

Envy, Jealousy and Appreciative Joy

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

It's ok to say, 'I envy you'. It's a way of praising someone, but also showing that we would like what they have. I know a monk who was an abbot and retired from that position. When he told me, he brought out in me a desire to lessen my teaching rota and spend more time on retreat and study. When I told him that I envied him, there was no 'coveting' for what he had, but I saw it a spur to move in the direction I wanted to. But the problem comes when we 'covet' what the other has. That's the 'keeping up with the Jones's' compulsion. And that's all to do with proving oneself equal or better than the other. It's a fool's game. The antidote is to be grateful for what we have. To discern what we need rather than what we want. This allows for a greater contentment. Not that we cannot better our situation, but it is not done in comparison to someone else. Jealousy is a darker state. Here there is not only wanting what the other has, but hating them for having it. This aversion can disguise itself as righteous criticism of the other. We can be dismissive of their achievements, their possessions. But there is a deeper comparison here, not of possessions, position and so on, but of egos. At worse the person nurtures a revenge for the shame they feel the other causes them - and yet be oblivious to their own jealousy! To accept we are jealous is to realise we are defining ourselves as inferior! That's hard on self-esteem. Indeed, we can even be in such denial that we project our jealousy onto them and fool ourselves into thinking that they are the ones who are jealous of us! One of the blessings of the noting technique in our practice is that it can make us acknowledge this difficult attitude. The antidote to all of this is appreciative or empathetic joy, *mudita*. First, as soon as we catch ourselves indulging our jealousy, we stop the thinking and imagining and see if we can feel the emotional value of the attitude in the body. If we can, if there's time, we stay there feeling and acknowledging its unwholesome and very unpleasant feelings. If there is no time or we cannot wait till the feelings exhaust themselves, then we put them to one side. Remember this is not suppressing them, but simply not identifying with them, not indulging them. And we then rejoice in the successes of the other. When we feel envious of what another has or achieves, we can praise their work, rejoice in their luck. When jealousy is aroused, we can praise not just what they have achieved, but their abilities and characters. And then wish them greater success – even through gritted teeth!

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