't broken the precepts since Sunday. That's pretty good. There's been a few precept-breaking things going on around the world that you don't need to know about because, you know, that's been going on for a little while, so it continues. But it's pretty special that you haven't broken the precepts.

I don't want to undervalue how important this is in this world of ours. It might be that you recognize something about yourself, a potential you have that you never knew, your potential for compassion, for kindness. Some of you, you're all volunteers here. You're all doing some kind of work meditation, *Saṅgha* service, and maybe you appreciate that you're contributing to the community.

So there's delight at the goodness of this, the benefits of this, that is more than just appreciation of pleasure, of what's good. But now there's a delight that you recognize something very important. And you're more than just having faith in it. The faith makes you smile, like the green plants that smile with the rain, the Dharma rain.

And then there is not just gladness, but a deeper experience of *pāmojja*, which is delight. And delight, the difference between gladness and delight, is gladness is a little bit more evaluative. It's a little bit at a distance, a more understanding thing, so this is really good. But the delight comes from participation, comes from now really doing the practice, putting yourself into it. There's more of you involved than simply understanding.

And this kind of feeling that you're really wholeheartedly participating with the Dharma, with the practice, with the mindfulness. You know, mindfulness is not, you know, very carefully reaching out your hand to touch something and look the other way, like it's, you know, well, I'm supposed to touch it, I'm supposed to feel it, and just very, very, very, well, kind of, I'll do it, and yeah, okay, I did it. You know, it's like you turn towards it. And you're like, I'm going to touch this. And you do touch it with two hands, with your soft fingers carefully. But all of you is participating.

So one of the reasons to be a little bit careful with your posture in meditation is whether you're lying down or sitting in a chair or on the floor or standing or even walking. Can you somehow adjust your posture so your postures are participating with being attentive, being present? There are postures of attention and postures of kind of inattention, where the body is not participating and supporting being here.

Usually in people sitting, it's usually sitting up a little bit straighter, having the chest a little more open. Even subtle changes in where the hands are can make a difference in how much the body feels like it's really here and present, and different people in different ways. And I've adjusted my posture when I do lying-down meditation so that also is intentional in some way. It's not just casually plopping down and just forgetting my body, but it's like being careful. So the body is participating.

So this idea of knowing, which is more the mental side of things, knowing, recognizing what's there, and sensing, which is more embodied, they're both extremely important parts of the whole. They're both needed. And so would you participate with all of yourself? And so participate with your capacity to know what's happening in the present, to participate by sensing and feeling what's going on there.

Some people live from their neck up, and it's all thoughts and ideas. And there are some

people who think that mindfulness is thoughtfulness. Then they interpret that really what they're doing is they're full of thoughts. Then they're thinking about their experience, and they're knowing what they're thinking about. And so therefore that's what mindfulness is, but they're just professional thinkers, or, you know, they could be, because that's what they do.

And thinking is not an enemy of the practice, but we want to make sure that the thinking, to the degree to which we're thinking, is supporting the practice, not keeping us distracted or from the neck up. And so this ability to be rooted in the body rather than mindfulness meaning thoughtfulness, thoughtfulness, I like to think that mindfulness means bodyfulness. It's so important.

So this participation, like, okay, the body is here, participating with my body, participating with my heart, participating with my mind, we're gathering, we're kind of, all of it is here. There's a practice. And so there's delight in having a practice, having something to do, delight that, oh, I'm so lucky I get to do walking meditation. Like, this is good.

It helps a little bit if you get in the flow of it. I can follow my breath and I sit and meditate. Wow. It's because you're participating in doing something. There's a little more energy that happens that kind of can give a sense of satisfaction, a sense of the faith, this is a good thing to do. I'm appreciating it and feel lucky.

Wow, I'm so fortunate to be able to do this. I've been wanting to go on retreat for a year because it's been so hard to meditate at home or practice at home. I have so many responsibilities. Wow, I finally get to do it. And this is cool. This is wonderful.

That colloquial way of translating *pāmojja* is, this is cool. So there's a kind of a little bit more of a tingling excitement, a little bit more uplift when there's delight than from gladness. And it has to do with, I think of it as, more fully participating, not just understanding.

And then there is contentment as a form of *pāmojja*. I think of this kind of contentment as being associated with this participation. We're gathering together all of who we are. Or because the faith is strong, we have a sense now that this practice, this teaching, this way of life, is really related to all of who we are. Nothing is left out.

And this idea that it's pervasive, it's inclusive, it allows some kind of spreading appreciation, spreading faith into all areas of our life. And so there can be a kind of a wonderful sense of contentment, of coming home, even a certain kind of very personal sense of safety, of being in this bubble of the practice that includes everything. Everything is here.

And so this wonderful faith that shades into shapes and deepening of seeing suffering and

becoming free of suffering, where there's a kind of a contentment, the faith that leads to a kind of deep sense of this is great, this is not just cool, this is really good. Yes, but it is a little bit evaluative still.

And then the third, I mean the fourth, the fifth one, the last one, is inspiration. And this is, you know, like having a real conviction or a real experience of trust that something is possible. This practice is onward-leading. This practice works. And wow, this is fantastic. I mean, I used to suffer so much, and now I'm not suffering so much.

I'm still inspired by the woman many years ago who came to a retreat I taught. And a year later, she came to the retreat again, the same place. And she said, at the last retreat a year ago, I stopped being cynical. And in the year in between, it hasn't returned. That's inspiring.

She was just completely delighted. This thing that had been her personality, she said, was, you know, that's who she thought she was, and somehow it stopped and didn't come back. And so to know, to be inspired, maybe because we start to see the benefits of the practice. Maybe we start seeing the benefits of seeing clearly.

Seeing clearly is a kind of freedom in itself, a kind of liberation in itself. We start seeing that we can let go sometimes. There's letting go of attachment and how good that is. There's a kind of seeing of how wonderful it is to be fully present in our body, fully present in our life. Wow, this is really good to really show up. This is like the best game in town. I thought I had to get Netflix to have a good time. And I just have to show up and really feel my whole body and live in my body and engage. That was a day of celebrating. They're inspired too.

And so, *pāmojja*, appreciation, to allow yourself to appreciate, to do it in an intelligent way, in such a way that it supports you. It's possible to go out here and appreciate all the flowers and come back and be so spun out in thoughts, planting gardens for all your friends. But to do it in a way that is a simple appreciation of the present moment, appreciation of a breath. If you go outside the building, appreciate the fresh air, the cool air, the ocean air, to appreciate that you have a practice.

Appreciate yourself for coming here and engaging in a practice. You're all experienced practitioners. Most of you I know well and know how much you've changed and grown and developed. It's pretty inspiring for me. Maybe you can recognize that. I appreciate that you've changed.

An appreciation that kind of buoys you for difficult work, the difficult practice we have here. After all, we are addressing suffering. And then there's gladness. Or if you prefer, it's cool. This is cool.

To allow yourself a certain kind of pleasure and joy and delight, so gladness and the delight from how you're doing the practice, how you're engaged, or what you're recognizing in yourself, the goodness you're recognizing in yourself. One of the great goodnesses in ourselves, in some Buddhist traditions, is *bodhicitta*, the wish for awakening, the thought, the desire for it. And sometimes that's understood for some people as they don't even know what liberation is, but the equivalent is the wish to be free of suffering. That's a cool thing.

Then there's hope for you. If you don't have that wish, then are you going to really hang in there and do this work of appreciation, gladness, delight, contentment? And I like it that as it goes deeper and deeper, with contentment it becomes quieter, settled. It becomes more comforting, becomes more settled, peaceful. There's a warmth.

All along there's kind of a warmth, the warmth of faith, the heartwarming aspects of faith that now are warming a certain kind of pleasure and goodness. And then an inspiration. Yes. Let's practice. Yes. Let's continue.

Yes. When should you practice? When should you get around to it? No. When you're on the retreat, the answer to that question is always now. Isn't that good? I mean, elsewhere there might be all kinds of debates that other things are more important. I don't have time for mindfulness. But here, just ask yourself, when should I practice? You don't have to even think about it. I told you the answer. Now, here, now, we're so lucky, so fortunate.

So if now's the time, let's sit together a little bit. And perhaps to say all of that in brief, bring all of yourself along into the practice. Thank you.