Mudita, Joy and Gratitude

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 55:27

The subject of the talk tonight is practicing mudita, joy and gratitude. I was struck many times throughout the day today by how lucky we are. This seemed to me like almost a perfect day for practice. It started off and you knew you were going to have a great lunch, so you kind of wake up happy. Then there was that amazing quiet snow, the first real snow of the winter coming on Thanksgiving Day—beautiful timing. The lunch lived up totally to its expectations, including the beautiful way the staff decorated the tables. Didn't that just pick your spirits up when you walked in? So much love and care for you. It wasn't for anybody else. Then in the afternoon, the way that the sun came out of those heavy clouds and the light in the western sky as it was setting—it's just a gorgeous day to be here. And it's a gorgeous day to be warm and dry and inside at this time of night also. We're lucky that way too.

A Zen master was once asked, "What's the purpose of a lifetime of practice?" This is an interesting question to reflect on, something each of us might want to take some time to think about. What's the purpose of a lifetime of practice? I wonder how each of us would answer that. The Zen master's answer was really simple. He said, "An appropriate response."

Is that a little anticlimactic? Doesn't it seem like the Zen master should say the purpose of a lifetime of practice is so I can be run through with a sword and not blink an eye—something really death-defying? The purpose of a lifetime of practice is an appropriate response. I love the humility of that. We're not aiming for anything otherworldly. We're aiming to be fully human and let our humanness come out in each moment that it is asked for.

When life presents us with a situation that challenges our understanding and our equanimity, what does our practice lead us to in our response? That's how we check our practice. How do we respond to these situations of life?

In our tradition, I think the Brahma Viharas are one really beautiful roadmap of the appropriate response of our hearts. They show us the possibility of a way that a wise heart, or you could say an awakened heart, meets life. Life is characterized by changing conditions—constantly cycling among what the Buddha called the eight worldly conditions: pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and disrepute. The Brahma Viharas show us how we can meet these changes in a balanced and wise way.

First, we set the foundation with loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is that development of heart that can look at another being and look into their heart and say, "I know there is in there a world of feelings, a world of joys and sorrows, and I care about that. I care about how your heart is receiving the joys and sorrows of your life." Turning to ourselves, we care about how our own heart is receiving the joys and

sorrows of our life. So the practice of loving-kindness tenderizes us to the human condition, to everybody's situation of enjoyment of this existence and our vulnerability to the suffering in it.

Then with that as our foundation, when this open heart turns toward suffering, what naturally gets evoked is compassion. Compassion is the natural response of the open heart when it sees suffering. And then exactly complementary to the compassion is appreciative joy or mudita. When this open heart looks upon someone who's experiencing happiness, the natural response is our own happiness. We are happy that someone else is experiencing happiness in this life. So these are the two poles. How do we relate to the changing conditions of life? If we're awake, compassion when we touch suffering, appreciative joy when we touch happiness, outside in others or inside in ourselves.

This is so different from the usual responses. The near enemy of compassion is grief—feeling burdened, overwhelmed, miserable because of the amount of suffering that we encounter. The most common enemy of appreciative joy is envy—feeling that we can't enjoy somebody else's happiness because their happiness threatens ours in some way.

But the heart can move to these wise responses of compassion and joy when the mind is supported by the fourth Brahma Vihara, which is equanimity. Equanimity is the balance of mind that lets us hold all the suffering in life and all the joys of life in a balance where we're not disturbed, where we're not thrown off our own inner sense of well-being. So these four Brahma Viharas are all necessary. They all work together.

But together they provide this roadmap to the heart's response to life—our own and others' experience of life.

This evening I want to talk particularly about the third of the Brahmavihāras, the practice of *muditā* or appreciative joy. As we explored last night in the guided meditation, this can be a really happy practice. It's very upbeat because, first of all, we're looking for happiness outside ourselves and within ourselves. Our radar is up for the happy experiences of life. And then we cultivate this ability to feel our own happiness when we touch them. So it's really this double expression of happiness.

I had a phone call a while ago from a friend I hadn't talked to for some time. I picked up the phone and said hello, and she told me who it was. I said, "How are you doing?" And her immediate response was, "I'm wonderful." Just hearing that from her, with her spirit, it picked my spirits up, and immediately I said back without thinking, "I am too." That was just the spontaneous expression of *muditā*—her happiness and then our shared happiness, that double happiness of the situation.

The Dalai Lama says that if you can be happy with other people's happiness, then your odds of happiness go up by six billion to one. That puts the odds in our favor. Those are good odds.

This is a very helpful quality of mind to cultivate as part of our path of practice, as one aspect of our path of practice. Joy is an integral and I would say a necessary part of the path to liberation. Later in the talk I

want to discuss how it fits into the conventional view, the classical view of insight practice.

But this quality, as we foster it, as we recognize it, as we develop it, keeps the mind inclining to what's wholesome. When your mind is in a place of joy or happiness, you're not going to have much interest in gravitating to unwholesome states. So this keeps the mind on that side of right effort which supports the wholesome, the positive.

James Baraz, who's a teaching colleague of Sally's and mine at Spirit Rock, has been offering a series of classes over the last couple of years on the development of joy. These are some of the best attended classes I've seen in the Bay Area. People take them, then they tell their friends about them, and then all their friends start going. People have really gotten a lot out of it and enjoyed it too.

One of the things we say when we teach about joy is we're not trying to force anything to happen in our hearts or in our minds. It's not possible—at least doing it skillfully, it's not possible. As you know from doing the mettā practice or compassion, we intend the mind in that direction, we incline it, and then we take what we get.

The Buddha said that what one frequently thinks and ponders upon, that becomes the inclination of the mind. As we practice loving-kindness, compassion, and joy, these qualities more and more become the inclination of our mind. That means we find ourselves there more and more often, quite spontaneously. The mind just starts liking to go in that direction, tending in that direction.

So all we really have to do in doing the vipassanā practice is notice the presence of this joy when it arises. Of course, in doing the practice of the Brahmavihāra, appreciative joy, we're doing a little more. We're saying phrases, we're looking for happiness, we're recognizing it when it comes. But in vipassanā practice, all we need to do is recognize the joy when it's there.

But this can be a new step for a lot of us as meditators. The Four Noble Truths are not heavily slanted toward this recognition. And yet I'd like to suggest that they could be reframed a little bit and that this is implicit in them.

I think if the Buddha had grown up in California... You know, in California, we're relentlessly upbeat, right? It's the sunshine and the surf and the orange groves and all that. So the first noble truth would probably have been: there are many opportunities for growth in life. And the third noble truth would definitely have been restated. Instead of the end of suffering, it would be the attainment of happiness.

But this is not actually that heretical. The Dalai Lama had a bestselling book that was on the charts for quite a while, I think on the New York Times bestseller list, called *The Art of Happiness*. And it was his expression of the Third Noble Truth.

Because when you think about it, if you let the significance of the Third Noble Truth sink in, what would it feel like if suffering really went out of your life altogether? What would it feel like if any one of us came

really to the end of suffering, of the torments of mind, of greed and fear and hatred and confusion? That is the highest kind of happiness possible.

So the whole path can be seen as the development in a wise way of our potential for happiness. That's really the point of it.

In this setting, we can start to tune into the very simple moments of happiness that come during a day, things we just may not have been looking for previously. Start to tune into them and see how the recognition of them affects your quality of mind and heart.

For instance, waking up, getting out of bed, and having a hot shower. There's something really delightful about that. When you're still a little bit sleepy and that hot water hits—

Or you come in from a cold afternoon walk after lunch and you can have a hot cup of tea from the tea urn. You warm your hands around the cup, and it warms your belly as the tea goes down. A day like today after the dark clouds and snow—then seeing the sun break through those rays of light in the late afternoon. And then the meditator's perhaps greatest pleasure: lying down on one's bed at the end of a day. Such a delicious moment. It lasts so briefly because it seems the next thing I know, the wake-up bells are ringing.

These simple joys are all present, and when we're on retreat, because of the simplicity of our life, they're actually heightened. The Buddha said that robes, alms food, a hut, and a straw seat will seem rich and luxurious to one who is renounced. Don't you feel that way sometimes here? How rich and luxurious it feels to have all this time, this food provided for you, and good company on the path. It's wonderful.

There's the joy of nature, which supports us so well here. It reminds me of a particular period of practice when I was in Thailand, just after I ordained as a bhikkhu. My preceptor let me go to a forest monastery in the north outside of Chiang Mai. It was a very small monastery with about ten huts for nuns and ten huts for monks, separated by a river—so there wouldn't be any complications.

The Thai people were very generous and gave me the most remote monk's hut, the furthest upstream. From my hut, I couldn't see another person. It was a wonderful experience of solitude, right by this running stream set down in the base of a deep gorge. It felt quite wild and mountainous, like those old Chinese hermit monks you see in paintings.

I was there for three months, doing retreat just before the rains. The teacher didn't speak English. He was a lovely man, well-practiced in our style of meditation that he had learned from a student of Mahasi Sayadaw. But with no translator available, for those three months I didn't have an interview and didn't hear a dharma talk. There wasn't another Westerner to talk to, so it was quite solitary.

The teacher and I would communicate somewhat. He would occasionally bring visitors up to my hut, and usually I'd be meditating because there wasn't really anything else to do. They'd look in through the

window, and seeing me meditating, he'd say, "Dee, dee"—"good, good." So that was one of my interactions with the teacher.

The other was when he'd come up while I was doing walking meditation. For some reason, I was wearing my rubber sandals while walking. He'd point to my shoes and gesture—no, no—telling me to take them off. That was the extent of my instruction for three months.

It was quite isolated. I felt very lonely at times, and yet what really pulled me through was the beauty of that nature. I felt so nourished and enriched and delighted in its presence.

One other facet struck me: there was a big old mango tree I had to walk under to get to my hut. It happened to be mango season, so the tree was dropping its fruit all over the path. These explosions of orange and that brilliant mango aroma would rise up as I walked by.

The little catch was, as a monk, I couldn't eat the fruit. You're not allowed to eat anything that hasn't been placed directly in your hands before noon of that day. So I'd come back from breakfast—this was a one-meal-a-day place, we'd eat around eight in the morning—and I'd walk back by all those falling mangoes, unable to touch them. It was bittersweet, but the fragrance was beautiful nonetheless.

The joy of nature is a great support and very available here. Even if you're outside briefly in a day, just notice the impression on your senses and that touch of happiness and joy from contact with beauty.

In meditating, there are also deep levels of joy that we touch. One of the great discoveries early in my practice was the possibility of peace. I'd never really known this was achievable in normal daily life. To come into meditation and find that the mind could quiet, that my whole being could be restful and stilled, was a great delight.

In some ways, I think it was that lure that kept me coming back to retreats again and again. Each time I came, it seemed I'd touch a deeper level of peace that I hadn't known was possible.

And that was a revelation for me.

There's also a great joy in being with the truth of things, even when the truth is not so easy. Something in us knows that we need to make our relationship with what's difficult in us. When we leave difficulties unresolved, they govern our lives in unconscious ways, leading us into confusion and fear and unskillful conduct that's harmful to ourselves and others, accompanied by the torments of mind that follow. We know that touching those places of difficulty is the way to freedom, and so there's often a great delight in this process.

One yogi said in an interview recently that one of the most joyful things about being on retreat was being able to be with pain and open to it. This is an acquired taste, but take a look and see if there isn't truth to it - that when you touch that pain and make your peace with it, there is a real delight in that.

As we practice mudita for others, we naturally come into contact with the joys in their lives. I'll share one example, a recent one from a friend of ours in the Bay Area. They're meditators who have practiced for a long time, and their son, in his late teens, went on a meditation retreat for the first time recently. This was kind of a dream come true for them because, as you know with parenting, you can't force anything on your children, especially once they become teenagers. But he had overcome his distrust of the older generation's habits enough to be interested in meditation retreat.

At the end of it, he wrote this beautiful summary of what he'd learned, describing how he'd come to a new understanding of life and the importance of non-harming - conducting oneself in such a way as not to harm other beings in any way - and then enjoying what he called "the bliss of blamelessness" from that. This became a key for him in a new view of life as he went off to university. We've heard that since entering his freshman year this fall, he started a little meditation class for other students. That was just a beautiful source of happiness for his parents.

As we open to mudita for all beings, we touch on something I believe to be true in my experience: that all beings have some experiences of joy and happiness in their lives. However difficult their lives are, there are moments that shine through, as far as I know, for everyone.

There was a woman on retreat last summer who had come to California from Manchester, England. If any of you know Manchester, it's not one of the most radiant places on the globe. It's one of those northern British cities where night falls very early in the winter, and as an old industrial area, it's not extremely beautiful in its architecture. Her job there was a difficult one - helping women refugees get established in their new lives in England. These are women who had fled their home countries, mostly in the developing world, because of persecution of some form, religious or political, and for whom it was not safe to live in their homeland.

Can you imagine having to flee your homeland because of persecution where probably your life was in danger, maybe your family's life was in danger, and landing in some strange, cold, northern city where you may not know people? That would be a really difficult adjustment.

Since this was a metta retreat, I asked her: can you see moments of joy, openness to joy, in the lives of the women that you counsel? And she said, absolutely. She said one of the most inspiring things about the job is the resiliency of their spirits. That in the midst of that really difficult life situation, they still have a lot of enthusiasm and obviously experiences of joy and happiness.

When we focus on the practice of mudita, we look for things that will make others happy, and they don't have to be the things that make us happy. A few years ago, Sally, who likes to ride horses, when we moved onto the Spirit Rock land, kind of inherited the care of this old quarter horse who had been on the land for many years rounding up cattle, since it was formerly used for cattle grazing.

This old horse named Bob had a deep sway back and had been running up and down those hills for

probably twenty years herding cattle and bringing them down to the pastures. At this point there were no more cattle on the Spirit Rock land, but we were left with Bob. That was part of the deal, and Sally, having knowledge of horses, was the one who took on his care.

So in winter and summer, she would be down there at 8:30 in the morning making sure Bob had food and water in his corral. On winter mornings, ice would be thick in the trough, and she'd have to break through it to make sure he could get to the water. Sometimes in winter, his hoofs would get abscesses, and she'd have to fill a bucket of hot water with Epsom salts, take it down, pick his leg up, and stick it in the bucket so he could soak that foot and the abscess would heal, all while tramping around in the mud because it rains a lot in Woodacre in the winter.

Yet I never heard her complain about doing that. There was something in her care for that old horse - who was cantankerous to boot - that I could tell was a pleasure for her, at least mostly. It doesn't have to be what makes us happy.

Around that same time in winter, some local skunks found their way underneath our house. The place they ended up liking best was underneath our bedroom. Some mornings at about two o'clock, we'd be awakened by this pungent, oily aroma wafting up from below. It was hard to get back to sleep because it was quite strong, and we could smell it in the closets the next morning. As you may know, it's not so easy to get skunks out from underneath your house, so it took a while to figure out what to do.

And in the meantime, they discovered that the other thing they liked to do was to bounce on the top of our furnace, which was a metal gas-burning furnace. They used it kind of like a trampoline, and they liked to do this also about two or three in the morning. So there I'd be: boing, boing—the skunks are at it again!

This was naturally a source of some frustration, as you can imagine, and my thoughts were not always kindly directed toward them. But at the same time, I did appreciate that they were probably really enjoying being dry and warm in the basement of our house. So I had some mudita for them, though it didn't stop me from trapping them with a Havahart trap and releasing them in a state park a few miles down the road. I was happy to relocate them to their natural setting.

With mudita, the near enemy is exhilaration or exuberance—or you could say attachment. This is something that might arise because there's some personal benefit involved. Perhaps you have a friend who inherited a cabin in the mountains where you want to go skiing, and you think, "Oh good, I can go skiing at their cabin. I'm happy about that." But that's not appreciating just your friend's happiness.

This kind of exuberance is a feeling that arises when one attaches to happiness and starts thinking—as Sally mentioned this morning—of projecting it into the future: "Oh, now that I'm happy, I can do X, Y, and Z. My life will be so great now that I'm happy." That's a clinging and a kind of corruption of the happiness by thought.

The far enemy is envy, and this is an interesting state to explore because it's really irrational. It's our

inability to enjoy someone else's happiness, and it feels as though their happiness takes away some of ours—as though there's only a finite quantity of happiness in the world, and if they have that much of it, I can't have enough for myself. So take a look when you hear good news from a friend and see if the response has a little bit of a tinge of this quality of envy.

About a year after I graduated from college, I went off to the Peace Corps. I taught for two years in Malaysia. I was really interested to experience another culture and to have some contact with Asia because I was already interested in Buddhism at that time. I had broken up with my girlfriend a few months before I went away. Then, after I'd been in Malaysia for a few months, I got a letter from my best friend telling me that he was now in relationship with my ex-girlfriend.

Mudita was not the first emotion that came to my mind.

So what is underneath envy? What is the reaction that forms the ground for envy? I wonder if it isn't caught up with the comparing mind—as though if someone else is doing really well, that means they're a better person than we are. If we don't feel we're doing as well, their success or good fortune reflects on us in a negative way, which of course doesn't make sense, but we might feel that.

This is similar to a near enemy of compassion that is sometimes called pity. When somebody's having a hard time, we sometimes imagine that makes us better than them. So we may feel sorry for them, but with a condescension or looking down. That's not true compassion, but more the quality of pity. In true compassion, there's a sense of equality between us.

As we tune into mudita as it expresses through our own situation—the appreciation of our own blessings—part of the flavor that comes through is gratitude. When we appreciate the blessings that we have, gratitude is a really beautiful state of mind because when we appreciate what we have, it cuts through greed. We don't necessarily want more. But it also cuts through aversion because we're not dissatisfied with what we have. So gratitude frees us from both greed and aversion.

I'll tell a little story about Kamala, which she's given me permission to tell. She has a few granddaughters now and was talking to one of them on the phone a few years ago. I think her granddaughter at that time was five years old. Kamala asked the granddaughter, "Well, when you get lots of presents on Christmas, do you feel thankful for what you have, or does it make you want more?"

And the little girl said, "Oh, Nana, I'd like some more."

Kamala just quietly said, "Oh, that's too bad."

This kind of stopped her granddaughter, and she said, "Why? What do you mean by that?"

Kamala said, "Well, haven't you noticed that when you're thankful for what you have, you feel good? And when you're wanting more, it doesn't feel so good."

The little girl said, "Oh, Nana, you're right."

This is the magic of gratitude. And all of us here have so many things to be thankful for—being warm and sheltered and clothed and so well-fed as we are, having access to medicine for the most part. We have fulfilled what the Buddha called the four requisites of human life: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. We have those in reasonably good supply, most of us. Many people don't.

You look at any one of those factors, and many people do not have adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medicine in this world.

The Tibetans, moreover, call the situation that we all share "the precious human birth with great endowments." You may have heard this statement in the Buddhist view of life—of beings taking birth over and over—that it's very rare to be born as a human being. The human realm is very conducive for practice and liberation because it has a good mixture of pleasure and pain. If there's too much pleasure, it's easy to become lazy and not want to work. If there's too much pain, we feel overwhelmed and discouraged and cannot work for our freedom. The human realm has a mixture that's conducive from both sides.

We have the opportunity to take real advantage of this through our situation here in our connection with the Dharma. First of all, we've all been born with reasonably well-functioning minds and bodies. Our senses are working; our minds are in good shape. We've taken birth at a time when a Buddha has appeared in the world. We've been born in a place and time when the Dharma is flourishing and available. We've been born at a time and place where practitioners are actively engaging in the teachings. We've also heard and understood the teachings, and we have the interest and some degree of leisure time to pursue them.

When you put all those things together, that's a very rare combination of circumstances. The Tibetans say that it's because of great merit—wholesome karma that we've accumulated in the past—that all these conditions have come together for us in this way. And they encourage us to take advantage of our time and these conditions to make our best effort for freedom, for liberation.

Many of you have mentioned this sense of gratitude over the last days. I think it's a very beautiful feeling that comes often at this time in retreat—an expression of gratitude mainly for the Dharma. That you've been able to have your life touched by the Dharma, transformed by the Dharma. That it has illuminated so many things that were unclear for you. And it is a great blessing.

So being in a practice situation, there's often a lot of gratitude already. But those of you who've practiced in Asia probably know that the sense of gratitude can be very, very strong at centers there. I went last year to practice in Burma for six weeks, and I had the opportunity—so I took advantage of it—to ordain as a monk with Paok Sayadaw, the great meditation master in the southeast of Burma, one of the most reliable authorities on the jhanas that I think is alive and teaching in the world today.

Because they knew I was going to Burma, one of my students gave me some money to take to offer as dana

to the monastery. As you know, Burma is a very poor country, and the monasteries are always in need of support. So I told her that I would try to sponsor at least one lunch, if not a few lunches, with her donation.

As soon as I got to the monastery while I was still a layperson, I went to the office and said to the steward—the layperson who handles the money for the monastery—"I have some money from a supporter in America, and she would like to offer some lunches during this retreat."

Well, I'd gotten there at the start of the rains retreat, which is a three-month period of practice. There were 750 people practicing in the monastery for most of the rains retreat: about 400 monks, about 150 nuns, and many laymen and laywomen. So I said, "I'd like to purchase at least one lunch."

And he said, "Oh, I'm sorry, all the lunches have been provided for the next three months, and they're all on dana." The monastery doesn't have this great store of money that they can provide lunches out of. People had already come forward—most of them Burmese—and made the donations to provide the meals, the lunches for the next three months to feed 750 people.

So what I was able to do with her donation was to offer a few breakfasts. We had three special breakfasts during the rains retreat, which were actually quite delicious—fried bread and a curry soup.

Every day we would go down to lunch, and there was a whiteboard, similar to the one here, on which would be written the menu for the day and who had donated the lunch for that day. That was the form, which is used in other monasteries in Burma as well, that inspired our practice here of the meal dana and the whiteboard with the acknowledgments.

So every day as I went down, I would read—they'd have the name in Burmese and in English—the family, mostly, who had made the offering for that day. And on many days, the people who had donated the lunch would come and sit by the food line and watch the monks and nuns go through serving themselves from the food that they had offered. You could tell what a delight it was for them: first, to have made the offering, and second, to see 750 people be fed from the donations they had made.

It was just a beautiful exchange of generosity and then gratitude from our side that we were reminded every day: this is made possible through the donations, through the generosity of many people who so value and support what you're doing that they give of their money in this country that doesn't have a lot, so that you can do what you're doing. And then obviously, as a meditator, one feels that one really needs to use that support well and not waste one's time, but really practice as well as one can to honor that generosity of spirit, that donation.

The Buddha said that three persons are rare in this world. One, he said, was a Buddha. Another, he said, was a person who is grateful and thankful. This is a really, really beautiful quality.

Often as we're sitting, we may feel a lot of gratitude for the existence of the path at all. I don't know if

you've ever taken time to reflect on what your life was like before you knew about a path.

But I'll invite you to just consider it for the moment. What was life like before you knew there was a path? Before you knew there was a possibility of ending suffering? Before you knew that suffering had a cause? Because it had a cause, it could have an end.

I know what mine was like. I had a lot of pain and I had no idea what to do about it. I had no idea that there was a way to clarify it and understand it and be free from it. How would we face death without our practice? How would we face aging and illness if it weren't for the practice? Just to know that we are not the body is a huge gift. Most people in the world don't know this. Even if they've heard it, they don't have an experiential sense of it or a real faith in it. We know we are not the body. There is more to us than this.

And did you ever think about how you got connected to the path? How did you wind up here? How did you get started? Isn't it mysterious? You read a book. Where did the book come from? How did you get your hands on that book? Or somebody talks to you, a friend just mentions it and you think, "I'll check it out." How did you have a friend like that? You know, there's this great mystery about what brings each of us onto this path. And in some ways it's mysterious, but at other times do you kind of get a sense that there's a destiny about it for you? That something in you was going to move you this way no matter what?

There's a quotation from the Chippewa tribe of the Native Americans: "Sometimes I go around pitying myself while all the time I'm being carried across the vast sky by great winds." We're all being carried by great winds. The great winds of our past actions have brought us here and provided the foundation for our wisdom and lovingkindness.

One year I was starting a six-week retreat as a yogi here, and the weather was really bad. I was starting in November, and it was very cold and gray and rainy. And I was starting to feel the bleakness of the weather sort of seep into my mind state. And I thought, "I don't really want to go into that kind of aversion. It's not good to get habituated to aversion early on in a retreat." So I thought, "I'll do something to offset it."

And what I did was I made a list of things I was grateful for. I just thought of all the things in my life that I appreciated at that time. I didn't spend a lot of time at it, but I filled one sheet of paper. And then every morning on that retreat, I would read over that sheet of paper when I woke up so that I could turn my mind in a direction of appreciation and joy. And that was a very helpful practice for me. In fact, I got that list out the other day and took a look at it, and it's still most of the things I'm grateful for. I can read it today and feel the same uplift that I felt then.

Sally and I were teaching about gratitude in a senior students class that we do in the Bay Area. And one guy in the class got the idea, "I'd like to practice gratitude." So he made the resolve, he connected with a friend, and they made the agreement: every night before they went to bed, they would email each other one thing that they were grateful for in that day. And so every night before they went to bed, they had a

gratitude thought from their life and a gratitude thought from their friends. And he said it was a really beautiful practice. So since we've told other people about that, other people have taken it up, and I don't recommend you start it now, but after you get home, it's a nice way to keep it alive in your mind.

I want to just finish by talking briefly about the role of joy in insight practice. And I believe that joy is really essential in the path of liberation. There are so many words in Pali that point to this quality. There's mudita, which we've been talking about. There is sukha, which is usually translated as happiness. Steve calls it happy comfort of body and mind. Ananda, which means bliss. This appears in a lot of Buddhist names. The Buddha's cousin was Ananda. My preceptor in Thailand was Ajahn Panyananda, which is the bliss of wisdom.

There's the word piti, for rapture or delight. There's pamoja, which can be translated as gladness, and somanasa, also for gladness of mind. This factor gets pointed to again and again in the Buddha's teachings.

There's one sutta in particular where it stands out very strongly—a list sometimes called Transcendent Dependent Arising. I hope you won't get intimidated by the list, but it's a series of twelve links similar to conventional dependent origination. However, these links trace the movement of the path to liberation in very positive terms, showing the wholesome qualities of mind that develop and lead one to the other to deliver us to the doorway of liberation.

Because of this, one commentator—Analayo, a German bhikkhu in Sri Lanka who has written a fantastic book called Satipatthana, a book-length commentary on the Satipatthana Sutta—writes that the entire scheme of the gradual training, that is the path of Dharma, can be envisaged as a progressive refinement of joy. The entire scheme of the gradual training can be envisaged as a progressive refinement of joy.

In this list called Transcendent Dependent Arising, the Buddha talks about suffering as the starting point leading to faith, and faith leading to gladness. Really, it's our faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha that brings this sense of gladness in our practice—this sense of gratitude. And then the gladness, as it becomes developed and recognized, starts to grow.

This is from Thomas Merton: "There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fountain of action and of joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created beings."

We touch this quality of gladness over and over, and that, the Buddha said, gives rise to rapture. Rapture is finding this gladness around the meditation object, finding the brightness of mind that loves to connect with our chosen object. As the mind collects and becomes unified through that delight, then it leads to tranquility in the body and mind.

As the body and mind become tranquil, that leads to the factor of happiness or sukha. I like this word sukha because it sounds a little bit like sugar, and sukha is a pointer to a sweetness of mind. That is the meaning of this link—such a satisfying sense of being that the whole body and mind start to settle. The

mind starts to settle in itself. The body relaxes and calms. And that is the entryway to concentration.

Concentration, then, is the basis for insight. And insight is the basis for liberation. So the function of gladness and joy is to bring contentment into the heart and mind, to allow for that complete settling where we don't need to look outside ourselves because everything we need, all our deep satisfaction, is found just in the here and now.

This sense of sukha is a very deep and more stable flowering. But I think it's so interesting that the practice the Buddha taught doesn't stop at happiness or sukha. It continues from there through concentration to insight and then liberation.

This is from the Buddha: "Two things I never lost track of: not to be lax in my efforts and not to settle merely for wholesome states of mind." Not to settle merely for wholesome states of mind. So many times I would have gladly settled for merely wholesome states of mind, but that's not the end of the path.

In a sutta called The Simile of the Heartwood, the Buddha said, "It is the unshakable deliverance of mind that is the goal of this holy life, its heartwood and its end." It is this complete liberation, the total end of suffering, that is the final outcome of this path.

But this is the same destination as mudita, gratitude, joy, and all the brahmaviharas. These are all supportive forces that lift the mind up and take it to the doorstep of peace and then liberation.

I'll close with a quotation from the Tibetan tradition of the Brahmaviharas in what are called the Four Immeasurables. Each line expresses one of the four: metta, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

May all beings have happiness and the cause of happiness, which is virtue.

May all beings be free from sorrow and the cause of sorrow, which is non-virtue.

May all beings remain unseparated from the sacred happiness which is free from sorrow.

May all beings come to rest in the great equanimity beyond attachment to those near and far.

Let's just sit for a minute together.

May all beings have happiness and the cause of happiness, which is virtue. May all beings be free from sorrow and the cause of sorrow, which is non-virtue. May all beings remain unseparated from the sacred happiness, which is free from sorrow. May all beings come to rest in the great equanimity beyond attachment to those near and far.

Thank you for listening. To learn how you can support the teachers and Dharma Seed, please visit dharmaseed.org/donate.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.