

Guided Meditation: Joy Begets Joy

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Hello and welcome. And welcome to this week, end of this week, where we're beginning our exploration of joy and a particular kind of joy, which we're calling appreciative joy. Hello and welcome. To appreciate what is good in the world, to appreciate the goodness of the world.

And one of the principles in Buddhism is that joy begets joy. Another principle from Buddhist psychology, the classic Buddhist psychology, where there's very detailed analysis of the mind and mental factors, when they list all the different mental factors that they've gathered together, there are dramatically more, maybe ten times more, lists of positive mental factors, wholesome ones. They call them, actually in this classic psychology, beautiful mental states. Then there are unwholesome ones. The inventory of all the good we can do, all the positive mental states we are capable of, is greater than the inventory of the unwholesome ones.

And it is true that sometimes we prioritize the unwholesome ones. Sometimes we prioritize, as we look upon the world, maybe evolutionarily it was selected, that we prioritize the threats that exist out there. And I became aware of this here in my town where I live, in Redwood City. When I was raising my kids in town, and I was much more deeply embedded in the life of the town, of the children and parents and sports coaches and teachers, and it went on and on, I was impressed by how much goodness is going on, how much generosity, how much care and service is going on.

But if I read the local newspaper, no one reports on that. It reports on the tragedies, the dangers, the crimes. And so, you know, somehow that gets highlighted in the mind and the heart. And we don't look at the ordinary everyday goodness and generosity that goes on.

It's possible, I suspect, there's a much higher percentage of goodness every day in the world than there is unwholesomeness and beauty.

And this practice of *brahma-vihāras* is to appreciate the goodness, appreciate what is going well, appreciate people's happiness and joy, success and good fortune. And in doing so, joy begets joy. That as we feel a certain kind of simple, ordinary, uncomplicated joy, delight in what we see and feel without the overlay of a lot of analysis or comparison, and the world should be different, then the joy kind of multiplies the joy that we feel. And then there's a certain kind of joy we also feel in wanting those people who are having goodness, doing good things, having good fortune, may they continue. We see their joy and we want it to continue. We're delighted, and we want to affirm it, and at least in ourselves we want to recognize it so we can live and live for another day.

So the joy of wishing other people joy is a double joy. And then sometimes we speak to it and say, oh, that was just a real pleasure to watch you do that, or that was a really generous thing you did for your friend, and people kind of, like, you know, feel delighted to be recognized. And so the joy, then there's more joy. So to feel joy, to take time for it, and not succumb to the insistence that we should be focusing on what's wrong. And the more we experience this joy and see that in the world, we're rectifying an overemphasis on the problems of our lives that we focus on, or the way we close down or are horrified. And it allows us then to be more available for the difficulties, not less.

So, to meditate in joy. So we begin by not doing that, but by settling into our body, here and now, as it is, to take time to add generosity, to feel your body on its own terms, not what you want, not what should happen, but for a few minutes scanning your body on its own terms. And here too, for whatever difficulties our bodies present us, there are many times more things that are working that we take for granted. And if we hold it all in awareness, the pains, the illnesses, the difficulties we have, with all that is working, the whole begins looking different than if we only focus on the challenges.

And to then take a few fuller breaths, feeling the body more fully on the inhale, and using the fuller breaths to begin shifting from the stream of thoughts that we can be floating in to the stream of sensations in the body, and to relax, to let go. Relaxing the body. There is a way of relaxing the body that is an expression of appreciation and thanks for the body, for all the ways that it does care for us, keeps us alive, softening the body so that the body can work better. It has space for, it has room to be itself that it doesn't quite have if we're contracted into our thoughts and concerns.

And letting the breath return to normal and relaxing the thinking mind, softening the tension

in the mind. The mind and the brain is a phenomenally multifaceted operating system, much of which operates without our conscious awareness. It does complicated physics just to be able to take our hand and reach for something, and to appreciate that there's more that's working well in our mind than what we're conscious of, or the headlines in the mind of what we are focused on, thinking about, our issues and concerns. And there's something about relaxing and softening the thinking mind that allows the mind to operate properly, better, on its own. The mind is not being interfered with by the tensions and preoccupations.

And then settling into the body breathing, approaching the sensations of breathing gently, softly, tenderly, a light awareness of breathing that allows the breathing to breathe itself and helps us not interfere so much with our body and mind, just a light touch of awareness with breathing, appreciating, enjoying our capacity for present moment awareness. And then to sit here in the present moment, just here and now, in what you can directly experience, to appreciate two things: that there's a lot that's working well just for us to be alive and breathe. And the second, there's something that each of us has, a degree of goodness, integrity, good qualities, capacity for friendliness, being ethical, being generous. Even if it doesn't often appear, it's there within us.

And to take some time not doubting it, not doubting, belittling it, or holding it off because it's not enough. It's not the full picture. Allow yourself to feel a deep appreciation, maybe joy, in what is working well right now for you. Breathe with it and allow the thinking mind to feel safe and content, a joy in the capacity to be aware and the confidence that there is goodness here.

And then the idea that joy begets joy. Think of someone that you know for whom it is easy for you to appreciate their goodness, their happiness, their joy, their good qualities, their good activities, that it brings you a joy just knowing that they exist and what they do. And allow yourself to find the place inside that lights up, that smiles, smiling of the heart, and quietly taking in what you appreciate about this person. Maybe breathing together with the simplest image of this person, or simplest thought that brings you joy, and thinking of a person who brings you joy because of their goodness, what they do, their success, because they're happy, their joy in something good happening.

And is there a simple, simple way to say yes that opens you to that joy that you feel in knowing them, and that says yes to their joy, as if you're making space in the universe for their well-being, their goodness, their success to grow and continue, a gentle yes in all directions. Being able to see goodness in the world and in oneself is what promotes, encourages more goodness to spread and grow. In the last minutes of the sitting, to sit quietly with an attitude

of yes. Oh, your whole being quietly living yes to all that is healthy, wholesome, beautiful, in our human world, for these few moments, to quietly open to it all so it has time to mature, to be and be reinforced.

And may it be that everyone has access to their deepest capacity for happiness, safety, peace, and freedom. May all beings know happiness, at the center of their heart. May all beings know safety, so their heart can be at ease. May all beings be peaceful, know peace, so that they're allowed to be at ease and free. And may all beings know freedom, a heart that's unshackled, unconstricted, undiminished. May all beings be happy, and may we live to support that possibility. Thank you.