

## Guided Meditation: Appreciation

**Gil Fronsdal**

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Hello and welcome to this guided meditation. We are continuing now this week with the topic of sympathetic joy. Today will still be kind of an introduction to the topic.

One thing I want to say is that some of you are maybe quite familiar with the idea that Buddhism teaches that everything is impermanent, *anicca*. What happens often is that teaching is made into a universal teaching, a universal idea. In a sense, it's taken out of context. In context, there is, yes, the idea of seeing the inconstancy, the changing nature of our experience, which is very important at a certain point of practice.

But it's interesting that the Buddha doesn't really say that everything is impermanent. There are some things that he never says are impermanent, even though they don't last. There are wholesome states, really good experiences, that he doesn't say to see as impermanent and changeable. Rather, in wholesome states like loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity, those are to be pervasive. Those are supposed to be enduring for a while.

The emphasis there is how they saturate us or fill us and continue for a period of meditation or for part of a day in a situation. The difference here is that the primary thing that's emphasized as being inconstant, impermanent, is the whole inner world of our reactive mind, the constructive mind, the mind that thinks and constructs and reacts to things. I call it the surface mind. And there's a whole other deep mind, or deep physiological experience, that has maybe more to do with hormones coursing through us and enduring for a while.

Those kinds of hormonal or chemical ways in which serotonin and different chemicals work in us leave a kind of enduring glow, an enduring kind of, not forever, but they don't arise and pass quickly there. There's a way in which they kind of saturate and fill us and stay. And so, yes, seeing that our thoughts, our judgments, our opinions, our constructs of self are fleeting and empty and constructed and constantly in flux is very valuable. But it's also very valuable

to linger and allow for the continuity of joy, of happiness, of love. It's possible to let those linger and stay and fill us.

We're not supposed to be looking upon them and saying, let's see how impermanent they are. The Buddha talks about letting them kind of radiate and fill our experience. So the idea that we're allowed to experience joy, allowed to feel deep appreciation and delight, is healing, is beneficial. And so appreciative joy is a wonderful state because it benefits both oneself and maybe the person we feel appreciative joy for, if we're in contact with them.

But not having appreciative joy, non-appreciative grumpiness, non-appreciative resentment, non-appreciative discouragement, or something, we harm ourselves. We contract, we limit, we irritate, we create a mood that is not so helpful for us. But when we can appreciate other people, value them, see their beauty, take delight in them, then that sets in motion these wonderful inner states that benefit us. And maybe set the conditions up that we're more likely to have positive relationships, more likely to benefit other people as well.

And so this movement to discover appreciative joy is a movement of deep appreciation, taking time to see in others what is really good, what is nice, what is beautiful. And of course, human beings are mixed bags. There's all kinds of things which are challenging, and maybe things that we may disapprove of. But that's not all that a human being is. People have many sides.

And just like it's important for us to begin nourishing and nurturing our capacity for love, joy, and happiness, and have those kinds of states suffusing us, so it's good for us to do this, to begin looking at others in a more holistic way that allows us to take delight, allows us not to harm ourselves by closing down and being resentful and complaining. We don't want to overlook things which we disapprove of. But we don't want that to feed our inner state. And we want to feed a positive inner state and later, with wisdom, take care of what we need to take care of in the world. So to appreciate others and ourselves is the foundation for appreciative joy.

So assuming a meditation posture and gently closing your eyes. And maybe it's okay to assume that all of us are a mixed bag, that we have things which are wholesome and unwholesome in us. We have things which we do well and things that maybe we regret or are not the best things we could do, feel, think. And perhaps we can take care of what is unwholesome in ourselves better if we gaze upon it from a settled, wholesome place. Maybe we're wiser and more honest and more truthful about things if we include the wholesome as a foundation.

So here now, what aspects of you, what aspects of your present-moment experience, maybe

sitting in meditation, do you appreciate? That you enjoy? Maybe if you meditate for a long time, it is simply assuming the meditation posture, a kind of homecoming in the body. Maybe it's an intention, a desire to care for yourself or care for others, that brings you to meditation.

Maybe there's a feeling of softness or gentleness, kindness somewhere in your system, however small. Maybe it's an appreciation that for these minutes of meditation, you can put down so much of your concerns to enjoy the simplicity of being. And letting the thinking mind become quieter, so you can feel your body, feel whatever is good in your body, whatever pleasure, wholesomeness. Even if there's pain or discomfort in the body, is there also pleasure, peace, or calm in your body as part of your body?

Become aware of your breathing, a simple awareness that allows your breathing to breathe itself, with your attention gentle, light. Becoming aware of the body breathing, with the experience of breathing, maybe at the edges of the sensations of breathing, also being aware of what feels good, pleasure and delight in something you appreciate. Maybe enjoying relaxing on the exhale. And might there be some very simple, maybe modest, global feeling, a global feeling of calm or pleasure, well-being, in the middle of which you're breathing?

Your breathing is like a gentle breeze that's fanning the flames of a campfire that's keeping you warm. With every breath, touching, feeling whatever it is that is going well, whatever is pleasant or enjoyable, peaceful here. Feeling it in such a way, quieting the mind, quieting the thinking, it allows you to feel and enjoy what is going well here more fully. Letting there be a little more quiet in the mind so there's more room in awareness to sense and feel, recognize whatever it is that you can appreciate in the present moment. An appreciation which is more about feeling and sensing what is here than it is about thinking about what's here.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, do you feel whatever way that you are calmer, more relaxed at the end of the sitting? Maybe a bit softer, gentler, tender, peaceful. And how it might feel good to be more settled, to be more this way, and how it might dispose you to be more open, more receptive to the environment we are sitting in. Maybe the ears can be more open to sound, even with the eyes closed.

The body is almost like an antenna at that point, is open and available to what's around you. And to begin bringing to mind some of the people in your life, neighbors, colleagues, strangers, and to appreciate them. To gaze upon them from the point of view of their precious human life, where to wish them harm and wish them ill, it desensitizes you to the openness, the calm, the receptivity, the antenna of our body. And take a few moments to simply appreciate that some things must be going well for others, even in their challenges.

They must have some good qualities in spite of some of the things you've seen. And to give them the benefit of the doubt and allow yourself to appreciate the people in your life, their goodness, their success, what's good about them, and to take a delight, to enjoy it. To have joy almost as if your joy, your appreciation, can be contagious for them, can help strengthen, bring forth what is good in them, if you gaze upon them with appreciation for their inner beauty, their precious humanity, wishing may they know how precious they are, their inner beauty, their inner goodness. May it continue for them.

And may my simple non-assertive appreciation contribute to greater joy and goodness in this world.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.