

Dharmette: Love (63) For Neutral Person

Gil Fronsdal

June 25, 2026

Keywords: *samādhi*, *muditā*, *muditā samādhi*, *brahma-vihāra*, appreciative joy, neutral person, benefactor, friend, interbeing, reactive mind

Hello and welcome to this fourth talk on *samādhi* of appreciative joy, *muditā samādhi*. And the classic way of doing this *samādhi* of appreciative joy is to do it towards a category of people. And the categories I've used this week so far are the easy person, the benefactor, the friend, and today the neutral person. And a neutral person is someone for whom there's no particular feeling of liking or not liking. Someone who's maybe not really involved in your life, or you're not involved with them. Maybe someone working in another department that you see periodically walking nearby, or someone you see through a shop window repeatedly, but you've never really thought about them.

And so to discover something about the treasure, the richness of love, with people who we don't really have reason to love, reason to appreciate, but to find some deeper way to open our hearts, open our kind regard, open our appreciation of this person as well. And this is a fascinating and rich area. Some people consider this one of the richest areas of appreciative joy, maybe even of love, to discover how and why and when to be able to open up to people for whom there's no obvious reason to love them. They're just neutral. They have never done anything for us. We're not going to get anything from them. We don't have some great attraction to them.

But to discover some very deep, peaceful, unassertive, unambitious, not wanting anything in return kind of love for that. It's like medicine to ourselves. And this is part of the fascination of this appreciative joy, or this whole *brahma-vihāra*, this love series, is that benefiting self and other are not so different. Loving self and other is not so different. Appreciating self and others kind of come together, right? The more these occur together, the richer they become for everyone.

If we leave ourselves out of the picture entirely, then the love will become partial. If we focus entirely on ourselves, then the love is partial. The fullness of love is in relationship to others.

Just as the fullness of language is in speaking it with other people, to have a private language doesn't go anywhere. But to speak the same language as other people, that's where all kinds of richness of communication can happen. So to share appreciative joy, to have this ability to love, even neutral people.

So one of the ways to do this is maybe through an act of imagination, a little bit imagining that they smile, imagining that they've had, at some time in their life, happy occasions, delightful occasions, times that they felt safe, maybe with their family or with friends or someplace where things were going well for them. Maybe they find a lot in being cozy at home, being alone, or with their close ones. And so you just delight in this. So you kind of just imagine this a little bit so that you can begin opening your heart and feel some delight, feel some joy. And with the idea that over time you don't need to imagine anything, you just kind of wish them well. And that wishing them well takes the form of wishing that whatever's going well for them may continue, and may it develop and grow.

And as a *samādhi*, the *samādhi* is actually also a means of cultivating strong inner mental, psychological, spiritual health for ourselves. I think of *samādhi*, first and foremost, as a deep state of harmony that we come into. Because we're not scattered, we're not divided, we're not caught spinning and distracted. We're really quiet, come into a kind of homeostasis, where all the parts of us are kind of settled and working together. We're not actively jumping around to what we're afraid of, the future, the past, what we want, what we don't want. We're here.

And so to do that around appreciative joy embodies the joy, fills it in with health, makes it fuller and better and bigger. *Samādhi* makes whatever we're focusing on fill the field of awareness in a fantastic way. So the sense of pleasure that comes with *samādhi*, the joy that comes with it, the sense of well-being, the sense of joy and well-being that comes with appreciating others in this kind of open way, appreciating... And is... is sometimes clearer when we're doing it with a neutral person than someone that's easy to love. Because a neutral person is not giving us necessarily a lot of feedback, reasons to be delighted. But our delight stands out in highlight.

And we're sharing it to them. We're using that as a way of being fully present for them. Even in meditation, as part of our imagination, kind of yes, yes. This person, too, I'll include in my heart. This person, too, I'll include in my appreciation, my respect, my offering them time, offering them presence, being able to listen to them.

It isn't that you have to do these things. It isn't that you have to go find them and listen to them and be present. But rather, you're cultivating this capacity to be that way. Maybe in your

regular life you don't do it for that person for a variety of good reasons, but maybe it makes you ready for the next person you do encounter. Maybe you're standing in line someplace and the person in front of you asks you a question, and you're there fully for that person as if they're the most important person of the moment. You're just kind of delighted to be able to be in it. They've started a relationship with you with a question, and you're delighted to appreciate them, to share it, and be with them.

And so appreciative joy is kind of beginning to teach us how to appreciate people that normally we don't appreciate, to expand our capacity, and to do it in a way that we enjoy. To do it in a way that is not a should, not an obligation. It's not like we're forcing ourselves to do this. But something inside of us wants to do this because it feels so good, because it feels so right. And this is part of the art of *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is not a forcefulness, it's not a requirement. It's something that wants to arise, that wants to emerge.

And with that emergence can come, if you're doing appreciative joy, more appreciative joy, more willingness, delight, joy to do this with others. And so one of the things I'm trying to say today is that we're putting ourselves into kind of a rich area of interconnection, interbeing, of mutuality, where our love, our appreciative joy, someone else's joy, someone else's well-being and happiness kind of go together. There's a feedback loop. There's a connection between these things. And so our own joy and well-being grows, and in growing, our ability to be with others in loving ways grows as well.

And so wishing people well in that particular way of appreciative joy is to want whatever is going well in their life to continue. And most people, there's more going well than they recognize. Just simply the fact that sometimes we're alive is a phenomenal undertaking. It's a phenomenal gift to be alive, to be present, to wake up in the morning and to be conscious, and to appreciate that, to understand that, to value that, not as a should, but because we're settled enough. We're not agitated, we're not caught in our thoughts, we're not caught in our judgments, caught in our resentments and negative thinking about things, but something in us has gotten quiet and settled.

And the reactive mind no longer has us by the nose. The reactive mind is not how we're measuring and thinking about and evaluating this world. The reactive mind in *samādhi* has become quiet. And that makes a world of difference for our capacity to love, to care, and to appreciate other people. And may all of us appreciate others.

And so the exercise I'd like to suggest for this next day for you is maybe from a little distance, so that no one has to know you're doing this, begin to do a kind of subtle, unobtrusive people-watching, where you look at people walking by, sitting on a bench, walking on the sidewalk

somewhere. Kind of take them in. And see if you can appreciate them or value them and be delighted in them. And even if they're rushing and you don't know much about them, certainly there's capacity for compassion for a lot of people. But here, is there some way to be delighted? Some way to meet them as if they're the wonderful person of the moment?

And wish them well. Wish that whatever is good in their life may continue. Experiment with that. See what happens inside of you. See what shifts in you and how that works for you, and what doesn't work, and the resistance to it. Hold it all lightly, but just experiment. Stretch yourself in this. Do something maybe you don't usually do, and find your way to finding a genuine way of being able to value each person you see.

So thank you, and maybe we'll have one more day on the appreciative joy tomorrow, and I appreciate this chance to share all this with you.