Joy and Happiness

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 59:00

The subject of this evening's talk is joy and happiness.

We've spent considerable time in this retreat exploring the vocabulary of the Buddha's teachings around the concept of dukkha, which is central to the Four Noble Truths—founded as they are around dukkha, its origin, its end, and the way to its end. But those Four Noble Truths could also have been formulated in terms of happiness. They would read something like this: There is unhappiness in life. The cause of unhappiness is wanting. Real happiness is possible. And the way to real happiness is the Eightfold Path.

Although we talk extensively about the hindrances and the kilesas and the afflictive emotions and all the difficulties of practice, it's also important to remember that joy and happiness are essential parts of this path. Especially at a certain point in development, they're really necessary to further the movement. The sense of deep contentment, relaxation and surrender can't fully ripen unless they come out of a place of joy and happiness.

These are essential parts of the path, but they don't always show up strongly in the beginning. It may take some time to really feel the development and the ripening of these factors in practice, so don't worry if they're not there today or this week. But it's important to know where we're headed, because as Yogi Berra said, if you don't know where you're going, you'll wind up somewhere else. So we want to be sure that we wind up in the right place with this quality of joy, this quality of happiness.

It's very helpful to actually spend some attention and time cultivating these as ongoing parts of your practice, your meditation practice, because this kind of development will keep the mind inclining to what is wholesome. If you remember the definition of right effort, two of the pieces of the four elements of right effort are about the wholesome: developing the wholesome and maintaining the wholesome. Joy and happiness are part of that mix of wholesome qualities that we want to continue to cultivate and develop because they're so supportive.

There is, I think, among our community a real thirst to find these qualities and develop them in our hearts and minds. You may know our friend James Baraz in California, who's written a book called Awakening Joy. It's become very popular and is highly recommended if you'd like to develop these qualities further. James has done for several years now a class in Berkeley based on the book, offering very practical ways to help people develop more joy in their life and in their meditation. He structures the class in such a way that there's an in-person portion and an online portion.

At one point his book got a favorable mention from Oprah Winfrey in O Magazine. Of course, that's a big

platform to get noticed on. After that review came out, the next session of his class had an enrollment of 2,900 people, which in the Vipassana world is a pretty good turnout. It's not like a Taylor Swift video—I think one of hers just went over a billion views—but for Vipassana it's a good turnout.

It's important first in the beginning to start to notice these qualities when they come. We spend so much time, especially in the beginning, talking about dukkha and the hindrances and the kilesas and afflictive emotions, that in a way it inclines us to be on the lookout for those. We can develop this kind of vigilance about watching out for when one of those hindrances is about to sneak in. And then an experience of calm comes and we hardly even notice it or recognize it or open to it because it's not one of these threatening mind states.

But it's just as important to notice and be open to the positive qualities in meditation—like the seven factors of awakening, like the Brahmaviharas, like the five spiritual faculties—as it is to be mindful of the difficult ones. In the beginning of practice, we often develop more attention to the difficult states. But what we want to find is a balance of mind in mindfulness that's not looking particularly one way or the other. A mind that is so poised in the middle that it's equally open to seeing the beautiful as seeing the difficult, so that we're not biased one way or another.

It's as though the mind is on that midpoint, which we could call zero or we could call emptiness, and it's just open to what appears. So open to seeing the beautiful qualities as well as anything. And the more we notice them, the more the mind learns to find its way there. The development of these qualities comes with the mindfulness and recognition of them when we're there.

Emphasizing the beautiful qualities at different times in our practice is actually skillful because it redresses the imbalance where the mind so often looks for the negative. It is true that craving is a frequent visitor. Greed, aversion and delusion are frequent visitors. The hindrances come often. Such a mind inclines to seeing difficulty, inclines to seeing insufficiency, inclines to the negative. So by cultivating and putting attention and emphasis on the wholesome qualities, positive qualities, we start to right that imbalance a little bit.

And we remember what the Buddha said: "What one frequently thinks and ponders upon, that becomes the inclination of one's mind." So we want to think and ponder upon these qualities.

There's a very large vocabulary in the suttas for the range of qualities pointed to by these two English terms, joy and happiness. Let me share some of them in Pali and their English translations. You'll be familiar with many, some of them you may not be so familiar with. Mudita, which is the third Brahmavihara, usually translated as empathetic joy or sympathetic joy, which if you're staying for part two, you'll have formal instruction in developing. The word sukha—I find this a very pleasant term. I would translate it normally as happiness.

And this is the word I normally translate as happiness. What I like about it is its sound—it has a quality

reminiscent of sucrose, like sugar, which gives it this sweet connotation for me. Sukha is that quality in the mind that brings a lot of sweetness. Often when people are experiencing sukha, a little smile will come spontaneously onto their face with this happiness.

The word ananda is normally translated as bliss. You see this in many Buddhist names. The Buddha's cousin was called Ananda. My first preceptor in Thailand was Panyananda, which means the bliss of wisdom. And when I ordained as a monk for the second time, I asked for this name and my preceptor granted it: Sunyatananda, which means the bliss of emptiness. So you'll see ananda used frequently in names, this attribute of bliss.

Piti, which you already know, means rapture—it's the fourth of the enlightenment factors.

Pamoja is a word that I would translate as joy. This is the Pali word that I would typically translate as joy, and it appears in quite an important sutta that I'll mention later in this talk.

Somanasa means gladness of mind, contrasted with domanasa, which is difficulty of mind.

Santuti—don't you like the sound of that? Santuti. It sounds like an Italian gelato machine, and it means contentment. One of the stanzas in the Dhammapada says, "Santuti is the greatest wealth"—contentment is the greatest wealth.

All these terms point to the same basic quality: gladness, uplift, happiness, empathic joy, delight. They were not neglected in the Buddha's teachings at all. It's a thread that runs throughout.

Pamoja comes in especially in one sutta in the Samyutta Nikaya called the Upanissa Sutta, which describes another version of dependent origination with twelve links showing causal relationships among them. We normally call this transcendent dependent origination—quite a mouthful, but it's called transcendent because it transcends suffering.

Whereas the original dependent origination shows how suffering is created based on ignorance and craving, this cycle describes how liberation is reached through positive states of mind. It describes the journey totally in positive and wholesome terms.

It begins with suffering, picking up where the first dependent origination leaves off, and then moves to faith. Now that's an interesting combination—how does suffering lead to faith? Because when we suffer, we are motivated to find a solution. When we discover that there is a solution available through these teachings, our faith is strengthened and gives us the energy to walk the path.

This leads to the next quality, which is pamoja or joy. Joy then leads on to rapture, tranquility, happiness, concentration, insight, and liberation. The movement into the maturing of these faculties flows from joy, rapture, tranquility, and happiness. This is what needs to be found.

Bhikkhu Analayo is the author of a book I recommend to all of you if you haven't read it—it's called

Satipatthana, an extensive commentary on the Satipatthana Sutta. He's quite a remarkable person: a German monk who ordained in Sri Lanka, practiced there, learned Pali there, and became very familiar with the whole range of the Pali discourses. Because he felt that was fairly straightforward, he went on to learn Chinese so that he could translate the equivalent discourses found in Chinese. He's since learned Tibetan so he can do comparative studies with that tradition as well. He's a very dedicated and excellent practitioner—probably one of the most remarkable Western scholars who combines both a deep practice orientation and really extensive knowledge of the original texts. In other words, he's a reliable source.

This is his comment from Satipatthana: "The entire scheme of the gradual training"—which is what we're all involved in—"can be envisaged as a progressive refinement of joy." The whole journey we're embarked upon is a progressive refinement of joy, leading to and culminating in liberation, which the Buddha described in this way: "Nibbana is the highest happiness." This is from the Dhammapada.

Nibbana is the highest happiness. And that's where mindfulness leads. From Sally's talks on the Satipatthana Sutta, the practice of mindfulness leads in only one direction, and that is to liberation and Nibbana.

So the discovery of joy is a really good ally at many points. Not only as an integral factor of the path, especially on the upward trajectory of liberation, but it's such a great ally in times of difficulty. And all of us, as we continue on the path, are going to run into times of difficulty.

This came fully home to me about ten years ago. I went back to Asia. I had not quite finished with the robes when I left the monkhood the first time in Thailand, which was in the eighties. And I'd always had a little bit of nostalgia for being a monk. So I went back again in 2005 to Burma with the intention of ordaining again, because I wanted to practice with Pa-Auk Sayadaw, who's a very renowned master of concentration and insight, who had a large monastery.

So I traveled over there, and his monastery is about two hundred miles southeast of Rangoon. I arrived late one afternoon, went up to meet the Sayadaw at his house about five p.m. I was introduced and very pleased to meet him. And I said to him, "Sayadaw, I'd like to stay for about six weeks, and if it's possible, I'd like to ordain."

He checked out that I had been a monk before, so I sort of knew the basics of the Vinaya and the monk's life. So he said, "Okay, I'll ordain you tomorrow."

So I'd just arrived—I'd just been off the plane a couple of days. I'd just arrived there with my big suitcases and foam mat and all of that. And I was going to ordain the next day.

So in the morning I went into town and bought my robes and bowl and belt. I got my monk gear together. Came back to the monastery, had lunch. And immediately after lunch, I joined a small group. My head was shaved. I changed into the robes. And I was a monk about an hour later. It all happened really quickly.

Well, in the intervening years, I'd sort of forgotten how to tie the robes. So I was walking around with them slipping off my shoulders for quite a while, but I sort of got back into the habit, we might say.

And so I went there to do Sayadaw's concentration practice, and he has a rigorous practice and a rigorous schedule. In doing concentration practice with him, he has you focus on just the small area below the tip of the nose, on the upper lip, about the size of a dime. That is your sole meditation object in sitting, in walking, in meals, and throughout the day. So it's a very narrow focus.

I went to him and said, "What should I do about hindrances? Hindrances are coming up." He said, "Oh, if you're averse, do metta, and if you're sleepy, pull your ears." That was the instruction. So other than that, I was right here in this very small place for six weeks. So that's a very disciplined kind of practice.

And the schedule at the monastery—by the way, there were about 750 people practicing when I was there. About 400 or so of them were monks, about 150 were nuns, and the rest were lay people. So it was a strong practice energy.

The schedule was such that we were sitting several times a day in a very big meditation hall. The shortest sitting was an hour and a half. The longest sitting was two hours. And as a new arrival, there was no way around that. I was to be at the meditation center, I was to be in my spot, hour and a half most sittings, two hours some sittings. So this was challenging.

In addition, I had arrived on the day that the rains retreat began. Now this should have been a clue about the weather, but I hadn't quite thought it through. So I ordained, and the day was actually fine. The next day the rain started, and it kept up solidly for about the next three weeks. I really didn't see the sun for three weeks. Mold was growing on my baggage, insects were crawling around my kuti, and the rain just kept coming down.

It rained about three inches a day over that period—a real tropical downpour. And then there were the meals.

Breakfast timing didn't work out so well for me. I was eating just one meal a day. While I appreciated that it was a vegetarian monastery, as I'm vegetarian myself, there wasn't a huge amount of protein. It was basically white rice and stir-fried vegetables. So I started losing weight—about half a pound a day over the time I was there. And I didn't have a lot to give up.

The rain kept coming down, and my robe still kept falling off my shoulder. I remember this one day when it was really raining hard. I'd gone down to the dining hall and had a really hot bowl full of food. I tried to cradle that in one elbow with dessert in the lid, my umbrella over my head as I walked back along the dirt path to my kuti where I was going to eat, and my left shoulder kept coming undone. As I was going, there were these very devout Burmese laypeople kneeling by the side of the path and bowing to this Western monk who couldn't even keep his robes on and who was about to lose his whole lunch on the path.

Long story short, I had a very difficult time at that point. It was about three weeks into a six-week retreat, and the practice was difficult, the weather was difficult. I've never seen such big spiders as inhabited my kuti. I was losing weight and getting really glum. Everything just looked gloomy to me.

Fortunately, I had one piece on my little altar in my hut—a photograph of the Dalai Lama with a couple of verses from Shantideva surrounding it. I find the Dalai Lama a very inspiring being, a very beautiful being. So he was my resource. I felt in real need of some uplift and some advice. So I said, "Your Holiness, I'm having a really hard time. Do you have any advice for me?"

I was in a state of real supplication, looking for some help beyond "pull your earlobes." Immediately that I made the request, the answer came. It was so interesting. It was exactly his voice—that slightly high-pitched, Indian-accented English that he speaks. That's exactly the voice I heard. There was a very clear message. What the Dalai Lama said was: "Stay cheerful, optimistic and confident. A positive attitude is the best support." And then transmission ended. That was it. That was the message. Stay cheerful, optimistic, and confident.

I've thought about that many times since. I revisited it a lot of times on that retreat. At times it was really helpful. At other times I couldn't even remember what cheerful felt like, so I couldn't use it. But if I could remember that advice, I could often incorporate it and just pick my mind up and move it into that more wholesome place. It helped that the words had come from the Dalai Lama himself in that short transmission, because he is such a happy and joyful person. I picked that up from him, and it inspires me greatly.

As we know, he has the whole weight of the Tibetan nation on his shoulders—seven million Tibetan people who remain. Something like two million have been killed since the occupation in 1949. But he is the only hope for the remaining Tibetan people and Tibetan culture. There's no one else on the world stage who has his stature, who could possibly shape the international situation for his people. Even the Dalai Lama is not succeeding in that role. But despite this enormous burden that he carries, he is so light and happy—cheerful, optimistic and confident.

He will say that over and over again.

I'd like to share a little anecdote about him. He was at a gathering of scientists in Dharamsala—he's very interested in bridging the Buddhist world and the scientific world, so he often has scientists come over to where he lives. One of the scientists, during a break, was chatting with him and asked, "What was the happiest time of your life?"

I thought, well, surely the Dalai Lama is going to say it was when he was a child in the Potala and Tibetan culture was intact, when his tutors were revealing everything about Buddhism and it was all opening up, dawning—it was so beautiful. I thought he would say something like that, perhaps a bit nostalgic.

Instead, he said, "I think right now—this is the happiest time in my life."

What a beautiful answer. Right now is the happiest time. That's such a wonderful attitude.

I want to talk about some different ways we can develop and cultivate these qualities of joy and happiness in our meditation. The first is the practice of mudita. In terms of formal Buddhist practices, this is the most direct path to joy. It is the happiest practice I know of in the whole realm of Buddhist meditation. The entire practice is about uplifting our heart and moving into a place of joy.

Mudita is defined as taking joy in the happiness of others. Here's a simple example: I got a call out of the blue from a friend one day. I hadn't talked to her for a while, so I said, "How are you?" And she said, "I'm wonderful!" She really meant it—I could just feel that enthusiasm in her voice. Without even thinking, I just said, "I'm wonderful too!" That was the instant arising of mudita based on her happiness. It just picked me up as well.

Mudita is like a double dose of happiness. We resonate with someone else like sympathetic strings. I love this word "sympathetic" because of how the sitar is built, that Indian stringed instrument. There are sympathetic strings underneath—twelve or seventeen or something—and then the main strings above that get plucked. The little strings aren't plucked; they just resonate in sympathy with the strings that the musician fingers. That's how sympathetic joy works. When someone else's heart is resonating with happiness, our heart resonates in response, so it becomes contagious.

A simple phrase, if you feel like playing with it and haven't had formal instruction, is to think of someone else and say: "May your happiness and good fortune continue." Then you focus on the things in their life that are happy, the blessings that are active for them.

Shantideva, that seventh-century Indian author, put it like this: "Whatever joy there is in this world, all comes from wanting others to be happy. And whatever suffering there is in this world, all comes from wanting only myself to be happy." This is a beautiful indicator for our metta practice as well. Metta picks up our heart when we wish others well. Mudita does the same.

We don't teach mudita often in formal settings. It will be taught in Part Two. We usually teach it on metta retreats. But one weekend, I decided I wanted to teach mudita here, so I offered a weekend retreat with another teacher just on the theme of mudita. People came in on Friday evening and we practiced mudita together the whole weekend.

I thought, oh, nothing's going to happen in a weekend because it's the worst format for a retreat, isn't it? You have the first day where your body really hurts, and then you have the last day where you're already thinking about going home. That's a weekend retreat. But I was amazed how much people gained from it. Just doing the practice consistently, I could feel it in my own experience and I could feel it shaping others. At the end of that weekend, one of the meditators came up and said, "You know, this is the happiest I've felt in years, just from two days of doing mudita." So it really is an uplifting kind of practice.

There are other ways that happiness is found in life. As lay people, part of our life involves sense

pleasures. We know that sense pleasures are impermanent and they don't give deep, lasting happiness and all of that. And yet, imagine your lay life without any sense pleasures. Wouldn't it feel a little bare?

These places flow with clear, cool water,
Covered with indigo clouds,
Adorned with flocks of many birds,
These rocky crags do please me so.

Like blue clouds in the sky,
Like palaces well-plastered,
Echoing with the cries of peacocks,
These rocky crags do please me so.

This is quite wonderful. Here's one of the most austere practitioners of the Buddha's time expressing such delight in the natural world. And this points to something important about our practice—we don't have to shut down our appreciation of beauty and simple pleasures. Even in the midst of deep renunciation, there's room for this kind of joy.

The Buddha taught that there are different kinds of happiness available to us at different times. There's the happiness that comes from getting what we want, which is pleasant but unstable. There's the happiness that comes from meditation and states of concentration, which is more refined and stable. And there's the happiness that comes from wisdom and freedom, which is the most lasting of all.

But he didn't say we should reject the simpler forms of happiness while we're cultivating the deeper ones. In fact, being able to appreciate the beauty around us, to take joy in simple pleasures with mindfulness and moderation—this can be part of our path. It can soften our hearts and make us more receptive to the deeper teachings.

I think sometimes in spiritual life we can become overly serious, overly concerned with getting to the "important" stuff. But joy itself is important. Lightness is important. The ability to be delighted by a beautiful sunset or a cup of tea or the sound of rain on the roof—these moments of simple happiness can be doorways into greater understanding.

The key is awareness. When we're mindful of our experience, even simple pleasures become part of our practice. We can notice how they arise and pass away. We can appreciate them without clinging to them. We can let them remind us of the preciousness and beauty that's always available in this moment.

Like the lofty peaks of looming clouds, like the most refined of palaces, the lovely calls of tuskers sound. These rocky crags do please me so. The lovely ground is rained upon, the hills are full of holy seers. Resounding with the cry of peacocks, these rocky crags do please me so.

It continues with more verses like that. He was an arhat, and you can see his sensitivity and joy in the

beauty that surrounded him.

This reflection comes from Ajahn Sumedho, the former abbot of Amaravati in England. Sometimes in Theravada Buddhism, one gets the impression that you shouldn't enjoy beauty. If you see a beautiful flower, you should contemplate its decay. Or if you see a beautiful woman, you should contemplate her as a rotting corpse. That's a good reflection on anicca, dukkha, and anatta, but it can leave the impression that beauty is only to be reflected upon in terms of these three characteristics, rather than in terms of the experience of beauty itself. This is the joy of mudita—being able to appreciate the beauty in things around us.

There are other avenues to joy as well. Kamala spoke extensively about the quality of sila in her recent talk, and there is indeed great joy in virtue. The Buddha spoke of it as the bliss of blamelessness. When we have been committed for a long time to practices that don't harm others, over time there grows in us an appreciation for that refinement. We enjoy looking back on our past conduct and seeing that there is nothing to blame ourselves for in the way we've acted. This leads to a certain kind of happiness.

You might know this verse from the very opening of the Dhammapada: "Mind is the forerunner of all things. Mind is chief. Speak and act with a pure mind and happiness will follow you like your shadow, unshakable." This is one of the fruits of beautiful conduct.

Again, I think the Dalai Lama is a wonderful example of how this can be developed. At one point, Oprah Winfrey was interviewing him for an article in her magazine. They were going to talk for an hour, and Oprah started by asking the Dalai Lama, "Have you ever had to forgive yourself for anything?" This leads us to reflect back on our own forgiveness meditation from a few weeks ago. Most of us can find a few things, right?

The Dalai Lama replied, "Small incidents like accidentally killing an insect."

"Killing an insect?" Oprah said. "Hmm, okay."

The Dalai Lama continued, "My attitude toward mosquitoes is not very favorable. Not very peaceful. Bed bugs also."

"And that's it?" Oprah couldn't quite believe what she was hearing. "In your lifetime, that's what you have to forgive yourself for?"

"Small mistakes every day, maybe," the Dalai Lama said evenly. "But major mistakes? It seems no."

"No major mistakes," Oprah repeated, mulling over the idea. There was awe in her voice when she continued. "You have nothing in life that you have regrets about. That's a great life, to have no regrets."

"Regarding service to Tibet," the Dalai Lama said, "service to Buddhism, service to humanity, I have done as much as I can. Regarding my own spiritual practice, when I share my experiences with more advanced

meditators, even those who have spent years in the mountains practicing single-pointedness of mind, I don't lag too far behind."

I believe that much of that brightness, happiness, and purity that we see in the Dalai Lama comes from his refinement of conduct, which is of course embedded in compassion and loving-kindness.

There's also great joy in generosity. Kamala spoke about this as well. I'm reminded of going to Burma when I went to ordain. A student knew that I was going and knew what teacher I was going to practice with, and she wanted to make an offering. So she gave me a few hundred dollars to take and donate to the monastery in whatever way I thought was appropriate.

When I arrived—this was before I ordained, I was still in lay clothes—I talked to the clerk of the monastery and said, "I have a donation from a supporter in America. Could we use it to offer a lunch for the 750 people who are practicing here?"

And the clerk said, "No, I'm sorry. All the lunches have been subscribed for the next three months." This was in one of the poorest countries on the face of the earth. But there is so much devotion and so much faith in the power and beauty of generosity that the three-month meal subscriptions had all been taken up.

I said, "Well, is there anything we could do?" He said, "Yes, you could sponsor a couple of special breakfasts." They make a special meal for everybody in the monastery that wouldn't normally be served, but when they have extra funds, they can do that. So then on those days when there were the special breakfasts, I could go down and read the meal board. They have a board much like ours—in fact, our board was inspired by this practice in Burmese monasteries of meal offerings—and the dedication for the day comes from the person or group who was offering the food. So I could go down and read her name on the days that the special breakfasts were offered.

But every day, going to lunch was a treat because the people who were offering the lunch that day would come to watch it being offered to the 450 monks and 150 nuns who went through the line. Sometimes it was a family, sometimes it was like a whole clan or a village. They would sit off to the side and watch the whole line of monks go through. Pauk Sayadaw would always lead the way because he had about 60 vassa at that point—he had so many years in the robes. He would be the first one through the line, then the senior monks, and then so on.

And they would look so happy. They would be so delighted watching everybody be served from their offering from that day. They would have collected the money from everybody in the village or the whole family. They would dress up in their best clothes to come and watch the meal being offered. It was really beautiful.

So we take these qualities like generosity, like virtue, like loving-kindness. These are considered bases for what's called merit. Wholesome actions in the teachings of the Buddha are considered to generate positive

energy that more or less ripples forward with us. And this is from the Buddha: "There are these streams of merit, streams of the wholesome, nourishments of happiness, which are heavenly, ripening in happiness, conducive to heaven, and which lead to whatever is wished for, loved and agreeable—to one's welfare and happiness."

This is a profound statement. I hope you'll take it in and reflect on it. Practices like generosity, virtue, loving-kindness lead to whatever is wished for, loved and agreeable to one's welfare and happiness.

When I think about the sources of worldly happiness—happiness being a normal human being in the world—these are the three things I think about that are most important. And as someone mentioned in a question period the other morning, these can be found in every faith: generosity, virtue and loving-kindness. So as we practice these, this is a stream that can lead to what I call ordinary human happiness, worldly happiness.

Then, of course, our practice also offers us the deeper happiness of insight. This opens up new areas, greater potential for freedom. But the insight journey is not always so easy. As you know, the journey of insight opens up old psychological patterns, it opens up the common human tendency of craving through greed, aversion and delusion, and we meet those forces very directly. That's not easy. But there's even joy in that.

If you look at the moment when the mind is steady enough to meet a deeply entrenched pattern that you're just recognizing, there is a joy in that. Because until we meet it directly—and many of you have said this in the interviews—we don't have a possibility of releasing it. But when we can meet it directly and with clarity, there's a possibility of understanding it and then releasing it. And releasing these deeply held tendencies is a source of a great deal of freedom and happiness.

This is from an Australian poet named Michael Leunig: "When the heart is cut or cracked or broken, do not clutch it. Let the wound lie open. Let the wind from the good old sea blow in to bathe the wound with salt and let it sting. Let a stray dog lick it. Let a bird lean in the hole and sing a simple song like a tiny bell and let it ring."

So even in healing, there is a sweetness. There's a joy. Then the meditation leads on to deeper states of concentration, peace and stillness. And these are felt as deeply satisfying places to be, deeply satisfying places to reside, to abide.

In some ways, I think for me personally, the discovery of peace was one of the most onward-leading fruits of retreat practice. As I began to practice through doing intensive retreats, I found levels of peace and calm that I'd never known in daily life—I'd never known in my ordinary existence. And they were so rich and meaningful that every time I thought, "Oh, if this much is possible, how much more is possible?" And then I would want to go back and find out what else was possible. So these experiences of deeper and deeper peace really led me on.

And of course one of the things that's most joyful about peace, even though the emotional tone may feel fairly neutral and not a strong affect, we start to really appreciate the absence of the hindrances. When the mind is in that state of stillness, the hindrances are no longer assaulting, and the relief of that is a beautiful kind of freedom.

And then as the concentration develops further, it moves into these states called jhāna. This is the way the Buddha described the first of the concentration states called jhāna: "One enters and abides in the first jhāna with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. She makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, fill, steep, and pervade this body so that there is no part of her whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure." This is the delight of concentration as it deepens and matures. This rapture and pleasure become very accessible.

Another beautiful access to joy comes through gratitude. And gratitude is such a beautiful emotion. It's in the brahmavihāra family. And personally, I would put it very similar to—has a similar feel to—muditā for self. When we stop to appreciate our own blessings, we are in the realm of gratitude. So muditā for self can give access to gratitude, or you can access it through deliberately thinking of all the things you're grateful for, just calling them to mind.

I want to tell a little story about Kamala. So Kamala has some grandchildren, and one time she was talking to one of her granddaughters. Her granddaughter was about five or six at this time, I think. And Kamala called her on Christmas Day. Kamala was in Hawaii and her granddaughter was on the mainland. And the girl had gotten a lot of Christmas presents that she really enjoyed. You know, being six years old, you love Christmas presents—that's kind of like the high time of the year.

And so Kamala asked this really thoughtful question. She said, "Oh, when you get lots of presents, do you feel thankful for what you have or does it make you want more?"

And the little girl said, "Oh, Nana, I want more."

And Kamala just said in her very quiet way, "Oh, that's too bad."

So the granddaughter actually picked up on that and said, "Well, what do you mean?"

And 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 as good?"

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

So this is the beauty of gratitude. When we have gratitude, greed is blocked because we appreciate what we have. And aversion is blocked because we appreciate the present moment. So gratitude is a movement out of those kilesas. And as such, it's in the brahmavihāra family—it's one aspect of the brahmavihāras.

And we all have a lot to be grateful for. Just think about the opportunity to be here for six weeks or three

months immersed in the Dharma. Even though it's difficult, even though many times you might wish to be anywhere else but here, it's a fabulous opportunity. And it's like—you know, I think of it as an investment in our future happiness and freedom. We're making deposits that will ripen in the future, moment by moment.

So in thinking about all we have to be grateful for, I'm reminded of a friend who was working in a refugee camp in Thailand. And the refugees were people from the countries where the wars had been going on. This was in the mid-eighties. So both in Cambodia and in Laos, there had been quite destructive regimes where a lot of people were suffering and a lot of people were displaced from their homes. And so a number of the people who were coming into the refugee camps were from the hill tribes of those countries.

When they came to the refugee camp, our friend and other workers—aid workers, both Thai and Western—were helping them acclimatize to a new culture. And they were teaching them skills like how to use money, what a washing machine does, what a toaster is, and how to read a bus schedule.

Because from where they had come, these people didn't have those things. So one of the questions that they would routinely ask in their schools in the refugee camp was: what are the most important things in life? This one teenage girl said, "The most important things in life are fire, rice, and water."

I think about that because if we didn't have those things, they would be the most important things for us too. But as it is, we have food, we have clothing, we have shelter, we have some access to medicine. These are considered the requisites in the Buddhist system. We have those things, and many of us have much more than that. So we all have that to be grateful for, as well as the Dharma.

Many of you have mentioned this over recent days—the gratitude for the opportunity to be here, the gratitude to be able to practice, gratitude for the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. These really are our refuges.

So joy is normally considered to be dependent on these conditions. It flowers in response to conditions. Happiness becomes a kind of softer and quieter bloom that isn't so dependent on conditions. It settles within us, or we settle into that quality of contentment.

We could say that happiness is a kind of joy that has risen up into rapture or pīti and become more intense, and then has become tranquilized through calm to settle out into this stable kind of contentment where really the mind is finding the quality of being contented within itself. It's not looking out anymore.

We don't have to worry about making this happiness permanent. That was something that bothered me as I first started to come upon this—that there wasn't a way to fix it and make it permanent. But we can't do that. We don't have to try. It will come when it comes and it will go when it goes. And that's why there's this saying in the Dharma: "Take care of this moment and you take care of all time." And we develop that attitude. We take care of this moment.

This is from Rumi, and it helps to remember that when Rumi says "you," he means what is divine, what is most essential:

"Come to the orchard in spring.
There is light and wine and sweethearts in the pomegranate flowers.
If you do not come, these do not matter.
If you do come, these do not matter."

That's that deep contentment.

But then, of course, the practice doesn't stop here. It doesn't stop just with wholesome states. The Buddha said at one point, "Two things I never lost track of in my own practice: not to be lax in my efforts and not to settle merely for wholesome states of mind." Because the sequence continues from happiness into concentration, insight, and liberation.

But the role of happiness is really important. One of my teachers, Mingyur Rinpoche, who's a very bright young Tibetan Lama currently away on a personal retreat that is in its fourth year and counting, put it this way: "The main cause of freedom is happiness. The main cause of freedom is happiness." We cultivate this and it's onward leading. It goes further.

Joseph's first teacher, Munindra-ji, used to say, "If you aim for the highest happiness, all the other kinds will come along the way." So we just keep walking this path of mindfulness pointed to the final goal, and all kinds of happiness flower along the way.

And as Kamala read the other night: "The goal of the practice is not virtue or gain or renown or concentration or insight, but it is the unshakable deliverance of mind that is the goal of the holy life, its heartwood and its end." That is the highest happiness.

So let's just sit together for a moment, please. It is the unshakable deliverance of mind that is the goal of the holy life, its heartwood and its end.

Thank you for listening.

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