

Dharmette: Love (56) Mudita and Appreciation

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Hello and welcome back. Welcome to this week's series on appreciative joy. Appreciating others and feeling joy, delight. In this appreciation, we can have other people. There are some people who go through their life seldom appreciating others. They're mostly afraid of others, and cautious and pulling back and unsure, maybe even a little afraid to appreciate others because they're afraid that's going to make them more vulnerable or defenseless.

There are people who are bitter and resentful, and the very bitterness and resentment they carry kind of feels so uncomfortable that it kind of self-generates more resentment, more bitterness. It's like the negative feelings of anger or resentment, bitterness, is enough proof that things are bitter in the world and bad in the world. And some people identify so strongly with their capacity to complain, their capacity to be insightful into how terrible things are and people are, and the people's identity or sense of value comes from being an opinionated person, being someone who can complain and see what's wrong.

And I saw that very clearly when I was in graduate school, that the medium for conversations, especially among graduate students, but also from professors, was to be critical of all other scholarship. Seldom praise, seldom appreciate other people's point of view, but always to look for where their weaknesses were, to always look for the problems. And sometimes it was downright mean how people were, and people prided themselves on being able to do that.

What we learn through doing this practice is the self-harm that we do to ourselves when we kind of carry with us negative states of mind, when we carry with us negative kinds of ways of thinking and orienting and opinions. It can create a mood which is kind of deflating. It can create tension and tightness. It can be unhealthy physically to go around all the time angry, always triggered and being upset. It's bad for the heart, the physical heart.

And so through practice we begin seeing the cost of some of the attitudes which we carry into our life, always being anxious and always being afraid. And the hope is that meditation at least is a place that's simple enough, safe enough, that this is where we begin dropping all that. We drop all the constant busyness or activities of the mind that are harmful, that are being generated by our thoughts, generated by our feelings. There's a choice. There's an engagement in this, that as the mind gets quieter in meditation, those quiet down. We stop doing those things.

And we start feeling it's a whole other way of being. And we start seeing that those thoughts, those opinions, those are impermanent. Those are kind of fleeting in a certain way. We just kept them going very quickly, one after the other. But as we start feeling better, there's a different sense of well-being that is not so fleeting, that in and of itself is more suffusive, is more continuous, not forever, but it's more like the weather than it is like lightning.

The temperature of the air generally stays somewhat constant. There can be big shifts that are relatively fast, but it stays constant as the day slowly warms up, maybe slowly cools down. And so we can have deep moods that kind of persist for a while, and sometimes those moods that persist are painful. But there's also good moods. And in the *Dharma*, those good moods of calm, joy, peace, happiness, love of the different types, these are all considered to be good moods, good states of being.

That we don't look for their impermanence. We look for how to grow them. The Buddha talked about wholesome states where we try to maintain them, we grow them, we expand them, we bring them to fullness. And this is not a minor teaching of the Buddha. This is embedded in the teachings on the *Eightfold Path*, where he talks about the wholesome states we can have. And he says, when they're there, maintain them, grow them, expand them, bring them to fulfillment.

He doesn't say, look how impermanent they are and don't get attached. He says, no, let them grow, let them feed you. And one of the things that we learn from this, the more we have a sense of inner well-being, is how much self-harm we arm ourselves with. And one of the ways we self-harm ourselves is some of the attitudes we have about other people. Whether or not those beliefs, those opinions about others are accurate or appropriate is a separate issue than are we causing harm to ourselves?

And if we see we're causing harm to ourselves, if our opinions about others have some accuracy, can we hold them in a different way? Can we hold them so there's no self-harm? But one of the things about not closing down, not getting tight, not getting contracted, is that we also then have the ability to see people in a richer, fuller way. Yes, people might have some

things which are off, but they also might have something that's very positive. It's possible to enjoy the basic humanity of people.

I've gone to a park and sat on a bench and just enjoyed every person that walked by. There was something about fresh and just being alive, like looking at the squirrels or the rabbits. It's not that people are like squirrels or rabbits, but just everyone is appreciated. Everyone's just their human animal again. I want them to do well. I don't want them to be killed as I'm watching them. I don't want them to be harmed or something. I want them to thrive and be happy and enjoy being in the park.

So there's a natural way in which it's healthy for us in the *Dharma*, if you've done your practice, to begin allowing yourself to appreciate other people and take in the joy, be delighted in it, and relax with it, having appreciative joy for others. Because it's good for ourselves. But not only is it good for ourselves, because if we only focus on me, myself, and mine, we can't really do this genuine goodwill. We're back caught in the reactive mind, the constructive mind.

There's this wonderful way in which to appreciate others and linger there. Not only would it benefit ourselves, but it protects ourselves from our contractions, from our resentments, from our conceits. Appreciating others is a phenomenally useful *Dharma* practice for *Dharma* practitioners. And seeing the beauty in others, seeing that which is delightful in others, looking into people and looking for their best qualities as well. And feeling joy in that, seeing people's successes, what's going well in their life, and feel joy and delight as opposed to being resentful, and to appreciate what they enjoy rather than judging what they do to enjoy it.

There's some young teenagers in our neighborhood who make a lot of noise on these little motorcycles, electric motorcycles, going up and down the road. And now it's a little bit annoying, but I don't want to focus on that. I just appreciate that they're having a good time, they're enjoying themselves, and I wish them well. I wish them safety. I wish them delight. I take joy in their joy.

And so when I see them, I'm more likely to comment in a nice way about them and their motorcycles. I'm not there to scowl at them or complain to them, you know, it's too noisy. That's not good for me. It's not good for them. And so this kind of joy, appreciating joy, delighting in the joy of others.

So you might try this. You might try to spend today, the next 24 hours, to go find, look at people and be with people to see if you can appreciate them more, see their beauty or see

their joy, see what they're doing as well, and speak to that. Appreciate people. You know, oh, you said something really nice. That was caring. That was done carefully. That was done, you know, that was, you seem to enjoy that and it was just wonderful to watch and see.

Maybe don't say all these things, but begin finding appreciation in sharing in the delight of others, the joys of others. And let it be contagious. Let there be almost a feedback loop between your joy and my joy, and let it continue through the day here. So thank you for today. I appreciate very much you all being here and sharing in this, and I look forward to continuing tomorrow. Thank you.