

Dharmette: Love (61) For Benefactor

Gil Fronsdal

June 23, 2026

Keywords: appreciative joy, samādhi, benefactor, meditation, well-being, generosity, gratitude, happiness, discursive thought, joy

So we continue on these talks on appreciative joy. And then this week it's the focus on how to engage in it as a meditation practice, where we give ourselves over to this quality of appreciative joy, to the feelings, the sense, the motivations, the thoughts. We really make it the place we settle and stabilize the attention, and we can enter into an immersive experience, a whole gathering of ourselves into this experience of appreciative joy as a *samādhi*.

Sometimes I like to think of it as immersing ourselves totally in a bathtub of wonderful, maybe warm water, or immersing ourselves in a wonderful, refreshing, cool lake on a very hot day. Just really being immersed. And if we're immersed in water like that, there's something in our system that kind of opens up and receives it and is available to us for the pleasure of the water. So the same thing: something inside of us becomes available for the pleasure or the goodness or the flow or the feelings of appreciative joy, so that all of us kind of is immersed and is basking in it or something.

And the classic way of doing this, as I said yesterday, is to start with a benefactor, and then we work through categories of people that become increasingly difficult to have that kind of joy and delight for. But the idea is to do it slowly and to maybe choose people who are not too difficult. So when we're moving from the easy person to the benefactor, then choosing someone, I mean, some of the easy people might have been the benefactor, but now choose someone else who's not quite as easy, more complicated. Maybe a benefactor who is a mixed bag, that maybe they have not caused you any difficulties, but they have some way of being that maybe they are sometimes a little bit too angry, or maybe they are depressed a fair amount of time, or anxious, or something. So they're there, we feel them, there's much more hesitation for whatever reason, but not dramatically, just enough so we can begin stretching ourselves and seeing, yes, let's not limit the appreciative joy by that they're a mixed bag, but let's include all of them.

Let's focus on their capacity to be happy. Let's acknowledge. And part of this is a really good principle, that the good in people and in ourselves, the capacity for well-being in others and ourselves, is supported by the appropriate acknowledgement. Sometimes not naming it or pointing to it, but sharing it, being with people. If people are smiling, smiling too. If people are happy, you know, join in their happiness without maybe naming it.

Sometimes it is naming it. You know, being so happy today, you know, thank you for lifting my spirits today because of your smile, or thank you for being so generous. But to do it not as a thank you as an obligation, but as a way of expressing your delight, your joy, your appreciative joy. So maybe it's a little bit contagious. They see that you've been buoyed, you've been inspired by what they did. So there's art.

Because if we focus rather on what's difficult, then that's what gets fed in this world. So if someone invites you to their house for dinner, and they make a nice dinner, and you feel appreciative of their efforts, but the dessert they give you is just terrible, overcooked, bitter, something about it. And so as you leave, you say, you know, well, you know, thank you for having me over for dinner. And, you know, that dessert was awful. I don't know if I want to come here again. I'm still kind of lingering with it. I mean, that kind of spoils the whole thing.

It doesn't matter that the dessert was bad. In the bigger scheme of things, what really matters here is their generosity and their goodness, and that they were doing something good for you, and to appreciate that and share that joy. And so appreciative joy is that practice of touching into what is really good in people and wanting it to grow, wanting it to continue, wanting their happiness to develop in such a way that we kind of feel inspired, too. It's our own goodness that's coming to the forefront in seeing and wishing other people this way.

And if it's challenging to do it well, if the reservations come up, that's an area to meet, to relax, to soften, to stretch into, and see if it can, if the joy, the appreciative joy, the intention of wishing them well, can kind of gently, appropriately let that fall to the side. So we immerse ourselves in this fullness, a full way of being, fully there, here, and not distracted by other things. Undistracted love, undistracted appreciative joy. That's what *samādhi* is.

And in meditation, this is the place where it's considered safe, appropriate, a blessing to put aside distractive thoughts for the time being. They can always come back later. You can say, thank you, and I'll put you on the shelf for now. You can rest now. You've been busy. You're probably tired. Right now, no more distracted thoughts. Those will have a time later.

And be willing to let go, to soften that mind, and then enter into this world of wishing people

well. In this case, not in the abstract, but by identifying, recognizing a way in which they are happy, are joyful, are successful, and to share in that joy. And so with the benefactor, to share in the benefactor's joy or capacity for joy, to share in their good fortune.

And in the meditation, finding a way to have the intention kind of be like the surfboard that we're riding on. So it's not entering into discursive thought, but a very quiet part of the mind, maybe almost not thinking at all, that is kind of intending, may your happiness continue. And then riding that, opening to it, being available. That's where you put yourself down into the water to take in the pleasure of the water. And may you continue, and then in the rest of that exhale, just open and feel maybe the tingling, a pleasure in the body, a subtleness, a smile in the heart, a delight, an immersion. Yes, here, this.

And to make this kind of immersive, fully, each person is going to have to find their own way, but there are these different elements of the practice that we can kind of bring together to support us. And how much to support them and how much to be holding all of this at the same time is up to each person. But there's the memory of the person, image or sense we have of them. There is their joy and happiness and well-being and what it was like for us to feel that when we're in their presence. If they're the benefactor, there's also our deep respect, appreciation, gratitude for them that can be there.

There is the intention, the words we say, or almost say, or the heart quality, where there's a rhythm, a nice kind of rhythm of rising and passing, coming and going, the waves coming and lifting us up and down, the scooter being pushed along. May your happiness continue. And then there's the feelings that happen within us that is that gathering, that settling, that's relaxing into this. This is all we have to do right now. All of our concerns and worries can be put aside, can settle.

Let's really have a deep trust in *samādhi*, a deep trust in this healthy, settled, unified way of being here now, settled on this, with the help of appreciative joy, one joy after another. So, and renewing it in a very soft, calm, nice rhythmic way with every breath. Or if that rhythm's not quite right for you, then maybe you have your own rhythm that is not connected to your breathing, that you just kind of stay in the flow, keep it going, keep it going.

And then to practice this in your daily life as well. And for appreciative joy of benefactors, maybe anybody who is expressing something good is your benefactor, because they inspire you, they show you what's possible. And to spend more time today looking for opportunities to either just kind of share in the joy of others, in the goodness, the integrity, the generosity of others. Just kind of take it in, appreciate it in yourself.

And then maybe in a very simple, unobtrusive, unassertive, uncomplicated way for the other person, you know, offer your gratitude for what you see, what you're experiencing, or how they are, your appreciation of them. And to see if you can find a way to do that that somehow lets things light up even more, that the joy, shared joy, lights up. Ah, yes, thank you. That's great. Everyone smiles, sparks, their eyes sparkle.

And then if you want to do the advanced practice of benefactors, then there can be the deep appreciation, the real appreciation, of people who are difficult for you. And the reason to appreciate them is that they show you where you have room to practice. They show you where you still need to find your freedom or your self-understanding or how not to get caught in that. And they are also benefiting us. But that, as I said, is the advanced practice. So only if it feels like that's going to work for you.

So we'll continue with this tomorrow. And if you are, you know, somehow find yourself interested in this *samādhi* of appreciative joy, I'd encourage you to meditate more today and this week. If you're meditating once a day, do it twice a day or do it a little bit longer. And so you kind of are getting familiar and getting more deeply connected to this appreciative joy. *Samādhi* comes from practice. So thank you very much.