

Notes and Quotes for March 13, 2022 Dharma Reflections:

“The Four Immeasurables”: Sympathetic Joy

Mudita as an Immeasurable:

For a little introduction to the meanings and import of Mudita, see this overview:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mudita>

“The root of the Pali word *Mudita* means ‘to be pleased, to have a sense of gladness.’ The Buddha called mudita ‘the mind-deliverance of gladness,’ because this force of happiness actually liberates us. Unlike a state of mere excitement or giddiness, the quality of sympathetic joy challenges our deep assumptions about aloneness, loss, and happiness, and shows us another possibility. It defeats many of the qualities of consciousness that bind us.

“So much of our unhappy condition as living beings comes from the constricting effect of our negativity toward each other. We limit ourselves, and we limit others. We judge each other, compare ourselves to each other, demean and envy each other, and we ourselves suffer the strangling effects of these limitations. Because there are so many constricting mind states that are impediments to mudita, sympathetic joy is considered the most difficult of all the brahmaviharas to develop. But so potent is this quality that expressing it can defeat the aversion and attachment that bind us.”

-Sharon Salzberg, *Loving-Kindness—The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*, Shambala Classics, 1995, pp.119-120.

“Let us here... only summarize the main points of what meditative insight and psychological understanding tell us about *mudita*:

- a. Envy, miserliness, jealousy, scorn, mockery, and competitiveness are accompanied by bitterness, outrage, and malaise—they do not give a person a good feeling; they do not make a person happy.
- b. Generosity and selflessness make it possible for us also to perceive others’ success and happiness as an occasion for joy.
- c. The more I am able selflessly to identify myself with those who are happy and successful, the sooner I will myself be able to accomplish the same.
- d. The greater the capacity I have to perceive the occasions for joy, the more often will happy experiences arise and the greater will be my capacity for happiness.

“...Through the cultivation of selflessness... we extend the sphere of joyful occasions also to the happy experiences of others. We realize that our own chances of being happy are greater the happier the beings around us are.

“...as a trigger for *mudita*, you can use a formula such as this one:

“Well done! This person is happy.
Suffering in my surroundings has been reduced
and through this my own prospects for happiness have improved!”

- From Myrko Fryba, *The Art of Happiness—Teachings of Buddhist Psychology*, Shambhala, 1989, pp.175-176.

“At Christmastime a favorite carol is ‘Joy to the World.’ In this song ‘heaven and nature sing.’ In one verse, ‘Fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy.’ One Christmas, my husband Charles asked our Zen group, ‘How do the rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy?’”

- From Ellen Birx, Ph.D., R.N., *Healing Zen—Buddhist Wisdom on Compassion, Caring, and Caregiving—for Yourself and Others*, Penguin Compass, 2002, p. 196.

“Joy can be harder to understand and access than compassion. I have noticed that many people, particularly in western cultures, find it easier to experience compassion in the face of pain than joy in the midst of the lovely. It seems especially difficult to experience empathetic joy, joy for the good fortune of others. The reason may be that in the competitive culture we live in, comparing ourselves to others appears to be necessary, especially given the lack of a safety net for so many. What one person has, another person does not. It affects our Dharma understanding, causing the sense that there is a limited amount of joy to go around. We imagine that if someone else is joyful we will not be. This is actually not so. (pp.116-117)

“*Don’t-know mind* is another word for joy, and *joy* is another word for wonder. Wonder is a sensing of the sacred and is not dependent on conditions and circumstances. Joy is a natural consequence of releasing and recognizing that conditions are largely out of our control. We practice reserving our judgments, willing to see in new ways. Don’t-know mind is a mind that is spacious rather than narrow and confined. In this spaciousness is a tangible sense of gentleness. The willingness to inquire with a silent mind provides access to a life of wonder. Just before the Zen teacher Joko Beck died, she reportedly said: ‘This too is wonder.’” (p.128)

- From Narayan Helen Liebenson, *The Magnanimous Heart—Compassion and Love, Loss and Grief, Joy and Liberation*, Wisdom Publications, 2018.

“In the traditional teachings of the boundless abodes, joy is primarily referred to as empathic, altruistic, or appreciative joy. It speaks to our capacity to celebrate, honor, and rejoice in the happiness and well-being of another.... Yet for us to know this specific dimension of joy, it is essential for us to know the vastness of the landscape of joy.... (p.86)

“Tasting joy requires discipline; it does not require us to disengage with life. The discipline involved in cultivating joy is not a discipline of forcing or striving; it is a discipline of kindness. How easily we put the care of our own heart at the very bottom of our list of things to do. Making room for joy asks us to learn how to pause and rest in the busyness of our days, to use our sense doors wisely to see and listen wholeheartedly. To make time and space for stillness is to make time and space for appreciation and gladness. Joy does ask us to disentangle from the world of anxiety and relentless busyness. One of the classical teachers, Patrul Rinpoche, said, ‘Preoccupations do not end until the moment we die. They end when we put them down. This is their nature.’” (p.89)

-from *Boundless Heart—The Buddha’s Path of Kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity*, Christina Feldman, Shambhala, 2017.

“Choose for yourself the kind of reality you wish to inhabit. If you don’t, bombardment with stimuli from the news media and so forth will force you to internalize a perspective that someone else has chosen for you. And that vision of reality is not necessarily in your best interests. When you see causes of happiness in others—some kindness here, a bit of courtesy there—pause and delight in that.

– B. Alan Wallace, *Genuine Happiness – Meditation as the Path to Fulfillment*, Wiley, 2005, p. 144.

“The meditation on joy brings into question everything that was trained into you by any system, including your family, education, profession, and culture. You feel that your way of life, your values, your beliefs, and your sense of purpose in life are being threatened. They are. The fierce resistance you encounter in seeing the values and beliefs as patterns and not absolutes indicates how thoroughly various systems have instilled their values and beliefs in you.”

- Ken McLeod, *Wake up to your Life - Discovering the Buddhist Path of Attention*, Harper San Francisco, 2001, p.290.

“In the Tibetan Buddhist practice of rejoicing in the good, it’s perfectly appropriate to start with yourself. This is a tremendously rich practice, and it’s so simple. There’s no notion of

achievement, you just do it and it's immediately beneficial.

“Rejoicing, especially when directed towards our own virtues, entails looking back on our own behavior, our aspirations and yearnings, then pausing and just delighting where we note that they are wholesome in nature. Maybe you've practiced meditation with a pure motivation and derived some benefit from it. Rather than just moving on, attend to your past practice, recognize that you have done something good, and take delight in it.”

- B. Alan Wallace, *The Four Immeasurables—Practices to Open the Heart*, Snow Lion, 2010, pp.145-146.

“Rejoicing itself is a positive action that creates positive energy, or ‘merit.’ Merit is like fuel that enables us to progress along the spiritual path and reach liberation and enlightenment; it is also the cause of happiness and good experiences along the way. Rejoicing is relatively easy to practice—we can even do it lying in bed or at the beach—and it immediately makes our mind more positive, happy, and peaceful. All we have to do is think of and feel happy about positive things people are doing, like helping the needy, making donations, living ethically, practicing meditation, or even just being kind and caring to their family, friends, and neighbors.”

-from *Awakening the Kind Heart—How to Meditate on Compassion*, Kathleen McDonald, Wisdom, 2010, pp. 97-98.

“...we must begin by cultivating them (the four immeasurables) toward specific individuals and extend them in stages so they become immeasurable and heartfelt toward all sentient beings.

“Empathetic joy is expressed as wishing all beings to attain liberation—the state of undeclining peace that is free from sorrow—as well as rejoicing in their virtuous actions that create the causes for happiness and wishes them never to be separated from whatever worldly happiness they have.

“The great Nyingma master Longchenpa (1308-1363) makes empathic joy more immediate by emphasizing its relationship to sentient beings' buddha nature. Because we want them to experience the joy of awakening, we rejoice that they already have the blissful, pure nature of mind that enables that awakening to be possible.”

-In *Praise of Great Compassion* – vol. 5 in *The Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron, 2020, Wisdom Publications, p. 41.

“Boundless joy is the joy you should feel when you see gifted and learned beings who are happy, famous, or influential. Instead of feeling uneasy and envious of their good fortune, rejoice sincerely, thinking, ‘May they continue to be happy and enjoy even more happiness!’ Pray too that they may use their wealth and power to help others, to serve the Dharma and the Sangha, making offerings, building monasteries, propagating the teachings, and performing other worthwhile deeds. Rejoice and make a wish: ‘May they never lose all their happiness and privileges. May their happiness increase more and more, and may they use it to benefit others and to further the teachings.’”

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, *The Excellent Path to Enlightenment: Oral Teachings on the Root Text of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo*, in Volume Two of *The Collected Works of Dilgo Khyentse*, Shambhala, 2010, p. 40.

“Rejoicing practice involves modest labor with a tremendous gain. Before we actually practice rejoicing, we must be able to appreciate the merit of others as equal to our own. In order to do that, we must lose some of our dualistic thinking regarding merit, as in, ‘It’s mine; it’s others’.’ ...If we can actually get to the point where, in the context of the practice of *bodhichitta*, we give up our lives and possessions as well as ‘our’ merit for the enlightenment of all beings and for their security and freedom, we will be able to let go of our self-importance. Then we can easily get to the point of rejoicing in others’ merit, being able to praise others’ merit with tremendous sincerity and a genuine heart.” (p.50)

“You hear so many great stories. Somebody is building a 108-foot-tall Guru Rinpoche statue, while someone else is building a great stupa or a big monastery, or a lama is supporting and honoring many monks. If you can rejoice in these great deeds, you can actually earn all of that merit too. It really doesn’t have to be happening here on ‘my property’; it doesn’t have to be ‘my doing,’ ‘my this,’ or ‘my that.’ That’s a very limited perspective. If you’re starting something, that’s wonderful. But if you aren’t starting something, that doesn’t mean you can’t rejoice and have a tremendous sense of appreciation of the fact that somebody else is doing it.

“I very much request you all to consider rejoicing as a practice that can shape our psychology and our sense of contentment. It helps us get over our own lack of appreciation of the world and the goodness in it. By rejoicing, we can truly be on the side of virtue.” (p.53)

“Right after you rejoice, dedicate the merit. Whether it is your own merit or that of others, you could actually rejoice in the merit and dedicate that over and over. Constantly rejoicing and dedicating could be your main practice.” (p.55)

-Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, *Uncommon Happiness—The Path of the Compassionate Warrior*, Ranjung Yeshe Publications, 2009.

Possible Discussion Starting Points

1. Several of the authors say that mudita is the most difficult of the four immeasurables to put into practice. Has this been your experience? Why do you suppose this might be the case for many practitioners?
2. What do you think Narayan Helen Liebenson is getting at when she asserts, “*Don’t-know mind* is another word for joy?”
3. Using various arguments, several of the authors contend that practicing mudita will make you happier, will advance you spiritually, will heap up merit, will grease the skids towards enlightenment. Does this make sense to you?
4. Christina Feldman reports that “cultivating joy... is a discipline... a discipline of kindness.” What does this phrase evoke in you?
5. Using Dilgo Khyentse’s descriptions, what sorts of folks do you have the most difficulty brining up joy for, “happy, famous, or influential,” or the wealthy or powerful? Are there other “classes” of beings you get stuck on?
6. How do the “fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy?”
7. Can you imagine how lifting up your heart to sincerely rejoice in the merit of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, other enlightened beings, and of all ordinary samsaric beings—can you imagine how this might bring your mindstream into the sharing of that merit?