

The Gift of Joy: Muditā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

Consider the many nouns we have for joy: pleasure, enjoyment, happiness, gladness, delight, thrill, exultation, elation, bliss, ecstasy, rapture. And it is all good! The Buddha was asked how he felt when people did not accept his teaching. He said he was OK with that. It was all to do with the person's karma. But if they did accept and followed his teaching, he was joyful. Yet in terms of practice like Mettā, no teacher of mine gave us an exercise to develop joy. But whenever I would point to something beautiful, my Burmese teacher reminded me it would corrupt and die! They were afraid of the attachment. Which is that desire to want more or more of the same. That's why the Buddha asks us to exercise restraint! However, the fear of indulgence can undermine joy. There was a Western monk who was the picture of an ascetic, thin, serious with shallow cheeks. When we were offered the delicious Buffalo curd, he waited till we had all but finished. Then he picked up the dessert bowl and tipped it down his throat, for fear of tasting its deliciousness! Of course, the seeds of greed are always there ready to be indulged. But whenever we have had a joyful time, if we become aware of the desire for more and just wait for it to expire, we will have undermined the greed that was activated there. We can use joy to lift our hearts - Restorative Joy. Wandering around a park, meeting up with a friend, watching a good film all go to lift us out of the dumps. The monastic life can become very samey. Nothing much happens. And sometimes I found myself moving towards dullness, apathy. Only then did I realise the power of a long, mindful mug of tea. Muditā is often translated as Appreciative or Reciprocal joy - the joy in other's joy. This undermines envy and jealousy. And that in itself makes us happier. To find you can actually be more joyful for another than yourself can be a revelation. This is not so strange to parents when a daughter or son finds success. Why is it we remember mostly the painful occasions of the day? Because they hurt! But in so doing, they shadow out the joys. If you sit quietly at the end of the day and count the joys, you may be surprised to find you can't really bring any to mind. Yet there will have been lots of joys, at various levels throughout the day. We simply don't note them. How to increase our joy. A resolution to daily acknowledge the joys that come our way and purposefully develop joy. Write them up daily and see how you feel at the end of the week. Spend a week recalling all the joys of your life so far. It's not been that bad after all. Practice developing joy as you would Mettā, going through all the categories. May I/you be joyful! May I/you be ever more joyful! (optional) May I/you attain the sublime bliss of Nibbana. Highly recommended spiritual practice!

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