

Dharmette: Love (57) Mudita and Gratitude

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June 17, 2026

Keywords: *mindfulness*, appreciative joy, gratitude, sympathetic joy, present moment, awareness, love, interconnectedness, suffering, freedom

So, hello, and welcome to this 7 a.m. meditation and teaching. For the first months of this year, I've been teaching about love. And now we've come to the point where we're talking about a form of love called appreciative joy. I'll just say a little more about this love topic. It is certainly not meant to be an admonition to love, that we have to do more and crank it up.

It's closer to the idea that, embedded in our capacity to be aware, to be attentive in the present moment, to be at rest here and now, we begin to decrease the preoccupations, the reactivity, the ways we close down and shut out, the ways that we are distracted, the ways that we get caught in difficult mind states. And when these covers begin to come off, when we begin to shed the armor and the preoccupations, there's a simplicity of being with which we're present for this world, present for ourselves. And this simplicity of being itself is that we can start discovering and sensing and recognizing something we might call love. Maybe each person will experience it and recognize it in a different way. But a warmheartedness, a care, a delight, an appreciation for not just others, not just oneself. But the amazing miracle of mindfulness, the miracle of this practice of freedom, is that we don't have to have an object for the love. Just a capacity for love is there.

So if I keep my hand in a fist for many years, I don't really know how sensitive, I forget how sensitive, the palm of the hand is. But finally, when the hand opens, the palm is sensitive, and I don't have to want it to be sensitive or try to make it more sensitive. The softness, the tenderness, the sensitivity of the hand can feel the breeze going across it. It can feel the temperature. It can feel the smoothness of some surface. The palm of the hand can feel the tenderness of holding a baby's hand, or a friend's hand, or the hand of someone who is dying, and of a lover, in a way that a fist can't.

And we don't have to focus on feeling the tenderness, the contact, the exchange, the meeting. But it's right there in the hand, the warmth of it, the gentleness, the softness. Something like

that with this capacity for love. And when we come to appreciative joy, I emphasize this as well, that it's not something we have to kind of figure out and logically appreciate in others. But it comes when we're really present to the simplicity of being here now. That we begin appreciating ordinary things in life.

And we appreciate just being alive. We appreciate the colors, the objects, the things, the weather, the sky, the sun, the ground we walk on. There's something about the more present we are, the more we appreciate the little details. I just came back from teaching a week retreat, and there in retreat were the people cultivating this simplicity of being day after day. It's remarkable, the sense of delight and joy and appreciation, even a foot coming down to the ground. Even opening a door and looking out and feeling the fresh air.

We're present to be with it, to feel it, take it in. We're not distracted from the details of life. And we can feel beauty and appreciate partly because the fist of the mind is open, the fist of the heart is open, and we're present for what's going on. So appreciative joy and gratitude, the simple acts of gratitude, being grateful. And what's beautiful, wonderful about gratitude is it puts us a little bit in the receptive mode. This is what comes to us. This is what benefits us. This is what we're receiving.

And we receive so much. And one of the reflections I have is when I go about the town, the town I live in, and I see strangers, people I don't know, that maybe they have a profession, a job. Maybe they do things that benefit me. Maybe that person works for the sewage plant in the city. Maybe that person works for the street department and takes care of the streets and keeps it clean or fixes potholes. Maybe that person is a clerk in a store that I go shopping in, or a stocker in the back and makes it possible for me to go to the store and pick up my groceries.

Maybe that person, all kinds of, who knows what this person is doing. Chances are I'm passing people all the time that indirectly I benefit from what they do. And I don't know how much that's the case. It's hard to calculate the circles of mutuality and interconnectedness we have. But just simply, to some degree it's true. And I just delight in the people around me, even the people who are strangers, because we have a shared life, and maybe they also are benefiting me. Maybe there's some way I benefit them indirectly.

And so to live that way is very different than going around, which I've done when I was young, which is judging people, seeing what's wrong with people, putting people in camps, the people who are good or acceptable and the people who are not, based on their clothes, their age, all kinds of things. And I feel so lucky that that tendency of the mind seems to be kind of fairly absent these days. And so this gratitude is a foundation, a usefulness to help us stay

present, stay aware, stay in an open, good-hearted way, and open in an unclouded way. And it's a stepping stone. Gratitude is a stepping stone to being able to have appreciative joy, sympathetic joy. To be able to appreciate what's going well for others, to appreciate their successes, to appreciate their joys, to appreciate what they receive and how they've maybe done well in the world.

And rather than being jealous or envious or automatically judging them for something, just to have a share in the joy, to share in the success, to share in the goodness of others. With the idea that just appreciating it strengthens it, brings forth more of it into the world. And an appreciative joy that, again, is not a logical thing to do or a required thing to do, but it's the contagion that happens when we're in presence with the success and happiness of others, that we naturally are delighted, we naturally share in that, and we allow ourselves. As opposed to staying shut down, resistant, caught up in thoughts, caught up in our own woes and griefs and complaints.

And so gratitude is a means for the growth of appreciative joy, this contagion, this sharing, this empathy that we want to take in and celebrate and be with when it seems appropriate, when that's what's happening around us. And some people will complain that appreciative joy is Pollyannish, or there's too much suffering in the world to spend any time appreciating things. I think what's true is that our capacity to appreciate the well-being, the joys of others around us, the successes, is what also allows us to open to the suffering of the world, the challenges. It's the opening of the fist of the heart, the fist of the mind, that now is available. To care for someone who's suffering and to appreciate someone who is happy.

So in this emphasis on appreciative joy this week, and now gratitude as a support for that, as you go about your day today, see if you can manage to take time to be present, really present, to experience what's happening around you, what's happening here, in an undistracted way, in an unclouded way. And see if, in open awareness to what's here, it helps you to take in what is going well, what to be grateful for, to be able to take in and share in the joy of others, to recognize it, name it, go along with it, kind of share it with people. Perhaps there's more joy, more gratitude that you can avail yourself of today. That prepares you, that strengthens you to be able to also encounter suffering, your own and that of others. So thank you very much, and we'll continue this theme of appreciative joy for another couple of days. Thank you.