

Mudita (55) Choosing Joy

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Hello everyone, and welcome to this new sub-series on appreciative joy. The joy that we can experience and share with others comes from sharing their joy, this kind of mutual feedback. It is a part of this wider series on love that has been going on now for many weeks.

And I'll begin by saying that one of the forms of love in Buddhism, Dharma love, is a love that wants us to be free of suffering, wants us to be free of stress, free of fear, free of hatred and ill will. It is not a requirement, it is not an obligation, to be free of all those difficult states. But there is a kind of love within us, a care, a kindness, a compassion, that naturally we want for ourselves, and naturally we want that for others.

And we could choose to stay with our suffering, choose to stay in a certain way, collapsing under its weight, or struggling against it, or living in the stories we tell ourselves about it that just kind of perpetuate it. Or we can choose another way. And Dharma practice is to choose the healthy way, the way to freedom, and to choose compassion, choose love, choose mindfulness, choose attention, and to choose the Dharma life, to choose to have this love for freedom, *vimutti* love, body love.

And part of this movement, of this choice to choose the healthy direction, the wholesome direction for ourselves, is that it needs to be done all the time. We need to know how to do it wisely and know that we have a choice. And one of the gifts of Buddhism is how it points us to the fact that we have a choice, we have some agency. Not necessarily over what impulses live in us, what thoughts live in us, but we have choice about what we give ourselves over to, what we pick up, what we allow ourselves to really participate with.

And all too easily, human beings participate with what is unwholesome, unhelpful. We believe the thoughts that others are wrong, others should be blamed. We believe the thoughts that we're to blame, that we're wrong, and somehow we're at fault. We believe that we are

suffering. We believe that suffering is inevitable, and I have to just kind of buckle down and carry on with it all.

There are all kinds of things that we believe, and we kind of give in to them in a way that we don't really see the place of choice, the place where you say, wait a minute, yes, those thoughts are there, yes, those beliefs are there, but I don't have to give in to them. I don't have to perpetuate them by keeping thinking the same things over and over again. Even if there's some truth to them, that doesn't mean that I need to wallow in them or repeatedly stay on those. There's more going on. The human life is multifaceted. Our human heart is multifaceted. Our mind is multifaceted.

And we have choice about what we choose. And one of the things we choose is to love, to care, to want freedom, to support ourselves, nourish ourselves with what is healthy, wholesome. And so this love series is about how to come back to the places that are really wholesome inside of us, that also are social, that connect us to other people in healthy and good ways.

And we come now to the third *brahmavihāra*, a third divine abode. We come to something called appreciative joy, sympathetic joy. It's called *muditā*. And rather than choosing to be resentful, choosing to be jealous, choosing to envy, choosing to be dismissive, choosing disbelieving others, we can choose something else.

I remember someone had a wonderful experience of joy, happiness, freedom at a retreat, and I was sitting there, and it was so nice that the teacher kind of mentioned how nice this person's experience was. And this person came up to me later and said, "I can't believe that. I know that person for a long time, and no way that that person could have that kind of happiness or joy," and was really upset and angry at someone else's happiness. And why bother? Why give up your own well-being in such a simple way? What does it matter that someone else is happy?

Why be jealous? Why be critical, when in doing that, the person who is angry has sacrificed their own well-being? And why not kind of relax at least, or leave it alone, just to be simple? Or why not appreciate it? The teacher appreciated it, seemed to value it, was delighted by it, and maybe there's some way that I can be delighted, I can be happy with it.

And so we have a capacity to celebrate other people's success, celebrate other people's well-being and happiness, maybe particularly when it's someone who's close to us, someone we identify with. In the Dharma, we're looking to expand our capacity to delight in other people's well-being so it's universal, so that we're ready to delight in all people. And rather than seeing people as enemies, to see them as fellow travelers, fellow members of our human family,

who also are multifaceted, and that they also have suffering, they have joys, successes and failures.

They go home maybe to a family, or they have children who are overcoming an illness or an injury, and now the child is better. And, you know, people are not just enemies. People are people. And to have the capacity to see the humanity in other people allows us also to feel or recognize what's going well for them and to appreciate people deeply.

One of the surprises and great joys for me in these years of Dharma practice is to have a growing tendency to appreciate people, to think they're beautiful, and to see what is going well and to see how wonderful they are and beautiful they are in their hearts and their well-being. And it's not Pollyannaish, because I know there's suffering, I know things are challenging, I know that there's unwholesome in them. But something shifts in me where I didn't used to see what was beautiful in people. I didn't used to see them with an appreciative eye and really delight in people. And that's steadily grown, I feel, as a fruit of Dharma practice.

And to be able to share that appreciation, to allow myself to kind of be buoyed and inspired and delighted by the delight of others, the joy of others, the beauty of others, even if they don't necessarily see their own beauty, to have this appreciative joy, appreciative delight. This is one of the great things, because there are lots of people in this world. To have the ability to take time to appreciate and see people in such a way that we feel just happy about them.

And again, not to deny that they're suffering, not to deny that there may be things they do which are unwholesome and unhelpful, maybe harmful even. But there's a way in which, if we never appreciate other people, maybe they don't grow. Maybe what's good in them doesn't get reinforced or fed or buoyed or fueled in some way. Maybe there's a beautiful way of sharing the good in human life, in human beings, that brings out more of it.

Just as we have the choice in Dharma practice, what we give ourselves to, what we pick up, what we see in ourselves, so we can do that in the world around us, and it can make a world of difference. Imagine if we just doubled the amount of time we spent appreciating and valuing other people and feeling delight in their well-being, delight in how things are going well for them when they are going well, sharing and celebrating.

The word *muditā*, that's translated as sympathetic or appreciative joy, is related to the word *anumodanā*, which sometimes is translated into English as rejoicing. And so this appreciative joy, appreciative rejoicing, and delighting in oneself and in others is a form of Dharma love.

So that's the topic for this week, and we'll spend more time with it. And then we started off

with the guided meditation earlier, a meditation on contentment, which was meant to be kind of a simple and hopefully accessible way to enter into this wholesome world of appreciative joy. So thank you, and I'm very happy to be back here and look forward to being here again tomorrow. Thank you.