Where Does Happiness Come From?

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 55:23

The subject of this evening's talk is: where does happiness come from? I think this is an important question for us to reflect on because the whole journey is about happiness. The Buddha framed it in the Four Noble Truths as the end of suffering, but that's just different language for the development of happiness. When suffering ends, there is something in our hearts and minds, there's something in our nature that brings happiness forth. So we don't have to think of these as two separate questions. When suffering ends, happiness is present, or we can talk about it as the development of happiness.

When I look around the world, I see such a wide range of happiness in the people that I meet and see. It's always been curious to me, why is that range the way it is? Is happiness just something random and mysterious and unpredictable? Some people are blessed with it and other people are not? Does it all have to do with our parents? That would be a convenient explanation, but hopefully that's not the final word. Is it sort of fatalistic or some kind of destiny that we can never really figure out or understand?

As practitioners, hopefully we all understand our journey as being about the development of happiness, the movement to happiness. The question is, what makes that journey possible? What makes it work? Because happiness is a very important concept in dharma practice, not just in current popular expressions, but all the way back to the words of the Buddha. This quality of happiness comes in again and again. Although the Buddha talked about the end of suffering and used that kind of negative language, there are also many words for the beautiful states of happiness of heart and mind in the suttas and in the Pali.

Just to mention a few, because I know that you're familiar with some of these. The word sukha is usually translated directly as happiness. For me, it means a very settled kind of contentment—not necessarily a bubbly or overflowing happiness, but a very settled, contented state of mind. I like the association of sukha with sugar. It may be the same root, I'm not sure, but the sweetness of sugar is kind of suggested by this word sukha. It has a sweet quality of contentment.

The word piti, which I think many of you know from the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, is often translated as rapture. It's a meditative quality when the mind discovers a delight in being with the meditation subject. So it's sometimes translated as a joyful interest. When we connect with our experience in a way that makes it come alive and is delightful, that's a factor of piti in the mind, one of the enlightenment factors.

There's the word ananda, which means bliss, which you hear as the name of the Buddha's companion, a very sweet monk that Sally mentioned the other day. This word appears in many monks' and nuns'

names. There are a group of nuns living in San Francisco. I don't know if you've had the good fortune to meet them yet. They're under an umbrella organization called Saranaloka. They intend to establish a permanent nun's residence, hopefully in the Bay Area or Northern California. I think it's very inspiring for women practitioners to see the nun sangha taking root here. One of the nuns in that community is named Ananda Bodhi—the bliss of awakening, the bliss of enlightenment.

There are other words too, but I don't need to do a Pali primer this evening. I just wanted to suggest that this word happiness is very important in Buddhist practice, going back to ancient times.

There's a wonderful modern scholar who I want to recommend to you named Bhikkhu Analayo, who is a linguist, a translator, a researcher. He wrote a very wonderful book called Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization, which is a commentary on the Satipatthana Sutta. I regard him as a very authoritative speaker on our tradition. In the book Satipatthana, he said this of the path: "The entire scheme of the gradual training can be envisaged as a progressive refinement of joy." I like this coming from a monk. It's deeply within our tradition, this development and refinement of joy in our practice.

This question of where happiness comes from came to me strongly this past summer. I was sitting in a retreat with a teacher in the Buddhist tradition who is a monk, and I was struck many times during the time that I spent around him by the level of his happiness. It was just very apparent and tangible—one of the most remarkable things about him. He laughed easily. He smiled a lot. He was very playful. I got to see him both behind the scene and in his teaching role. In both settings, he had this joy that was just very easy to touch and contagious. Because of that, he had a certain charisma.

A lot of people loved this monk. I'm not going to say who it is because I don't want to foster a cult of personality, and I don't want to make statements about him that might not be accurate. I want to share my inferences about him, my impressions of this fellow, without being bound to defend particular claims about any individual.

As I watched him, so struck by the degree of his happiness, a question arose in my mind: where did that come from? How can this one person have such a strong experience and expression of happiness? I should mention that this isn't just subjective interpretation. He was taken to one of these MRI machines—you know how they're running tests on advanced meditators? These functional MRIs look directly at the centers of activity in the brain as one is meditating or experiencing the present moment. They recognize certain neural patterns as being indicative of happiness, and his numbers were off the chart, which led some people to call him the happiest person in the world. Of course we can't know that because we haven't all been tested—that person could be here. But at any rate, he had a very high degree of happiness.

I started to reflect: what is that due to? As a practitioner himself, he has had some hand in developing the happiness that he enjoys—maybe a lot of hand in developing that level of happiness. So I began to reflect on what I understand from the Buddha's teachings about the growth of happiness and where it comes

from. I thought that as I understand the teachings, there are basically five ways that the Buddha talked about happiness being developed.

Those are the ways I want to share this evening. The reason I want to do this is to bring happiness out of the realm of the mysterious or the random or the fatalistic—out of a sense of destiny—and communicate my belief that happiness is achievable for each of us by following these practices. I think what the Buddha was pointing to is that we can each create the heart and mind that we wish to have, that we wish to enjoy in this life. These are, I feel, reliable guides to developing our own happiness. As practitioners, it's just a question of faith and then effort to carry out this kind of development.

Let me name the five first and then talk about each one of them. But before I do, I want to say this is not an exhaustive list. There are lots of routes to happiness. I'm sure you have your favorites. Our good friend James has written a book and leads a class called Awakening Joy. He has thousands of followers and it's transformed people's lives—some Buddhist principles, some principles of his own discovery that have helped people find great measures of happiness. They may not all fit in the five I'm going to name tonight. So the list is broader than what I'm going to talk about. You may have your own ways.

I did a short search on the word "happiness" on Amazon this evening before I came, and 20,000 results popped up in the category of books. So there are a lot of books on this topic. In fact, Sylvia told me that when she was writing one of her books—Sylvia Boorstein, who teaches here—her publisher suggested a title and told her that the best-selling books in this general field have three words in the title: freedom, happiness, and easy. So it's a tip for all you authors out there.

These may not all be so easy, but they are all really reliable. They've been tested for thousands of years. They do seem to work.

The five I want to talk about tonight, in kind of increasing order of happiness, are: sense pleasures, merit, concentration, insight, and awakening.

The first is sense pleasures, and it may seem a little odd to hear a Buddhist talk about sense pleasures as a valid type of happiness, because you probably know there are some strong warnings against sense pleasures, especially for monastics, in our tradition. But let me read you the way the Buddha defined the term of sense pleasure and you'll get a sense of their power.

This is from the Samyutta Nikaya, and the Buddha was talking to his attendant Ananda: "Ananda, there are these five chords of sense pleasure. What five? Forms cognizable by the eye"—that basically means sights—"forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, lovely, agreeable, pleasing, sensually enticing, and tantalizing. Sounds cognizable by the ear," using the same description. "Odors cognizable by the nose. Tastes cognizable by the tongue. Sensations cognizable by the body that are desirable, lovely, agreeable, pleasing, sensually enticing, and tantalizing."

Now who can resist that? This is the appeal of sense pleasures. The pleasure and joy that arise in

dependence on these five types of sense contact are called sensual pleasure.

So this is a big part of life as laypeople. I assume for most of us, these five kinds of sense contact and their pleasurable quality constitute a significant portion of what makes lay life enjoyable to the extent that it is.

I was reminded of this recently. Sally and I went to a museum exhibit in the fall—a number of you probably saw it too. The de Young Museum in San Francisco had borrowed many paintings from the Musée d'Orsay in Paris because the museum there was undergoing renovation. They divided the collection into two exhibitions: the first called "The Birth of Impressionism," and the second featuring the post-Impressionists.

In September we went to see this exhibit of some of the greatest French Impressionist painters who ever lived. The works were arranged chronologically, so you walk in seeing the earlier period of Impressionism—paintings by artists like Manet and Degas who were somewhat more on the realistic end. As you move through the exhibit, advancing in time, you eventually reach the later works of Renoir, Monet, and Pissarro.

I noticed as I walked through that a smile began to spread across my face. The beauty of what I was looking at, especially in the later galleries—that raw play of light and color—was simply delightful. I wasn't trying to smile or thinking about smiling; I just observed the smile growing on my face. That's the realm of sense pleasure: beautiful sights, beautiful sounds, beautiful touches that bring a certain uplift to the mind.

Part of what makes our lay life as pleasurable as it is comes from these different kinds of experiences. It could be sharing a wonderful meal with friends at a good restaurant, listening to your favorite music, making love, or enjoying a beautiful sunset.

When we come on retreat, many of these experiences become inaccessible to us. The loss of those sense pleasures is often one of the more difficult adjustments we make entering the retreat experience. You may find yourself missing friends from home, a comfortable chair, television, movies, music, or all the familiar comforts you're accustomed to.

The Buddha spoke of this as part of the sorrow of the renunciate life. Giving up the pleasures of lay life and entering this more austere lifestyle creates conditions for sadness—a natural missing of those things. Over time, as we continue practicing, joy arising from the meditation practice itself gradually takes the place of those missing sense pleasures. But there's a transition period where the mind can feel somewhat sad at moving away from the pleasures of daily life.

As I mentioned, the Buddha offered many warnings about sense pleasures that were specifically directed to monastics. When we read these teachings, we may develop something of a guilt complex about enjoying sense pleasures as laypeople. Let me share just one passage—there are many, but this one is particularly significant.

This comes from the very first discourse the Buddha gave after his awakening, when he set in motion the wheel of the Dhamma. Finding his five former companions in Sarnath, he explained the Four Noble Truths. Before presenting those truths, here's how he prefaced his teaching:

"Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness and sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and unbeneficial. Without veering toward either of these extremes, the Tathagata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision and knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to nibbana."

But notice—this teaching was directed to "those who have gone forth into homelessness," that is, to renunciates. In teachings to monastics, the Buddha also compared sense pleasures to a bone dried up with no meat remaining, or to dreams that are fleeting and insubstantial.

For laypeople, however, the Buddha did not condemn sense pleasures. In fact, he said that one who enjoys sense pleasures may be praised, provided that person has come by their wealth lawfully and uses it not only for personal enjoyment but also shares it to bring happiness to others.

So for laypeople, sense pleasures are perfectly acceptable. For monastics, it's not so much that they're wrong as that they constitute a kind of diversion from the spiritual path.

We have a foot in both worlds. We live our lay lives in the everyday world, and when we come here, we adopt a renunciate lifestyle. It's quite interesting to be in this position where sometimes we're living more or less by a monastic ethos in a renunciate style, while at other times we're fully engaged in lay life.

I feel we must listen to both sides of this discourse to understand when sense pleasures are appropriate and when it's skillful to let them go, as we're practicing here. On retreat, we're practicing mostly in a renunciate style.

But to think that they're wrong for lay people would be misinterpreting the Buddha's teachings. They do give an uplift to the mind, and it's helpful to acknowledge that.

I remember one time Sally and I were having lunch over our kitchen table and we had just pulled some fresh chocolate chip cookies out of the oven. I was eating one, and I remember saying to her, "You know, it's really hard to be unhappy when you're eating a fresh chocolate chip cookie." So just tune into that way that delightful sensual experiences uplift the mind. As lay people, we don't have to resist that or condemn it.

But then the Buddha continues in that quote where he describes the five chords of sense pleasures being lovely and agreeable. He continues in this way: "Though some may say this is the supreme pleasure and joy that beings experience, I would not concede this to them. Why is that? Because there is another kind of

happiness more excellent and sublime than that happiness."

So sense pleasures are just the first in our list, and there are other pleasures more sublime than that. As I was observing this monk who I was around last summer, I looked at his relationship to sense pleasures. As a monk, he doesn't really have a lot of them, so he was not very attached—I never saw him being attached. But I would see him enjoying food and having slight preferences for this kind of food or that kind of food. Sense pleasures didn't play a big role in his life or his happiness.

So the second area of the development of happiness is around this word called merit. Merit is the translation of a Pali term, *puñña*. A lot of Westerners have a real reaction to this term merit. Maybe it reminds us of somebody who was like the teacher's pet at school who always brought the apple in for the teacher. Maybe it reminds us of collecting merit badges when we were in Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts. It just seems a little too goody-goody.

But this translation is in wide use in the Buddhist world. I don't think we're going to change it overnight, so I'm going to use it and live with it. But let me talk a little bit about what *puñña* means. *Puñña* is basically just skillful action or wholesome action—action from a good intention. And the understanding is that when we act from that kind of good intention, a caring intention, a loving intention, a giving intention, then happiness comes from that.

You probably all recall this famous quotation from the Dhammapada, which I think Carol mentioned in her talk last night. This is from the opening verses: "All states come from mind, are preceded by mind, are ruled by mind. Speak and act with a pure mind and happiness will follow you like your shadow, unshakable."

So *puñña* just refers to these acts of speaking and bodily action that come from a pure heart and mind. And the Buddha said, if we always act from that kind of place, happiness comes to us. Happiness follows us like our shadow, unshakable.

As practitioners, as we gain some trust in these teachings, we can take this message to heart as a kind of practice direction. And the more we have faith and trust in this as an avenue, and the more we're inclined to have our actions come from good intentions, loving intentions, generous intentions, we can create for our lives this kind of happy outcome. It's not mysterious. It's not random. It's karmic. It's just one of the outcomes of the law of karma.

In the Buddha's lifetime, his basic instructions for lay people were to do meritorious actions. Most lay people in his time, most lay people in Buddhist countries today, are not interested in pursuing this kind of intensive meditation practice that we're engaged in here. If you go to Thailand or Burma or Sri Lanka, you'll see that the majority of lay people are more interested in doing things like visiting the temples, the nunneries, the monasteries, and making offerings, doing some chanting, doing prayers. But they rarely sit down and practice in the way that we do.

Originally, when I went to Thailand, I thought, "Wow, that's not taking the teachings very seriously." But actually, there's a stream of the Buddha's teachings that is designed for lay people that emphasizes this kind of activity. So even in the Buddha's time, he didn't expect most lay people to practice like this. Generally, at the time of the Buddha, if you wanted to practice like this, you became a renunciate. You became a nun or a monk, at least for a period of time.

Because we have a foot in both worlds, I think it's really good for us to learn about the lay practices as well as these more secluded practices. And I think as teachers, as we brought these teachings to the West, we haven't put very much emphasis on these lay practices, the practices of merit. So partly why I want to mention this tonight is to put it forth as another way that we can bring happiness into our lives as lay people. We don't have to wait for the next retreat. There are lots of things we can do in lay life that encourage this development.

When the Buddha talked about skillful action in terms of merit, he talked about three main activities or three main areas, which in the Pali are known as *dāna*, *sīla*, *bhāvanā*.

Or in English, dana is generosity, sila is virtue or wise conduct, and bhavana is a very interesting word we might translate as mental development or development of heart and mind. When bhavana is used in the sense of merit, it generally refers to the area of loving kindness and compassion.

I'll say a little more about each of these three as excellent practices in lay life.

Generosity is one of the most accessible practices for us as lay people, and it was one the Buddha taught over and over again. It's the first of the ten paramis which were described as the way to Buddhahood. And it's something that you see a lot in Asia. Over the course of this retreat, Carol and I will both probably talk about our experiences of generosity around the monasteries in Asia because it's quite extraordinary. Hanging around this scene for a long time, you just run into some outrageous examples of generosity.

I was coming back from a retreat one time and a woman who had been on the retreat gave me a ride, and I got to hear her story. Her story was that she had been a management consultant—very highly trained, highly functioning professional—until she was about fifty. In the course of her career she had saved quite a bit of money. She had invested in the usual vehicles, plus she had bought property and invested a lot in real estate.

Then she got into meditation practice in our style, Vipassana practice. She was so inspired by the practice and its roots, because she'd visited Asia before, that she decided she wanted to give all her money away and support especially nunneries and also monasteries in Thailand. So she went over to Thailand with the intention of retiring from her career, supporting the nunneries especially and also the monasteries, and then settling down in one of them to live and practice for the rest of her life.

She cashed in her securities. She sold all her real estate around the states except for one property, which she kept. She took the money and started giving it away to these different spiritual centers there. She

settled in and prepared to live out her days in probably a nunnery environment.

But then something happened. She got sick. It was a kind of sickness that was fairly serious, life-threatening, and she felt she needed to come back to the West to get treatment. So she uprooted herself from Thailand. She sort of lost her practice and living situation, came back here, and only had one property left. She sold that to pay for her health care. She got well, fortunately, and then she resumed her career as a management consultant to support herself again. She continued to do meditation practice.

So it was at this point that I met her and heard her story. She'd given away all her money. She had gotten ill, and she had to come out of her retirement to start over again. But what I found so beautiful—she had given away hundreds of thousands of dollars, I don't know the exact amount, it could have even been a million—and then she was almost broke. And she had no regrets. She would have done the same thing again, she said.

For me, that was a really beautiful pointing to the power of generosity because I could see how that impulse had sustained her over the years that she was planning it. When you think about doing something generous—not something you have to do, like giving an uncle a gift because it's his birthday, but something you really want to do—it's joyful to think about that, to think about a gift that would really please someone. When you buy it and then offer it, there's a wonderful feeling because it makes the other person happy. And then afterwards when you reflect on it, you get that warm feeling all over again because it's a beautiful thing to recollect.

So this is the force of generosity. It brightens the mind. It uplifts the mind. It gives us beautiful qualities to reflect on afterwards.

And there's something else that generosity does that's more subtle, often not seen or acknowledged, that I want to point out. Generosity works because we're able to put ourselves in somebody else's shoes. We're able to look at someone else and understand what their need is because we can imagine: if I was in that situation, here's what I might feel and here's what I would need. The generosity really rests on this sense of connectedness or empathy.

Then underlying it is something like: I have so much, they have a certain need, let me give some of what I have so that their life can be improved. Underlying generosity is this deep feeling of connectedness. And I would even go so far as to say some intuition of oneness.

We understand that we're really not separate from the person that we're giving to. We can feel their situation as though it was our own. So we act out of that sense of connection. And when we act and make the offering, that action sets a kind of karmic seed in the mind that implants that sense of connectedness even more deeply. Acting on a belief through our body and through our words implants that in our karmic stream more solidly. So that's part of the power of the act of giving.

The second of the bases of merit, as the Buddha called them, is this quality of sila—virtue, or wise conduct,

or integrity. We all know what that feels like when we violate it. We know that it causes harm to others and it causes a lot of remorse in ourselves. Similarly, when we know someone who has a lot of integrity, they create a kind of zone of safety around them. When you're around someone who's very careful with their conduct, you feel safe, the other people that come into contact with them feel safe, and conduct is generally good around that person. I mean, how many people do cruel things around the Dalai Lama? I bet not very many.

So that sense of integrity creates an atmosphere of safety. Everyone who comes into that presence can feel it or is touched by it, benefits from it. The Buddha talked about this kind of integrity as being a different kind of gift. He says that when we follow care with our conduct, we're giving unlimited beings freedom from fear. This is the gift of harmlessness that we offer when we take care with our own conduct.

The third of the bases of merit is this factor called bhavana, or mental development. I just want to mention the etymology here. The word bhava in Pali means being or existence or becoming. It refers to a quality of coming into existence. The bhavana makes an emphasis on the kind of process that's going on. So what I think of the word bhavana as pointing to is bringing into existence or bringing into becoming. It's often a synonym for meditation. So it really refers to when we do certain practices, we are bringing those qualities into existence in our hearts and minds.

Bhavana is often associated in this basis of merit framework with the practice of loving-kindness, generating a loving heart, a compassionate heart toward ourselves and others. I love this image that when we practice loving-kindness, we're creating our heart. We're bringing our heart into being. That is part of the gift that practice offers us. This is really what we're doing with all of our meditation practice—we're bringing ourselves into being in a beautiful way.

There was a French poet, Paul Valéry, an imagist poet who wrote toward the end of the 19th century. One of his unpublished works from his lifetime were his private notebooks that he wrote in every day. He kept a long series of these things called cahiers, notebooks. He did them very consciously as a spiritual practice. When they were published posthumously, you could read through and they were not just his poems, but his reflections on his readings and some poems and some essays and his thoughts on a wide, wide range of topics. But he did it as a spiritual practice. And he put it this way: he said, other people are writing books, but I am making my mind.

That's the sense of bhavana. With bhavana, we make our mind and heart. We shape it in the direction that we choose. And in this sense of merit, we shape it toward loving-kindness, compassion, and connection.

Here's what the Buddha said about the fruits of merit from dana, sila, bhavana: "There are these streams of merit, streams of the wholesome, nourishments of happiness, which are heavenly, ripening in happiness, and which lead to whatever is wished for, loved and agreeable, to one's welfare and happiness."

It's understood in our tradition that these streams of merit lead to the fulfillment of our aspirations—whatever that aspiration is. So the streams of merit may lead to different results for different people. They lead to what each of us wishes for. If what we wish for is a comfortable life in the world and some material prosperity and basically harmony of mind, then the accumulation of merit can lead in that direction. If what we wish for is true freedom of heart and mind, or liberation, then the streams of merit will lead in that direction, of course if also supported by wisdom.

These are very helpful things for us to develop and actualize. They lead to what is wished for. When I looked at the lifestyle of this monk that I was around last summer, I could see the merit just being formed all the time with him. He was very generous with his time, with his teaching, with sharing his understanding. He was someone who took very little personal time for himself, but was always involved in activities that gave to others, receiving people, reaching out.

He went into this deep absorption that lasted three days. His parents tried calling his name, shaking him, but he was completely unreachable. They became quite frightened and called other people to help, but nothing worked. Finally, after three days, he naturally emerged from this state.

When he came out, he told his parents that it had been the most wonderful experience of his life - far better than playing with the other children. From that moment on, he became passionate about meditation. By the age of twelve, he was teaching meditation to adults in his village.

Meeting Ajahn Jumnian is an extraordinary experience. He carries this quality of deep peace and steadiness that you can feel immediately. There's something almost magnetic about being in his presence. This is the power of well-developed samadhi - it creates a field of peace around a person that others can sense and benefit from.

This brings us to the fourth avenue to happiness, which is wisdom or insight - the Pali word *panna*. While the other three paths can bring temporary happiness and peace, wisdom offers something more permanent. Wisdom sees through the fundamental delusions that create suffering in the first place.

The Buddha taught that there are three root causes of suffering: greed, hatred, and delusion. Wisdom directly addresses delusion - our fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of reality. When we see clearly how things actually are, rather than how we imagine them to be, suffering naturally decreases.

The insights that bring this freedom are not intellectual understandings, though intellectual understanding can support them. Rather, they are direct, experiential realizations that change our relationship to life at the most fundamental level.

One of the most powerful of these insights is the recognition of impermanence. When we truly see that everything is constantly changing - including ourselves - we begin to hold everything more lightly. We stop grasping so tightly to experiences, relationships, and even our own identity, because we understand that everything is in flux.

Another crucial insight is understanding what the Buddha called *anatta* or not-self. This doesn't mean we don't exist, but rather that what we think of as "self" is much more fluid and interdependent than we usually imagine. When this is seen clearly, the desperate need to defend and promote the ego relaxes, and a natural compassion emerges.

The third fundamental insight is recognizing that trying to find lasting satisfaction in changing conditions leads to suffering - what the Buddha called *dukkha*. When we truly understand this, we stop looking for happiness in all the wrong places and begin to find the peace that doesn't depend on external circumstances.

So his father knew what was going on because he had been a strong meditator himself. He knew that this young boy had fallen into a strong state of concentration, but the boy wouldn't surrender it. So the father kept talking to him, saying, "You're in a strong state of meditation. Come out. You can find it again. Don't worry." Ajahn Jinnian wouldn't leave. And of course, you know what would reach a young boy. His mother talked to him. So his mother finally sweet-talked him and told him how worried they were about him, and her heart was heavy with worry. Finally he came out, responding to her love.

Once they realized that he had this talent, they began to train him both in vipassana style and concentration styles of meditation. He developed a very strong concentration practice. You can feel that in him today. He has very high energy. I've never seen him get tired. I've never seen him unhappy. He says that he hasn't had anger in twenty-five years. And I believe it. Every time I see him, he's energetic and happy.

So when he was first coming to Spirit Rock, we thought, well, maybe he'd like to go out sightseeing in the area, you know—Point Reyes, Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco. People would ask him, "Would you like to go to see the ocean? Would you like to go to see the city? Would you like to go to see the bay?" And his answer would always be the same. He'd say, "You know, if you want to take me somewhere, I'm happy to go. But are there people who'd like to hear the Dharma? Then I'd like to teach them the Dharma. But if you want me to go, I'll be happy there. And I'll be happy teaching the Dharma. I'll be happy anywhere. So it's all okay with me." But there were usually people who wanted to hear the Dharma, so Ajahn Jinnian would give teachings there.

He had a kind of bubbly, infectious energy that partly came from his depth of concentration and loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is a path to concentration as well. So just to know, this is one of the factors that develops very naturally on these kinds of retreats. I think Carol mentioned that this morning in response to a question. What you're doing now in your vipassana practice will develop concentration very strongly as long as you apply that moment-to-moment mindfulness.

So concentration will develop for all of you while you're here. Some people choose to take a long period of time like this and devote it to especially strengthening this factor of concentration. And Carol mentioned some specific practices called samatha practices that we offer. And for those, there will be a few people on

this retreat practicing those particular kinds of practice out of a particular interest. But that quality will develop for all of you.

So I'd just like to read one description from the Buddha about one of the states that develops from strong concentration. This is a description of the first jhana. There are eight jhanas in all, so this is the entry point: "She enters and abides in the first jhana with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. She makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, fill, steep, and pervade her body so that there is no part of her whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure."

When this experience is accessible, imagine your whole body being filled with rapture and pleasure and being so fully in the present moment that there's no worry about the future and no regret about the past. That state brings a certain degree of happiness. Again, it's temporary, so we can't pin our whole meditation career on temporary states. But it's a very strong experience and gives a lot of confidence, a lot of happiness.

One of the things I noticed about the monk that I was with is that he had a lot of inner peace and a lot of stillness. Even in a busy day—we had to go out, give teachings outside, come back, give teachings, meet people, film videos—his mind was very balanced, steady, and still through it all. A lot of practice had gone into that.

The fourth of the areas of the development of happiness is insight, or we could call this wisdom. We're going to be talking about this a lot over this month.

This is the theme of this retreat, really. So I'm not going to spend much time on it tonight.

Just to say that as we pay close mindful attention to our experience, we feel its individual characteristics. A breath is long or short, relaxed or constricted, calming or agitating. We feel each breath differently.

But as we pay close attention, we also start to notice the universal characteristics of the phenomena that we're paying attention to. We notice every phenomenon we pay attention to is of the nature of arising and passing. Everything comes and goes. This comes very naturally out of bare moment-to-moment attention to what we're experiencing.

As we notice this coming and going of everything, the truth of impermanence just becomes more and more obvious. Sometimes it's presented in dramatic ways in our practice. Sometimes it's presented in more subtle ways. But that truth comes home to us. I'd say every day in a long retreat like this, as we see that again and again at deeper and deeper levels, we see everything's coming and going. What sense does it make to hang on to what's naturally passing? It really doesn't.

So we learn not to cling as much, not to hold on as much, because nothing is lasting very long. That light approach to our experience gives a lightness of mind. And that was another thing I very much appreciated about this monk. He didn't seem to take anything too seriously. He touched everything he did with a very

light heart and a light gesture. A lot of ease came out of that understanding of the nature of things.

The fifth element, avenue to happiness, is the quality of awakening itself. As insight deepens, stillness settles in very new and, I could say, unshakable forms. There's the possibility of the mind opening to that which is unchanging beyond the phenomena that are arising and passing. This is what's referred to in our tradition as the process of awakening, the opening to this unconditioned element.

When that awakening happens at different degrees for different individuals, it has the power of removing from the mind altogether certain kinds of stains or fetters that bring suffering. In the end, it has the potential to remove all the causes of unhappiness from the mind stream permanently. And that is what the Buddha referred to as the complete end of suffering.

This is possible through the deepening of insight and this experience of awakening. This is really what's referred to as the experience of full liberation, full awakening, full enlightenment. When the mind is so free from the causes of suffering that it can really be said to be completely released and freed.

So I asked this monk about the experience of freedom, the causes of freedom to this degree, and his response was, the primary cause of that freedom is happiness.

So all the other practices that we do—enjoyment of our lay life, the development of merit, cultivating the quality of concentration and developing wisdom through insight—all those streams can go into the access to and the release of this factor of liberation, the highest kind of happiness that the Buddha talked about.

So let's just please sit together for a minute in silence and let the words settle.

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