



OPEN EYE

Meditation Group

See for Yourself

Joy as a Path to Liberation

Pali Canon | Joy - The Buddha

The awakened one, the Buddha, said: Here, one lets one's mind pervade one quarter of the world with thoughts of unselfish joy, and so the second, and so the third, and so the fourth. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around, everywhere and equally, he continues to pervade with a heart of unselfish joy, abundant, grown great, measureless, without hostility or ill-will.

Pali Canon MN 36 -The Buddha

"I thought: 'I recall once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, then — quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful mental qualities — I entered & remained in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. Could that be the path to Awakening?' Then following on that memory came the realization: 'That is the path to Awakening.

Joy - Bhante Vimalaramsi (transcript taken from a talk)

Because I'm a Buddhist monk, I'm going to give you a Buddhist perspective, but it's not really going to be much different from what you already know. One of the things that the Buddha did, was, he taught very much in depth how mind works. And the talk that we heard this morning was great, a very good talk, and I would only add one thing to that, and that is: when the Hawaiian family was all together, and they finally worked out the problem, the healing factor that happened to the child, was the joy of the release of that attachment. And what I want to talk to you today is, about today is, — how to develop joy all the time. Now, I've been in the healing arts for probably forty years. And twenty years ago, I had to make a decision on which path I wanted to follow for the healing — whether I wanted to be a hands-on healer, or I wanted to do the next level of healing. And

I decided that I wanted to do the spiritual healing. So I became a Buddhist monk. And I studied very hard and I practiced a lot of meditation.

I hear people that are teaching meditation now, and they said: "Oh, I did one three-month retreat and that was really something, and now I can teach." And I've done twelve or fifteen of those. And I did an eight-month retreat in Burma, very intensive — getting up at 3 o'clock in the morning, meditating till 11 o'clock at night. The last three months I was there, I was going to bed at midnight and getting up at two. So, I've done a lot of very intensive meditation. What I found out later, after I got out of Burma, I also did a two-year retreat, which was about as intensive. Intensive means I didn't talk to anybody but the teacher, and all I did was sitting meditation, walking meditation, and I did that for hours and hours on end. I went through what they said was the "final result", and I was not satisfied with that. So, I left Burma and I came back, and I did an eight - month fairly intensive, this was only about twelve hours a day, so a fairly intensive meditation. But I did it with Loving-Kindness meditation, not with the vipassana or the one-pointed kind of concentration that is generally being taught in the world today. When I got done with that, I was invited to start up a monastery in a suburb of Kuala Lumpur. And they asked me to start teaching Loving- Kindness meditation. Now, almost everybody in Malaysia that was practicing meditation, they were practicing a form of meditation called vipassana. When you practice vipassana, mind has a tendency to get a little bit critical, a little bit hard, a little bit judgmental, "I'm right, I don't care what your experience is, I know what the experience is", things like that. And when they would get done with a vipassana retreat, they would say things and do things that were very harsh to other people. They were hurting other people's feelings. And they'd come running to me, and they'd say: "I have to do a retreat with you, when's your next retreat?" And I was giving one-week retreats, with Loving-Kindness.

Now, when you practice Loving-Kindness meditation, it is a smiling meditation, and this is incredibly important. There was a study done in the University of Minnesota, I think, I can't remember, it's been long ago - on the corners of your mouth. When the corners of your mouth go down, your mental state goes down. When the

corners of your mouth go up, your mental state goes up. So I said: "OK, that's a key to having joy arise." You've got to smile. And these people would come and they'd say: "OK, I'll do the meditation with you", and they would come after the first day and they'd say: "This is a phoney smile." And I would say: "I don't care whether it's phoney or not, keep smiling." The more you smile, the more uplifted your mind becomes. As you start to have more and more uplifted mind, you are naturally starting to develop joy. When you have joy in your mind, your mind is very alert; your mind is very bright. And it's real easy to see when there's not any joy in your mind. It's real easy to see when you have one of the emotional things that arise whenever, something unpleasant happened – sadness, depression, anxiety, stress, whatever the catch of the day happens to be. It's real easy to see that you're caught by that, when you notice you don't have joy. So what did I tell people to do? I told them they had to smile. And the more you smile, the easier it gets, the more uplifted your mind becomes, and the more actual healing there is that takes place. Joy is the real healer. And it just so happens in Buddhism, there are things called seven factors of enlightenment. And the first factor is mindfulness, the next one is investigation of your experience, the next one is energy, the next one is joy – that's right in the middle of the enlightenment factors. After that there is tranquillity, there's collectedness, and then there's equanimity. But for our purpose here, we want to focus on joy.

Why is joy right in the middle of that mass? Because that is the balancing factor between putting too much energy into trying to control things, and not enough energy into trying to control things. The more you see joy arise in your daily activities, the more magic you can manifest. Why? You are going to worry about something - you have joy in your mind – no room. I was... We have a chat group for meditation basically, and there was a man from Australia that wrote and he said that he'd been practicing meditation for six years very intensively, and he thought he was missing something, so he asked me to help him. And I told him: "OK, what kind of practice were you doing?" And he was doing a breathing meditation. Now, when I teach breathing meditation, that's a little bit different, because I follow what the Buddha was talking about directly in the suttas. When you do your breathing meditation, you know when you have a long breath, you know when you have a short breath. You know when your breath is coarse, you know when your breath is fine. You know when your breath is fast, you know when your breath is slow. Then the instructions happen, and the instructions say: "Experience your entire body on the in-breath, experience your entire body on the out-breath." Then the instructions say,

and this is the important part, it says: "Tranquillise your bodily formation on the in-breath and tranquillise your bodily formation on the out-breath." What does that mean? When you breathe, there is tension and tightness. Relax. On the in-breath – relax, on the out-breath – relax.

Now, when I teach mindfulness of breathing, I also tell him that this is a smiling meditation too, and he didn't much like that idea, because he liked the idea of being serious: "I'm going to do this practice and I'm going to try real hard." And all that tension that arises... So, he had resistance to smiling. Now, he was doing the same kind of practice basically, except for this one extra step of relaxing. And he was not making any progress at all. He was still caught in the old ways of practice, so I said: "OK, I don't want you to do that practice anymore; I want you to switch over and do Loving-Kindness meditation." Loving-Kindness meditation is sending loving and kind thoughts purposefully to your spiritual friend. A spiritual friend is somebody of the same sex. If you send loving and kind thoughts to a person of the opposite sex, your mind will tend to become infatuated and you don't want that to happen. Now, it doesn't happen when you're doing it on the surface level, but when you are doing it deeply this kind of thing can happen, so you pick someone of the same sex. And, you make a wish for their happiness. The wish can be any kind of positive wish you want to make – doesn't matter. The trick is – you have to feel that wish. You make a wish for somebody so that they are peaceful and calm. You know how it feels like to be peaceful and calm? Of course. Bring that feeling into your heart. Put your friend right in the middle of that feeling and give them a great big heart-hug with the feeling of peace and calm. Radiate that feeling.

Now, the thing, when you start doing this, you are going to notice, when you start doing it in an intensive way, you are going to start noticing that your mind is going to think about other things. It's OK that your mind thinks about other things. Thoughts are not your enemy. They are not something to fight with, they are not something to control. Let the thoughts go. Relax. Now, the reason that you relax right here is every thought and every feeling that arises, there is tension that arises along with that. One of the places that the tension arises is in your head. Now, everybody here, I guarantee, has tension in their head right now. It's a tightness around your brain. Relax. Let go of that. And what you'll feel is a little bit of expansion out, and calmness. Now, what you do when you have a distraction – your mind is thinking about this or that, for the period of the sitting – let go of the thought, relax, bring that mind back to your meditation, the feeling of warmth in your chest, the wish that you make, and putting your friend right in the

middle of that wish. When you see your friend in your heart, see them smiling and happy. Now, when you smile, there are four different places that I want you to smile. You have to smile in your mind; you have to smile with your eyes, even though your eyes are closed when you are sitting in meditation. You need to put a little smile on your lips.

Now, you notice a lot of Buddha images, they have this little kind of pixie kind of a smile, with just a little bit of a smile on his face? The artist is saying he is experiencing joy at that time. Put that little smile on your face, and a smile in your heart. It doesn't matter how many times your mind wanders away. Every time you see your mind is thinking about something else, let go of that, relax, come back, do the meditation some more. If you have a sitting for a half an hour, and during that half an hour your mind wanders away a hundred times – and a hundred times you notice it, and you let that go, and you relax and you come back – that is a good meditation. It's an active meditation, it's a meditation where you have to kind of roll up your sleeves and work a little bit, but that is a good meditation. It's kind of funny, because I teach a lot of retreats, and people will come in and I'll say: "How is your meditation going today?" And they'd say: "Ah, it's terrible, my mind is jumping all over the place, I'm thinking about this and thinking about that, I just can't stand it." And I have some questions then: "Are you able to see it?" – "Well, yeah I could see it fairly quickly, and then I could let it go and relax and come back." – "Do you do that all the time?" – "Yeah." – "Good meditation, isn't it?" What most people consider good meditation, and what I consider a good meditation are not always the same. Your mind will calm down by itself, but it does take some effort in letting go of these distracting thoughts and relaxing and coming back. Now, that's the sitting meditation, that's only say for a half an hour a day, 45 minutes, when your sitting is good, sit longer, it's up to you. Then there is the meditation that's all the time. And I mean – all the time. When you are walking from here to your car, what are you thinking about? Ho-hum. Some of this, some of that, nothing in particular. Well that's the time you should be smiling, that's the time you should look around and look at how wonderful everything is. Don't worry about the way it might be in a moment, look at how it is right now.

We were just at a restaurant, and I went outside, waiting for them to come out, and everybody that walked out of the door, they said: "Oh, it's really hot." And I was sitting there enjoying the heat, thinking: "That's not a bad thing." But everybody has this tight mind, because they were in a cool place, they went to a place where there was a change, and their

mind went tight, and they didn't really notice it. And that tight mind is the thing that dictated what kind of thoughts they were going to have. Now, when the Buddha is talking about mind, I mean he was really, really deep, and really, really precise. He said: "Your mind works in the same way." Everybody's mind does, it doesn't matter whether you are an Asian, or a Westerner, it doesn't matter where you come from, your mind works the same. In order to see, now this is going to be going kind of deep, and I'll explain it in a different way in a little while – in order to see, there have to be certain conditions that have to be met. You have to have an eye in good working order, there has to be colour and form, and when the eye hits the colour and form, that is called – eye consciousness arises. As soon as eye consciousness arises, that is called contact. With contact as condition, feeling arises. Now, every time somebody hears "feeling", they think of emotion, and this is not that kind of feeling. Feeling according to the Buddha is either pleasant, or painful, or neither painful nor pleasant. So, you have your eye hitting that, that's the contact. As soon as contact arises, feeling arises. As soon as feeling arises, right then, that is when that tightness happens. And that tightness is called craving. Craving always manifests as tension or tightness in your mind and in your body. It always manifests that way. And right after the craving there is clinging. And clinging are all of your thoughts, all of your opinions, all of your concepts, all of your ideas. And this is where you start taking everything personally – these are my thoughts, these are my feelings. Now, when you are walking down the street, and your mind starts thinking about something, there was the feeling, there was the craving, there was the clinging. And this is why we have the roller coaster ride of "I like it, I don't like it, I like it, I don't like it," and all of the emotions that go along with that. As you become more aware of how mind works, instead of having the high highs and the low lows, it starts to be more like little waves.

There's times that are easier than others, welcome to the real world. But the thing you want to remember is – if you want to have balance in your life, you need to practice joy. Smiling. And one of the things that the Buddha taught was, the first part of meditation that the Buddha thought was – you have to practice your generosity. A lot of people think: "O-o, the monk is talking about generosity – he wants you to give him something." The kind of generosity the Buddha was talking about was the kind of generosity that makes other people smile, makes other people happy. Now, there are three ways you can give your generosity: you can give your generosity with your speech; you can give your generosity with your actions; you can give with your thoughts. Now, he said also there are

three other things that you need to know. When you're giving your gift, prepare your gift with a happy mind. While you are giving your gift, give your gift with a happy mind. After you have given the gift, reflect on: "That was a really good thing" with a happy mind. So, the more you can say things that make people smile, the more you can do things that make people smile, the more you reflect on doing that, the more uplifted your mind becomes. The happier you become, the more joy you have in your life. It's all interconnected. It's really, really important to realize that any time your mind is being serious about something, that there is this craving and clinging that's there. That doesn't mean that you don't point your mind towards an end-goal, you do, but you don't do it with a tight mind, you do it with a relaxed mind.

As you learn to do this with a relaxed mind, you manifest things much more quickly, much easier, and everything starts to be fun. Somewhere along the line, somebody told us as we were growing up, that life was supposed to be serious. That's funk (laughing). Have fun, smile, laugh. How does your face radiate when with a hospice, I helped set one up in California, and I was working at a nursing home at the time, too, because I wanted to be around people as they were dying. Isn't that odd? I wanted to be around people so that I can help them have a mind that was accepting. And it didn't matter whether they were Christian or Hindu or Islam or Buddhist, I didn't care what their religion was, I was just there to help them have an uplifted mind. I was there to talk with them right before they died, to find out when their happy times were in their life. And then as they were dying I would remind them of that. And it was real amazing; I saw some true miracles happen. The person died, but when you see someone dying with a smile on their lips, that's really something. The more we can practice smiling... Remember, the Buddha said: "What you think and ponder on, that is the inclination of your mind." The more you think and ponder joyful thoughts, happy thoughts, thoughts of well-wishing and laughing, the more your mind will tend towards doing that. And that's how the Buddha's meditation and his teaching is immediately effective.

Song of Joy **-Ludwig van Beethoven**

Come, sing a song of joy
For peace shall come, my brother
Sing, sing a song of joy
For men shall love each other

That day will dawn just as sure
As hearts that are pure
Are hearts set free
No man must stand alone
With outstretched hands before him

Reach out and take them in yours
With love that endures
Forever more
Then sing a song of joy
For love and understanding

Come, sing a song of joy
Of freedom, tell the story
Sing, sing a song of joy
For mankind in his glory

One mighty voice that will bring
A sound that will ring
Forever more
Then sing a song of joy
For love and understanding

Come, sing a song of joy
Of freedom, tell the story
Sing, sing a song of joy
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