

Dharma Talk 8/27/2022 Zen, Joy and Happiness

Introductions: name location etc

chris: Our intention behind the talk today is to provide food for thought and small group discussion.

Don't Hesitate by Mary Oliver

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes something happens better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that's often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

Dear friends,

How are you? Is your joy a crumb? Are you afraid of its plenty? Or do you revel in it? Do you wish it would stay a little longer and you'd do anything to make that happen?

Maybe I should say some words about joy, maybe like a joke explained, I will miss the feel of joy by talking about it. I would like to speak not about the kind of happiness advertised in shiny magazines, where perfectly tanned people lean against sailboat railings under a brilliant blue sky, not about the happiness that will certainly arrive when the right spouse is found or the house is built or when the kids leave home, because this is when happiness will most certainly arrive. And how about all the movies that end with the main actor driving or riding into the sunset and we know that the world is all right. Do we feel like this when we drive into the sunset? And why not?

Like every moment in which we live, moments of joy are dharma gates. Present moment dharmas to be felt and explored. We are fortunate in that we are practitioners, that we sit zazen. Dogen said: "The zazen I speak of is not learning meditation. It is simply the dharma gate of repose and bliss, the practice-realization of totally culminated enlightenment/It is the manifestation of ultimate reality. Traps and snares will never reach it."

Nowadays, I appreciate these lines, though, I confess, when I started out, I thought they were ridiculous. Here I was in sesshin, my body hurting so bad that I could feel every heartbeat in my knees. Where was the repose and bliss Dogen praised? Not here. Definitely not here right now. That is where I was wrong. Repose and bliss can only be here, right now. Anything else may be a dream or a wish--including the implied uncertainty, or a memory which includes much continuous editing.

6This is Dogen's understanding of zazen, this is what he means by original nature, your buddha-nature. This wish to be happy and the wish for everyone to be happy are the contents of buddha-nature. They're what buddha-nature actually means.

The second theme I am bringing up today is one of the brahma viharas or noble abodes. The four of them are

1. loving-kindness or benevolence (maitrī/ mettā)
2. compassion (karuṇā)
3. empathetic joy (muditā)
4. equanimity (upekṣā/upekkhā)

Sympathetic joy (Pāli and Sanskrit: muditā): is the feeling of joy because others are happy, even if one did not contribute to it, it is a form of sympathetic joy. When we practice mudita, we imagine that the success or benefit that someone else is enjoying is also your own success or benefit. When someone wins, even if you have opposed them in the process, you train yourself to say, "How wonderful; this joy is mine also." Look for opportunities to replace your habitual way of thinking with the discipline of thinking in this new way.

According to the Metta Sutta, the practice of the four immeasurables increases the chance of rebirth into a "Brahma realm" which is definitely considered great real estate. A sidenote for fellow geeks: the four Brahmavihara meditation practices "did not originate within the Buddhist tradition". The Buddha never claimed that the "four immeasurables" were his unique ideas

It is most common to practice metta, loving kindness meditation, but in truth they are to be practiced equally. I find them so incredibly challenging at times. But I have also noticed that I experience great benefit especially when the practice has been hard. The barriers I create can be pretty solid and it takes real work to take them down. Sometimes, in the beginning, And so there's a tendency to try to force or manufacture an idea of how that emotion is supposed to feel, which often leads to the exact opposite, to emotions of frustration, self-judgement, and other expressions of aversion.

In Buddhism, to nurture a healthier mental life requires that we cultivate an attitude of respect for other living beings. Respect, not because there is anything special about them, but simply because they are alive and therefore part of the network of life. I can feel for animals, plants and the earth – easily. I confess that at times I have a hard time with humans. I am grateful that Nomon Tim made joy the theme of our day together. It brought back that I used to do these practices regularly. I think it is time to start it up again. Although, in many ways the long-term practice did seep into my heart and mind. Nevertheless, I did have strong emotions around mudita in the 2016 election.

Thank you very much if you are being willing to give it a try. I hope that your practice with mudita today was enjoyable. To feel love, the joy of others – this is an expansive experience. But perhaps also you could see that it's not necessarily always so easy to generate sympathetic joy especially if you don't like the other person so much. When on our cushions, maybe we could do it. It's easier to feel this way when you are sitting on your cushion, as opposed to daily life when people, in general, seem

not to be so lovable.