Cultivating Seeds of Joy

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:02:16

I want to talk about cultivating seeds of joy, which is a phrase Thich Nhat Hanh uses, in our practice, in our life, in the service of awakening—and that's really important.

The whole path is much vaster than our meditation practice, which we can sometimes lose sight of in the middle of a retreat. The meditation practice itself is so rich and so deep and so vast that it can seem to be everything. But the breadth of the Buddha's teaching, if you read in the different suttas and discourses, covers a whole range of our experiences in life. Meditation practice is only a part of it.

Among the many different aspects of the path of our life, I want to talk about a few that we can specifically draw on as ways to cultivate a sense of happiness or joy—what is often called gladdening the heart. We sometimes lose sight of this in the depths of a meditation retreat, or in the depths of our life at times.

It's not that every moment should be a joyful, happy moment. It won't be. But there are times, as I think many of you know all too well, on retreat or in life, where the difficult, the suffering aspect is so visible, so strong, that it seems to be all we can perceive. It becomes like a veil, and the only thing we can see in our practice or in the world is suffering.

Now, of course, a very important aspect of our understanding, of coming to freedom of heart and mind, is the understanding of suffering and how we get caught—how we suffer by our really incorrect perception of experience, our inaccurate idea of what happiness really is, and the confused ways we go about, in our ordinary mind, trying to be happy. We've talked about that a lot.

What happens often, and I think it needs to happen, is that we do get sometimes, and sometimes for seemingly long periods of time, quite focused on the transitory, the unsatisfactory aspect of all experience. We need to be really kind of hit over the head with this over and over, simply because we are so conditioned and ingrained to view life as otherwise.

But there are times when we get stuck there, where all we can see, all we can project is difficulty, is endings, is falling apart—and in a way that isn't freeing, that is not onward leading. Because the whole purpose of our spiritual life is about freeing the heart, freeing the mind. As the Buddha said, there is no higher happiness than peace. That's the whole point of our practice.

But on the way to this highest happiness, there are various other kinds of happiness. And there are practical ways, even in our practice here, for those times when we're seeming to drown in the suffering—when it's not just suffering but bleakness, drabness, total negativity.

I'll give an example. I call these periods dukkha periods, whether on retreat or in life. In life, maybe there's just been a whole series of times when people you know are dying, people you know are sick. You don't see relationships coming together; you see relationships coming apart. And it just seems like the accent is on the impermanence, the transitory, the unsatisfactory. Then that starts to be the glasses we see through.

I was giving this example the other day. Years ago, when I was on staff here, a couple—two people who were on staff—got together in a relationship. They were walking down the driveway holding hands. I see it in my mind's eye. They were so happy. And I was in a dukkha period. I turned to whoever I was with next to me and said, "I give them six months."

That's the veil. That's not helpful. That wasn't coming from the freedom of a heart at ease. That's unbalanced perception. I'm happy to say they're married. They have a kid. As far as I know, they're happy—not always happy, but happy. So that was wrong. That wasn't clear seeing.

Tonight I want to talk about, hopefully not too theoretically, some practical ways we can consciously access seeds of joy. Not to pretend that difficulty doesn't happen, not to get lost in pleasant feeling, but to gladden the heart, to open the mind. It actually leads us onward to deeper understanding, to greater peace, to the real happiness—the heart of non-clinging that is not dependent on any particular mental state.

So the first thing to talk about is really what we mean by happiness. This is a word—or joy—that each of us might be interpreting very differently. It has many connotations. Even within the very precise language of Buddhist terminology, there are different words for happiness. Remember when I put up that transcendental dependent arising and there was a word for joy? There was a word for rapture, which is pīti. There's a word for happiness, which is sukha. Joy is pāmojja.

Those are referring to very specific mental states, all of which we could lump under happiness, and there are also other forms of happiness. So I'm not speaking so much tonight from the precise Abhidhamma perspective, but I think it is important for each of us, when we find ourselves reflecting or mulling over or looking for happiness, that we don't just take that word or that concept at face value. Look a little deeper and see what it is you're really wanting. And of course, as long as you're wanting it, forget about happiness—that's the other trip.

These seeds of joy are really just reflections, ways to access the happiness that's onward leading, something that can support us when we're in those really difficult phases. Rather than just passively waiting and hoping that piti arises sometime in the distant future, that some kind of sukha will come and brighten our life—and then we want it, and then we crave it, and then we compare ourselves to others who sound like they have it, although we don't even know what it is. That just leads onward to more suffering. So that's not what I'm talking about.

The guiding principle, I would say, when we're thinking or speaking about gladdening the heart—states of heart or mind that are onward leading to peace, to freedom, to giving up clinging, the heart and mind of non-clinging—the guiding principle is really this: a wholesome state of joy or happiness, which can be triggered by many things, is non-clinging in the experience of it. In other words, it's not self-referencing back to me, me, me.

A lot of these different things I'll talk about can at times be experienced just this way, in a very non-self-referential, non-clinging, onward leading way. And the same experience can also be seen as starting to refer back to me, me, me. It might be experienced as pleasant, but it isn't the same type of happiness or joy that's going to gladden the heart, bring faith, bring brightness and lightness and energy to our system. I think you get a sense of the difference, and I'll keep giving examples of it as we go along.

So let's talk about really many different kinds of pleasure, joy, and happiness that we experience, starting with—believe it or not—sense pleasure. Sense pleasure is a form of pleasure. The Buddha never said it wasn't. And he didn't actually say that pleasant sense experience in itself is bad.

But if you look at most of our common sense pleasure experiences when we're not really paying attention, the danger isn't that sense pleasure is bad and we shouldn't have it, or that it can't for a moment bring us a kind of happiness. It's that for most of us, the movement from the experience of the moment of pleasure to clinging—to trying to get it, to trying to hold on to it, referring back to me, me, me—is so quick and fast that we almost can't tell the difference. We get completely and very quickly caught up in that cycle of wanting and clinging and longing and separation and neediness, all the experiences that actually hide us from the state of deepest happiness, of peace, of non-clinging.

When we're not seeing clearly, sense pleasure can strengthen our confusion, our sense of imprisonment. I don't know if you remember earlier in the retreat when I read from a sutta called "The Two Darts," where at one point the Buddha said that for ordinary people, the only escape we know from unpleasant sensation is to crave after, to lust after some pleasant sense experience. So on the first level of pleasure, of happiness, that's what we've learned, that's what we know: go towards some pleasant sense experience. And the drawback is simply that we get caught there. Unless we have another way to look, another avenue into our experience, we just keep spinning in that cycle of going for more pleasant experience. The more subtle happiness that isn't so self-referential, that isn't dependent on sense pleasure—we actually can't even quite imagine what else could give us happiness, as long as we're in the thrall of this cycle.

I read an interesting sutta where a householder went to the Buddha and was basically saying—I'll try to shorten it—"We're householders, and we indulge in sensuality, we delight in sensuality." Now that just means sense pleasures. "We really enjoy it, we rejoice in sensuality." He's really appreciating it. And he's saying, "So for us, when we hear about renunciation, it just seems like a sheer drop-off." That's the translation—like, ugh. "Even though we see and hear about young monks and nuns whose hearts leap at the idea of renunciation, who get really joyful, who grow confident and really see renunciation as

peace—we've seen that this happens to these young monks and nuns. But for us, when we think about renunciation, it's like a sheer drop-off. Forget about it."

Which is true, isn't it? When we're first immersed in sense pleasures, even a little renunciation sounds awful, so bleak.

And I love the Buddha's response. He said, "Yeah, it's true. Even for myself, before I became awakened, when I was still an unawakened Bodhisattva, I thought renunciation is good, seclusion is good—but my heart didn't leap at the thought of it. I thought it should be good, but it wasn't really making me happy. I wasn't seeing it as peace. It wasn't bringing confidence up in me." And then he said the thought occurred to him: Why? If I think it's good, but my heart isn't leaping—why not?

And he looked at himself and he saw, oh, it's because I haven't really understood the drawbacks of sensual pleasure. So as long as I don't understand the drawbacks, I'm caught there. Once I understand the drawbacks, I'm able to—it doesn't mean you give up sense pleasure completely, but to renounce that clinging to it and then open to the joy of renunciation.

And this sutta, I won't read it, but it goes on and on. He takes that through all the different jhānic levels, through all the different kinds of deep happiness, pīti, rapture, sukha, through all the different understandings. Each one, he sees it, he appreciates it, and then something in him lets go and he moves to the next. It's not denigrating anything previous. It's just seeing it's not all there is, releasing the attachment to it.

I really like that, because to me first it made the Buddha human. I could relate. That was only the first one out of that whole list, but I could relate to that one. And I think it's why the dangers of sense pleasures get hammered on so much in the suttas, because we are so overwhelmed with the possibility of sense pleasure. It's so easy to miss the clinging in it.

But I want to point out, because it's something people have asked and I've gotten notes about it, that understanding the drawback of sense pleasures doesn't mean we turn off and don't appreciate anymore. Doesn't mean you can't appreciate how good the ice cream tasted the other day. If, on the other hand, as someone told me last year at the end of retreat in the group discussions—on one of those days, I think he had eaten either one or two whole pints of Ben and Jerry's. He said, "Don't worry, there's enough for everybody." I asked, "Did you really enjoy it?" And he said, "Not really, after a while, but you just get going."

You can get the difference. One can enjoy the taste, but you don't need to eat two pints. Or with nature, which is, I think, almost the fear—that if we see the clinging in sense pleasures, we're going to stop appreciating. It's not so at all. Part of the joy of renunciation is that when we're renouncing the clinging, we're so much more able to appreciate just what is.

There's a saying I love from the Buddha: what is beautiful in the world remains so, but the wise one no

longer strives after it. So looking at that sunset tonight—I looked out my window, it was pink, the whole sky, it was beautiful. Our job really is to learn to tell in ourselves the difference between that appreciation that's not referring back to me, not asking how good does it make me feel or how can I hold on to it, but that appreciation that really opens us up, takes us out of ourselves. It's onward leading. It brings in a brightness, a lightness in the mind, in the heart. It energizes.

And so it's often very skillful when you're feeling tight and drab and bleak and striving here in practice to go outside—not to try and grab some sense of happiness, but just to appreciate.

Someone else asked me, in the Buddha's time, did they ever appreciate nature or such? Or is it all this anti-body, anti-beauty? It's not at all. If you remember, the monks and nuns were living outside all the time, living under trees, living in forests, living in beautiful deer parks.

And so I looked up this one poem. This is from the monk Mahākassapa, a disciple of the Buddha. Now, he was the one most renowned for his asceticism. Even before he ever came to be a disciple of the Buddha, he was an amazing ascetic. And after the Buddha died, he was the most senior monk, the one that everyone looked to to hold the Saṅgha together. So, Mahākassapa—more ascetic than any of us, I think, could even begin to imagine.

There's a long poem, and I'll just read a few stanzas. He was asked over and over, why did he keep living in the forest and the mountains? Why didn't he come and live in the bamboo grove or somewhere a little more comfortable? And it's because he loved the nature. He said:

Spread over with kariri garlands, these regions are delightful to my heart. Resounding with elephants, so lovely—those rocky mountains give me delight.

Their lovely surfaces lashed by rain, the mountains are resorted to by seers. Echoing with the cries of peacocks, those rocky mountains give me delight.

Wild gorges are there where clear water flows, haunted by monkeys and by deer, covered by wet carpets of moss—those rocky mountains give me delight.

The music of a five-piece ensemble can never give me so much delight as I derive when with one-pointed mind I gain insight into the Dhamma.

He had to put that on the end. But that's the point.

The delight he's gaining, that he's experiencing, is onward leading—leading to really seeing into the truth. It's supportive. It's a supportive condition for awakening.

So I think it's just part of our practice to explore in yourself the difference between the joy in sense pleasures—these pleasures that keep us on the cycle of wanting and needing and self-referencing—and the joy that helps us open to appreciation and peace. And then this peace we take back into our

mindfulness to simply explore whatever's arising next.

So as long as I've talked about Mahakassapa, I'll go on to appreciating the joys of renunciation. Not on that level, although you could if you want, but simply on the level of the renunciation each of us experiences being on a retreat like this. Sometimes it might take a conscious reflection, because we might lose sight of the joys of renunciation. But if you look, you can see an incredible sense of spaciousness, simplicity, and ease that can come even from a small moment of renunciation.

For instance, the times when you're drinking tea or walking outside, whatever you're doing, and there's a simple moment of pure presence where you just really appreciate the beingness of the tea or the walk or the nature or the gurgle of the water fountain. That moment is accessible to our consciousness because in that moment, even though we don't think of it as renouncing, we're not caught up in looking for sense pleasures. There's a kind of seclusion, a quietness of the mind that isn't battered by the hindrances, that isn't wanting something—and this allows the simple peace of presence to be there.

On a little more active level, consider the kind of simple renunciation when you're in line for breakfast and it's egg day, and you're a few people back, and there are three eggs left. You really want an egg. You're dying for an egg. You've been waiting six days for an egg. But in that moment of going by, you can say, "You know what? There's more people behind me. I can let it go." And it's not some self-congratulatory "Aren't I so great?" It's a real letting go. There's a sense of real joy and ease that can come with that kind of renunciation. And we see in this that the things we want or need in our mind are the things that bind us. The renunciation, even when small, can bring quite a spacious joy, a lightness, an uplifting of heart, an uplifting of energy.

People give me little examples all the time in interviews, so I want to point this out so that you can appreciate those moments for yourself. It's not that you should knock them away and say they're nothing.

I think a common misconception we can get into in our practice is that we look so hard for the *kilesas*, but we forget that when the Buddha described right effort, he gave four elements to it. The first two deal with not allowing unwholesome mental states to arise if they haven't, and if they have arisen, to abandon them, not get lost in them. But the other two are having a zeal for the arising of un-arisen wholesome factors, and for the ones that have already arisen that are wholesome, to appreciate them and allow them to continue.

That's different from ego. So in a moment of renunciation and that joy, that appreciation, let it fill your mind and body. Believe me, when it turns to "I'm so great," it'll stop being so uplifting. It'll stop filling your mind and body with joy, and you'll feel that heaviness again. So just recognize, okay, now we're back to the first two wise efforts. But I think we often tend to overlook or give short shrift to moments of wholesomeness. They don't have to be big. You don't have to renounce the whole world. But you can notice the moments here, and they're quite helpful.

In Thailand as a nun—I think I mentioned before—in the beginning of course it was quite difficult for many reasons. But a big reason was simply the level of giving up comfort, giving up the way of life I was used to: the food, the weather, sleeping on the floor, all of that. And for an aversive personality, that's what comes up when you don't get what you want—aversion. That's how it works. If it was a greedy personality, then greed would come up. Not that one's really better than the other. But anyway, there was suffering for a while.

The joy that came after some months was the simplicity of the lifestyle. I didn't really think of it as renunciation anymore, but it really was. The simplicity of the lifestyle and not having so many choices of things to do or things to go towards—sort of like here. What do you want for lunch? It doesn't matter. You get what there is. That's actually, if you can be content with it, a huge relief.

And some people have told me when they stopped eating after tea, if that's a choice they make, something that surprised them was actually this sense of ease, of lightness, of joy—just not having to deal with that whole *mishigas* in the cafeteria one more time. It's just this sense of spaciousness, ease, a joy that can come from simplicity.

We would never have the chance to appreciate this, really, if we didn't somehow, for some moments, if we weren't able to not be caught up in wanting sense pleasures.

So it's not that sense pleasures are bad, but as long as we think they represent the highest happiness, we don't know how to explore and experience and let in more subtle, more pervading, and more supportive types of happiness. That's all. The joy of simplicity, of renunciation.

Another very strong avenue that gives rise to various kinds of joy, of peace, and strong experience of our connectedness and lack of separation, is the whole area of dana, or generosity. As I'm sure you know, whenever the Buddha taught, he would always start with dana. He had a set order in which he would teach. Starting with lay people, he'd talk about dana, then he'd talk about sila, which I'll discuss next. Then he'd talk about bhavana, the whole field of mental cultivation and development through meditation.

If you look at it, generosity is really an expression of non-clinging. It's an active expression of a sense of connectedness, a sense of letting go rather than holding on, rather than self-referencing. It's a practice of letting go of self-cherishing. It's really an active opening of mind and heart to non-clinging. And because there are many forms of dana or generosity, and in the world when we're not in meditation, it's a very active thing one can do. It's a very good source of practice—both of freedom, of cultivating non-clinging, of cultivating a sense of our oneness, and also of bringing happiness to our heart, of gladdening the heart.

Have you ever noticed when you really are generous, whether it's with your time, whether it's with giving something, whether it's just with letting someone else have something you want and they don't even know it, how really happy that makes one feel when we really do it? I know sometimes it's a little grudging, and it makes us feel sort of good, but we can't quite stay happy. But it's a start.

When I was a nun, I think that's when I really began to understand—I can't say I understand it completely, of course—the depth of real joy that I could see in people from their incredible generosity. It's one of the most humbling and really profound lessons for me of living as a renunciate, as a Sangha member, because one lives completely on the generosity of others, and without even asking. You don't ask.

Even though, I must say, for nuns in Thailand it's a vastly different scene than it is for monks—they aren't supported in the same way or with the same enthusiasm by the whole group of people, the whole country—my experience in the short time I was there, only a year, was such total, loving, joyful support that it really blew me away. There was no sense of "we should do this" or "now this foreigner has come, she has more than we do, and here she comes to our country living off of us." I could imagine myself thinking something like that. There was nothing like that. It was much more like, "Oh, we're so happy that you're here! Let us give you your robes. Let us give you your food. Please stay in the best kuti. Let me take you here. Let me take you there."

At one point my back got really bad, and I was staying in a place way out in the country, like two or three hours by a really bumpy bus. A woman who was a nurse, who would come out sometimes to sit there, took me to her house in town for a month and insisted on cooking for me every day. You can imagine, I was incredibly uncomfortable with this—which is a good lesson, because that actually blocks the kindness. She was so happy to get up at five in the morning and cook me this giant breakfast, and then come home from her job as a nurse at like ten thirty so she could cook me lunch.

To see the stuff I went through from my Western conditioning—we take care of ourselves, I'm beholden to nobody—it's so isolating, that attitude. It's so separating. It so blocks the real connection that we all share. And when I began to let in the generosity and just tune into the people as they were offering, there was a transcendent kind of joy that came about. I have to say, that was my unvarying experience in the whole year that I was there. It's really profoundly etched on my heart, the beauty and the happiness that real open-hearted generosity can bring.

I have lots of examples of this. Another example, not from Thailand but from Tibet. I was watching a video a few years ago called *Home to Tibet*. I don't know if any of you saw it. It was about a Tibetan man named Sonam who actually—I don't know if he still does—used to live in western Massachusetts and built stone walls. In this video, he managed to go back home to Tibet to visit his family, his sister, people that were still there. He hadn't been to Tibet for many years. He was saying that when he first went, he was a bit shocked by how old his sister looked, how really hard the life was, how really poor they were. So he brought all kinds of gifts and money, and he was so happy to give it. And they were so happy, the old sister—when she got the gifts and the money, you could see on the video, she just lit up with transcendent joy.

And why?

Because now they could give more to the monastery. It was so beautiful.

I share this not to enter into any kind of value judgment, but simply because the happiness, the joy of that transcendent generosity is really deeply touching to me.

So why does it make us so happy? I mean, it's kind of obvious. If we look deeply, of course, as with all actions—even actions of mind—the seed is in the intention more than in what we give. But in that intention of real giving, whether it's money or time or service—and metta is a form of generosity of the heart—in that intention of giving, it brings us into a sense of unity, doesn't it? It's not "I'm so great, I'm giving to you." That won't bring the same kind of happiness. It might bring a little; at least we're letting go. But that real generosity of "Oh, you need this—here"—there's no self-referencing. It's coming from a sense of the big picture, the heart of non-clinging, our basic unity. And as we're acting from non-clinging, we experience the joy and the peace of non-clinging.

On retreat here, I know there's not so much you can really do. And actually—this might seem strange—I want to beg you not to go around trying to do generous things for each other. Because in some ways, the most generous thing we can each do is just let each other continue their practice. Sometimes when we talk about generosity, it does feel good. You want to ask the office to buy little things so you can go around and give them to everybody. But that's a lot of doing. You don't need to. You can just offer some metta in your heart. Or you can do little things. When you see the place you always sit in the dining room and somebody's hovering, you think, "Maybe I could let them sit there next time." There are intangible ways we can offer the heart of generosity. And it's also generous to just let people be in their own space. I know I need to say that as a proviso just for here on retreat. But you'll see there are little ways of generosity. Notice it. Notice when it's possible.

And also—and I'm going to say this about morality too—you can reflect consciously when you're in a kind of pit and you think, "What's going to get me out of here? There's not one good, wholesome, joyful thing I can imagine." Reflecting on acts of generosity, thoughts of generosity in your past—the karmic fruit ripening can actually bring joy. It's the same with reflecting on our wholesome actions, on our sila, which is again something we don't do all that much because we think it's sort of egocentric. It is egocentric if we're doing it to say, "I'm so generous, I'm so great, I'm more generous than that person." Well, that won't make us too happy. But to just hold in our heart those moments of generosity—it can bring us back into that unitive intention, into the joy. Or when we've been the recipients of generosity.

When I was talking just now about being in Thailand, the sense of happiness just washes through me. Deep gratefulness, which also opens us to happiness. Deep appreciation of generosity and being able to be the recipient—that I could finally let go of all my self-image of "No, I shouldn't take that, let me take care of myself" and just receive it. It made me tremendously happy as well.

So dana. Now sila, or our non-harming conduct. This is the second thing the Buddha would always teach. It's often talked about as the bliss of blamelessness. I like that phrase—the bliss of blamelessness—or freedom from remorse.

Now I know some of you, and maybe all of you, have at times had actions you've done in the past, or wish you'd done and didn't do, or unkind things, or just little things come up, and you experience tremendous remorse or sorrow or regret over it. And some of these things—when people would tell me about them, they're so little. Just such a small thing that you wouldn't even notice it in your daily life, really. And it's happened to me too—sitting, thinking of all the people whose letters I didn't answer, all the phone calls I didn't return, all the little things I haven't done when reaching out might have made someone happy. And you can really sink into a swamp of remorse.

Remorse is useful in seeing—not with judgment, not with self-hatred, not with guilt, but in understanding the suffering that comes from our unwholesome speech and actions. But sometimes it can also go quite too far, just little things we're really beating ourselves about.

our internal commitment, even though of course we're not perfect in it, to speak and act from that non-harming is again an actualization of our oneness with all beings. And this bliss of blamelessness, this freedom from remorse, is actually a very profound and supportive form of happiness.

At least many of the people I talk to, it's not something we consciously turn our minds to all that often. You know how in the beginning of the metta, the formal metta meditation, sometimes we'll say, consciously reflect on something wholesome you've done or some good attitude of yours. And sometimes people really can't think of anything, or you think of some little thing and you think, well, that's too stupid, that's not good enough.

But it's important. It's really important because it can bring a brightness, a confidence, a sense of gladness to our mind and heart. If nothing else—and this isn't nothing, this is big—reflect on the power and the sincerity of your intentions in pursuing a spiritual path at all. In all the moments here and in your life that you have cultivated kindness, honesty, awareness, metta, freedom, non-harming. It's vast. It's really important to see and acknowledge this in ourselves, and it can be a major source of support in difficult times.

You could consciously bring up a specific incident or a specific time where you were aware of appreciating something wholesome or non-harming that you did. And again, for us, it's difficult to know how to do this without falling into "Aren't I great?" But experiment with it.

I really got a sense of how powerful this could be, sort of by mistake, a few years ago when one day, just out of nowhere, came a memory—the kind that comes up on retreat as if you're reliving it. Just a day many years ago when I worked in a sheltered workshop in North Carolina with moderately to severely mentally handicapped adults. It was pretty intense work.

But anyway, this one day came up. We were in this windowless garage with no air conditioning in North Carolina in the summer, 105 degrees outside. It was a charming environment. But I remember this one day in particular where, for some reason—I mean, I really came to love the people in the workshop that I

worked with. I can still remember a lot of them and their names. And this one day, for some reason, there were just several different little incidents of interactions where basically I was just being kind, being loving. And I was also receiving—for some reason, people were expressing in their way that sense of love and appreciation back. It was just a very beautiful half a day or whatever.

And when that memory came up, it brought with it that gladdening of the heart of wholesomeness. That's all. It wasn't like, "I'm so great." Just the wholesomeness of being kind, of doing the best I could, certainly non-harming, and of being able to receive that sense of connection with the people we were all working together. Again, it's the karmic fruits coming up in this life, in this moment. That can really just bring up some brightness and energy and confidence. It's kind of like you take a deep breath and go, "Okay. One more five minutes of lifting, moving, placing." Okay, I can come back and feel this tightness in the abdomen just as it is. It just brings in a spaciousness.

It's a great balance for self-blame and self-judgment when you're getting lost in that. And again, if no incident comes to mind, reflect on your intentions.

This freedom from remorse, which is what attention to our conduct is, this bliss of blamelessness—also called freedom from remorse—I found an interesting sutta where the Buddha is talking about how skillful virtues have freedom from remorse as their purpose, Ananda, freedom from remorse as their reward. And then it goes through this whole list again. What's the purpose of freedom from remorse? What is its reward? And he says joy is the purpose and the reward of freedom from remorse. And then from joy, he goes to rapture, to serenity, to sukha. He goes through the whole transcendent dependent arising. Exactly as I talked about the other day. Only instead of starting from faith, he's starting from skillful virtues and freedom from remorse.

So don't overlook the power of our non-harming speech and action. It is the foundation, the grounding of our whole opening into freedom. It's the grounding of the joy and rapture, serenity, sukha, concentration—which are all happinesses that come specifically in the meditative path. Onward leading to the last one: dispassion has knowledge and vision of release as its purpose, knowledge and vision of release as its reward.

So in this way, Ananda, skillful virtues lead step by step to the consummation of Arhatship.

Just in case you missed that. It's not a little thing.

This brings me to the point of how, simply by our step-by-step willingness to pay attention to each of these areas, coupled with our mindfulness practice, this whole field arises—not so much sense pleasures, but what you could call meditative joys and meditative happinesses. Those ones I specifically mentioned: the joys of the secluded mind and heart, the rapture, the sukha, the concentration, the tranquility of mind. These are specific states of happiness, of joy in the mind pervading the body, that are onward leading. They arise quite naturally in their own time through our continued attention to dāna, sīla, and our

meditation practice.

As well, there is the great joy called vipassanā happiness. When a sudden insight arises, it brings a kind of happiness with it. Sometimes it's like a big release of energy, or there's more energy, or you feel happy, excited—but there's a real joy that comes with that.

These aren't so much the kind of happiness that you can decide to access when you're in a pit of despair. So I'm mentioning these, but I'm not recommending this as a practical means. Like when I saw those people walking down the driveway and all I could see was "Give them six months"—I couldn't then say, "Well, I'll go inside and access sukha." The mind wasn't in a state of seclusion at that time. It's only possible to really open to and experience these more subtle states of joy and happiness when we're not entranced by sense pleasures, when the mind is more quiet, more secluded, more at peace. And they'll come in their own time. We can trust that. But if you get caught in wanting, as you know, forget about it. It just gets in the way.

So only by the abandoning of sense pleasures can we even begin to taste these more subtle yet at the same time much more satisfying kinds of meditation pleasures, and the happiness of vipassanā.

I remember one retreat I was sitting with Sayadaw U Pandita, and I was in one of these states of vipassanā happiness. Things were just coming and going, coming and going very quickly. It's one of those classic stages where great rapture arises, joy arises, just from seeing everything coming and going. And I remember thinking at the time about different sense pleasures—anything you could think of. The thought of them would come up in my mind, and it was really funny because my mind would go, "That's not even appealing. That's gross." There was no sense pleasure that could even touch the happiness of this vipassanā happiness.

And even now, I don't experience that in the moment, that vipassanā happiness. But again, even in talking about it, some knowing of that peace, that happiness comes back. It doesn't mean I don't want sense pleasures again, but somewhere I know they don't really cut it in the same way—not like seeing things clearly, the joy that comes from that, the heart and mind that doesn't need to hide from suffering and doesn't need to hold on to pleasure. There's a happiness so much greater in that.

And it's onward leading, as long as we keep paying attention. Even this happiness of deep meditation, of concentration—if we stop paying attention, of course we get caught there. As I know Steve was talking about: getting caught within. "Wow, this is so great. There's no happiness greater than this. Aren't I happy? This is really making me..." It starts to refer back to me again, back to me again, and how to prolong it.

I think a little of this is inevitable, and don't worry about it as long as you keep being mindful. Mindful of the happiness. Mindful of the liking of it. Mindful of how great it is. Just notice that. And I have ultimate faith that the awareness takes care of it. You'll move through that. You don't have to say, "Oh, vipassanā happiness—better back away. I might get attached. Let me go distract myself." Don't do that. So you get

caught a little bit. Keep paying attention, and the mindfulness will just take us through that place.

Now, without paying attention, we do get caught. Caught in the cycle of me and self-referencing, caught in the cycle of clinging. Or another place we might not notice is that happiness turns into—it's actually the near enemy of empathetic joy—exuberance. And it happens a lot in interviews. People will come in with some insight, and they're so happy and filled with rapture or whatever, and the energy is going up, and then suddenly you can see they just want to run all over the building being happy. All of a sudden there are all these things to do and all these expressions of it—and that's exuberance.

It's without mindfulness. The energy builds, and we're not quite paying attention to it. It stops being so connected. We run around, do all kinds of stuff. "Oh, I feel so great. I just need to run around the loop feeling this joy." And we come back with a thud sooner or later with that kind of exuberance, because the mindfulness has gone out the window. So you're happy, then you're really high, then you're really excited, then all of a sudden you're like, "Ugh. What happened?"

After you do that a couple of times, you'll learn. Maybe you can notice when the energy is really high. "This is happiness. Just keep being mindful. Don't try to hold on to it."

Now I have five minutes for my favorite topic, which will make me happy anyway. One other specific way that we can access non-clinging, non-self-referencing joy in our practice—both here and in the world—is through the conscious cultivation of one of the four Brahma Viharas, the one called mudita, appreciative joy.

All the Brahma Viharas bring us a kind of happiness, but appreciative joy is, I have found, so practical and so useful as a way to consciously open the energy field, the heart, the mind to happiness and joy when you're not particularly experiencing it yourself.

Mudita is defined as metta turned toward someone's happiness—turning toward the joy or success of another. It's said to be one of the four Brahma Viharas that's in some ways the most difficult or most unfamiliar. Perhaps it's the one we're not in such a habit of, but I've found that when I consciously turn my mind that way, it's pretty accessible, and it's really fun. That's what's so nice about it. It's light, it's bright, it's energizing—and yes, its near enemy is exuberance.

Ajahn Sumedho also talks about appreciative joy as being able to appreciate the beauty and the goodness in nature and in the things around us. It's sort of back to what I was talking about in the beginning, about appreciating beauty. If you find that you can't quite yet connect to mudita with another person, you can begin by just consciously appreciating the beauty around you, or something that makes you happy in nature, or a beautiful work of art—just something you see around here that brings you joy.

But mudita is really about turning our attention to the perceived happiness or success of another person and saying in our heart, "May your happiness continue. May your success continue." In doing that, their joy becomes something we get happy from. It stops being their joy or my joy—it just becomes joy that's

accessible in the world. Instead of having to rely on our own paltry resources for joy, we suddenly have the resources of the whole world.

You know how when you read something in the newspaper about someone who's done something really generous or really good, it can bring shivers and make us really happy? That's mudita. I read about this man who works for Ford in Detroit. He's seventy-eight years old. He's been working for Ford for fifty-nine years. He makes a hundred thousand dollars a year because he works overtime all the time, and mostly he gives all his money away. He's given over two hundred thousand dollars to the United Negro College Fund, two hundred thousand to Louisiana State University, a hundred twelve thousand to different churches, twenty thousand to the NAACP, four hundred thirty-one thousand to Wayne State University. And he says, "I get joy, happiness out of this. I can go home and sleep good." He lives in some little apartment, drives an old car. Doesn't it make you happy to hear about him? He's just this big smiling face.

That's mudita. We can consciously look for that. It's such a wonderful way, because it's not just his goodness—how does it make us happy? It's because just as we all share suffering, we all share happiness, we all share goodness. It touches that place of unity in us. It's a really important thing to tune into.

Of course, the far enemy is envy—that constant comparing mind, that sense of there being a finite amount of joy to go around. When you're in a down space and you see a yogi walking by looking really happy, do we say, "May your happiness continue"?

Or do we think, "Oh, how come they're so happy? I'm really doing even worse than I thought." We kind of take it as a way to reflect back on what a loser we are.

Notice your mind do that. You can change the channel. You can consciously try and say, "Oh, may your happiness continue." Remember, it's intention. You don't have to feel it right away. But try it. It really opens so that other people's happiness stops being a threat and becomes a source of joy, a source of connection.

You can start in very small ways. For instance, if you're really having a hard time sitting still in the hall and you're beating yourself up about it, and the person next to you comes in and sits like a rock for two and a half hours, you might not be able, quite in that moment, to feel *muditā* for that person. But you see someone else sitting outside smiling at the sunset—you can feel *muditā* for that. Or I'll think of friends who get happy when their particular tennis star wins. Now, I don't really care what tennis person wins what tennis match. But my friend gets so happy, so I can think of him and I can feel *muditā* for that.

The proviso is, of course, wholesome things. Not *muditā* for somebody who's doing something that's harmful to themselves or others. That's not really what we're talking about in wholesome joy. But just look around here and try it. It can really bring a balance to the mind and heart that's only seeing suffering. Even in compassion, where we're connecting with suffering, sometimes that's all we see. We can consciously bring in the fact of joy.

This is important because we often tend to see all one way or all another. When there's a lot of suffering in the world, to consciously look at someone who's smiling and think of joy—it almost sometimes feels like cheating, or it's shallow, or inconsequential. Sometimes when I'm listening to news on the radio about any of the difficult places around the world—so much suffering, so much torment—I think about here we are in this little *deva* realm, getting upset at the things we're all getting upset about. But we're safe. We have so much to eat. We have the opportunity to practice.

My mind can go to, "How can that be possible? How can I appreciate that when there's so much suffering?" But it's very important not to denigrate the joy, but to open the heart and mind to hold both. Because that's how it is in the world. It isn't all joy, and it isn't all suffering, and all of us experience both. *Muditā* is a conscious way to access joy when we're drowning in suffering, but it's not a way that denies the suffering.

And that's really what takes us into the highest happiness of peace—one that isn't dependent on only positive things or pleasant experience, one that isn't overwhelmed by difficulty, by suffering. Nor does the mind at peace identify with or blame oneself for the suffering either.

If you look at some of the people who seem most awakened—who can tell from outside—but people who have really exhibited great love and care for this world, they seem really joyful at the same time that they've perhaps seen and been close to more suffering than I could ever imagine.

This is my favorite little photo. It's a picture from a conference of Nobel Peace laureates. I'm sure some of you have seen it—the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. These two men together—Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama—the amount of suffering, of cruelty that they've talked to people about, that they've experienced in their two different countries of Tibet and South Africa, is mind boggling. And here they are together, yucking it up. The Dalai Lama is standing behind Archbishop Tutu trying to pull off his hat. The Archbishop is holding it on. They're both just filled with this kind of simplicity of joy that I would say isn't in spite of, but maybe because of, their ability to be with suffering—balanced with these other aspects of joy.

So thanks for listening. Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

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