

2009-07-27 Emotions Happiness

Fri, 8/14 4:45PM • 38:02

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

happiness, people, joy, develop, buddhism, life, caught, mind, appreciative, practice, important, good, mode, buddha, pursuing, attention, experience, happy, wonderful, decrepit

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

This evening's talk is about mindfulness and happiness. Last week, the topic was grief. And I considered maybe giving an a second week on grief. But it's such a big topic, but I had more energy for joy or happiness. So I'm sorry. Happiness is a very important topic, very important emotion. For Buddhism. Buddhism puts a tremendous emphasis on developing well being, developing happiness, developing joy, and not simply leaving it to chance that as things happen, that somehow accidentally we're happy. But happiness is something that can be cultivated or developed, increase the possibility of eternal life. And then happiness has a very important role in the path of practice. It's not incidental, but it's really very important for the cultivation development of the Buddhist path. And it's also understood to be part of the goal of the path in that Nirvana or awakening or liberation is sometimes treated synonymously as Maha sukha, or great happiness. And not a few teachers will emphasize that this masuka great happiness is a happiness which is reliable, which is something that is long lasting and ultimately beneficial for us. In contrast to a lot of other forms of happiness as enjoys and pleasures we can have in life, which may be are much more fleeting and much less reliable. For us, more or less useful for us. Some people associate Buddhism with its emphasis on suffering. Buddhism tick kind of look suffering right in the eye and tries to be very honest about it and, and encourages people to practice with their sufferings really enter into the world of their suffering, not to suffer better. But by going through it, and discovering happiness and the other side, or discovering some happiness or joy or freedom in relationship to it. And so happy focusing on suffering is not meant to pull us down. But it's meant to actually be a doorway to some great possibility. One of the reasons to talk about all these emotions that we've been talking about these last weeks, is because of the principle that what you bring attention to, or what you bring into the field of awareness affects how things go forward for you. Things you developed for you how you, you know, your path unfolds for you. What you bring into awareness is affected by the awareness you bring to it. Even if you don't try to change anything, just bring it hold it in awareness, that awareness will, will involve changing what you're paying attention to. So if you're paying attention to things that do best, that survived the best or thrive the best in darkness, in by not paying attention to them, those things tend to get diminished. Those things with thrive the most in the light of awareness tend to grow. So things like attachment and fear and anger and greed and lust, all those things tend to do the best if you don't pay a lot of attention to them. They thrive the best they can get strong, stronger and get the upper hand. But if you bring attention to those things, those things tend to just be a factor were aware of them and honest about them tend to diminish the And then there's a whole series of emotions like joy and happiness and honesty and generosity and equanimity and contentment, that tend to get stronger as we tend to bring awareness to them as we bring more attention to them. So, by talking about happiness and joy, it becomes more something we've become more conscious of. And as we become more aware of it, then it could also grow and develop. Some people have a bias in the West direction, their attention goes, they're biased what they notice. And maybe in different times in your life, you have a different bias. Sometimes the bias is to notice all the

problems in your life. And that people are really good at that some people. Other times the bias is maybe a little bit Hallmark Hallmark like to notice, try to notice all the sweet and wonderful things how wonderful life is. And that kind of bias is not so useful. But we try to say In Buddhism, we're trying to have an unbiased attention.

So we can take in the full scope of our experience. But there are some things that when they're present, it's useful to give some emphasis to, and happiness and joy is one of those things where we want to be able to recognize it when it happens. Sometimes it happens very, in subtle ways. And it's useful to recognize it when that subtlety, and that subtlety has a chance to develop and grow. The Buddha when he talked about happiness, he talked about a variety of different kinds of happiness. And he sometimes had lists of happinesses there's one famous list of four happinesses. And it was surprising, I think list. I think this was meant meant more for laypeople. I think all of you are late lady, so you should listen to it carefully. one form of happiness. The first one in the list is the happiness of having wealth. That's something and people associate Buddhism with austerity and renunciation and letting go and things like that. And so suddenly you hear that that's it. The Buddha recognized as a form of happiness is a little bit surprising for some people. The happiness of wealth is meant to be the happiness of wealth, honestly and morally gained. But to have a certain degree of financial stability and security is considered to be a source of well being source of delight or happiness, that's not denigrated or considered bad thing to have, it's a fine thing to have provided the wealth was well gained. The second form of happiness is the happiness of being able to use your, whatever wealth you have, and use it to support other people. So acts of generosity to be able to support and help other people. And there's lots of stories in Buddhism, these kind of little myths. fables of people who are extremely poor, and all they can afford to give someone is a flower versus someone who is phenomenally wealthy. And all they give is a flower. And, and the karmic consequences of it to the person who's so poor and give just a little bit, gets tremendous benefit, developing of the heart variety of things. That doesn't come to the person who's miserly. So the idea that somehow being able to share one's fortune with others is a source of happiness. The third kind of happiness is the happiness of, of what's called blame lessness the happiness of not doing anything that that having done anything that anyone's going to blame you for, critically, anybody's going to be angry with you or you know, I blame you. So living an ethical life, living a life where your intent you know that your intentions are good and wholesome. And so no one can blame you for having poor intentions or bad intentions. So that's a source of happiness, one source of happiness that would emphasized. Then the fourth one, what was the fourth one? Maybe the fourth one is remember having good memory.

So

Well, luckily he has other lists of happiness. So we can just go on.

And one form of happiness is the happiness of contentment. They have the capacity beacon beacon Ken, with what you have. We have a society that tries to inculcate discontentment on people. Because the more discontented we are, the more we'll buy. And I think that consumer society really thrives on discontentment. And in that sense, Buddhism is very subversive for us our culture. Because Buddhism tends to help people become much more content. So they're not being driven by dissatisfaction or greed or thinking that somehow they're going to be happy by just getting more and more and better and bigger and whatever it might be. So one form of happiness is contentment. And I think it's a very significant capacity to learn to be content with what what has. One of the people like kind of holed up in my eyes, as the wealthiest person I know, is actually also one of the poorest people I know, here on the peninsula lives here. And he's just so happy tries it hides his bike everywhere and, and seems to be

see, you know, he lives a life that seemingly he doesn't have any once and I'm inspired whenever I'm around him.

There's a happiness of having a practice, a spiritual practice. Some people this is a very significant happiness to have found a meaningful way of living a meaningful course of life. That brings meaning that brings delight brings benefit, and is onward leading to a possibility of liberation or freedom or for some people just bring some tremendous to light. Some people are so delighted by that, that it doesn't matter so much. If they reach the end of that path, just knowing they have a path of practice. It's so meaningful. That's really good. There's a Zen teacher named Lou Richmond who asked his teachers Suki Roshi, what is Nirvana? Or you know, what is enlightenment? And then I said, Well, if I do this practice here, this is what I said, if I do this practice, will I get enlightened? And zoku Suzuki Roshi said to him, if your practice is sincere, it's almost as good. As a great answer, you answer if you practice sincere, it's almost as good. It's not the same. But you know, and if you practice sincere, you're not going to be content with just you know, where you're at. Exactly. In terms of practice, you're still practicing and going on. But it's really neat. It's really amazing like special to have a practice and be engaged wholeheartedly in that practice. So that's a form of happiness. There's the happiness, of a mind which is not caught by anything. If you sit down to meditate, or if you guess all you did to this evening, many of you will discover that the mind is caught by things the mind it, the more your mind drifted off in thought was caught up in his thought, the more it was caught by things, the more you can actually choose to stay on the breath, if that was your focus, and stay keep the mind there. Chances are, the less you were caught, the more free the mind was. And so they have a mind's always going off into thoughts of the future in the past and this and that is a mind which is caught by things. Sometimes it's so caught that we call it obsessed, obsessed, obsessed by certain things. Some of you here spent the whole 45 minutes thinking about one topic without you know, really meditating, that qualifies to being obsessed for those 45 minutes. And so one of the forms of happiness is the happiness of not having a mind which is obsessed by anything not caught by anything. And that's one of the reasons why that delight in the mind can be applied. For purpose, it can direct the mind, okay, I'm going to sit down, and I'm going to direct my mind on my breathing and keep it there and develop concentration, develop stillness and peace. And so if the mind is caught this tremendous sense of inner peace and well being can bubble up. So the happiness of having mind which is not caused by anything, is a real wonderful kind of happiness. And other kind of happiness is the happiness that comes once the mind is not caught by anything. And then the mind becomes concentrated. So just really gets focused. There's a very kind of peculiar, peculiar, very, very wonderful kind of happiness that sometimes is likened to ecstasy, that can arise when the mind can really get focused and centered and concentrated on the breath or in some, some topic, and that's a different kind of happiness. The Buddha emphasized that kind of happiness, the happiness of concentration Because a concentrated mind is a mind which is still enough that it can see clearly, it's kind of like having a magnifying glass that can see much more deeply into our experience. And that sort of concentration that brings a lot of happiness to it also comes with sight, this benefit of being having a lot of happiness. And somehow the happiness of concentration teaches a lesson to the mind that it's okay not to be caught by things. So if you if you're told, don't get caught by things, it's not good for you. And then you think, well, that's good to be told. But not being caught by things is kind of a blind state. It's kind of like boring. And it's much more interesting to be obsessed and oppressed and upset and because then I can be really creative. I can do beautiful art. You know? can be like, monk and the Norwegian painter and do their like to scream. And people will be looking at my paintings forever, you know. And so it's much better to be in angst.

Because it's not so interesting to be not caught by things. And so then people have sometimes some reason then or maybe are then are reluctant to let go of what they're attached to. But if you have the experience that in letting go of the attachments, you can experience a happiness and joy. It's so much

more satisfying than the joy and happiness of success in the worldly terms, then perhaps it's a lot easier in meditation to be willing to let go. Oh, that's actually for my benefit, to let go and experience that kind of happiness. So there's a series of kind of happinesses and the Buddha emphasized that it's that part of the path is pursuing happiness, pursuing higher and higher forms of happiness and kind refining how we understand happiness as we go along the path.

Now,

in saying that, at some point, the very pursuit of happiness gets in the way of the happiness. So there's a wonderful art of pursuing happiness without going to directly at it. And partly, it's to learn to let go is to learn that letting go at some point in the path, letting go, letting go even if the pursuit of happiness is one of the ways that is most supportive, allowing the happiness to bubble up. So in this regard, I wanted to offer you two different approaches to life. You know, it's kind of simplistic but offered here for teaching purposes. One, I call it the EULA, utilitarian approach and the Other I call the appreciative approach. So the utilitarian approach is about accomplishing things, getting things pragmatically, you have an idea, I'm going to get something. And so there it's very important to know things very important to have a lot of knowledge. And it's, it's important to be able to do things and manipulate the world of material yourself or accomplish things. In the appreciative mode, what's important rather than having and getting and becoming something, what's important is being is a kind of simplicity of being rather than knowing, in appreciating is maybe more important to not know and not the kind of not knowing that leaves space in the mind to take in something fresh and new to beginner's mind. And now to come with all our preconceived ideas. utilitarian mode, the focus tends to be on the goal. In the appreciative mode, the focus is much more in the process, how we are, how things are right now, as opposed to the what I'm going to get and what I have to do to get it. The appreciated mode focuses much more on tending. And sometimes we talk about the gardening as a metaphor for the appreciative mode. Whereas perhaps, I don't know what's a example of utilitarian mode gardening where, you know, you can plant the seed, and then you have to attend it 10 the garden, you can't go tugging on the on the seedlings to make it grow faster. You have to make a lot of space and you have to care and 10 for the garden in the plant and its own time and place it tends to grow. But it's not something you can force

with utilitarian mode, there's often something at stake. Because there's a goal and something to accomplish. There's a mistake and there can be failure. With the appreciative mode, there's a lot more often nothing at stake. You go out into your garden just to appreciate it and there's not much at stake just to enjoy. You appreciate the sunset, what's at stake to be the best sunset washer washer. lets you know he's more more more more you have to learn to let go of a lot. I've been in situations where it's maybe tremendous beauty or something really nice. And I didn't really appreciate what was going on around me because I was caught up in my thoughts caught up with my concerns and my plans. And haven't even laughed at myself sometimes where I saw that. I was planning for some real great, wonderful experience tomorrow and missed out to the fact that right here Now, he was actually quite wonderful if I only paid attention noticed. So and then it's also very interesting that with utilitarian mode, I think knowledge is, is much very important to know and understand how things work. And in the appreciative mode, it's sometimes said that wisdom is much more important. And the difference between knowledge and wisdom is maybe the difference between here and this kind of description. The difference between

being, being active and doing something versus being receptive. I don't know if that's the good work so well, but maybe, maybe it's kind of like the difference between pleasure and joy. Pleasure is something you can do to yourself in a variety of ways. And, but joy and happiness you can't do to yourself in the same way. You can't go out and you know you can. If you want pleasure, you can go out for example and get a massage and rock and get by ice cream. You can go go look at the sunset, perhaps and have

some pleasure of watching it. But happiness and joy is not something you can make happen in the same way as for example, you can get people to praise you. But you can't get people to appreciate you. You know, you can force people to praise you can get people's afraid of you, you can get people's variety of things, but to have people admire you or to have people appreciate you or enjoy you. You can't force them to do that. So what I'm trying to point to here is that there's a series of experiences that Don't come from making it happen, but come more from kind of letting it happen. Another example I think of in this regard is falling asleep. You can make yourself go to bed. But most people don't make themselves fall asleep. But something has to something some letting go, that has to happen. Some other thing that's happening as we fall asleep. So at some point along the path of practice, there's a kind of happiness that can only happen when we're much more in the receptive mode, or the appreciative mode. And the appreciated mode requires something of us. And this is where we set we create the conditions that improves the chances of happiness occurring. And so what are some of those conditions that improve the possibility of happiness? One of them is not being too busy. People who are too busy running around with too many things. Do it's hard, it's hard, much harder to give yourself the space and time to be happy, or to allow yourself to experience the happiness that might be here, or the simple joys, simple delights that might be available. It helps if we live a life, which is ethical. So we blameless so we're not troubled by what we have done and we have a lot of remorse or a lot of fear that we'll get caught or whatever. So living an ethical life is one of those conditions that helps this to really settle into this, this appreciative mode. What are some of the other things conditions you can think of? They can help support the arising of happiness of well being that allows it to have happiness and well being that's maybe available to you to come more often. So assuming that happiness is more available to you than you've allotted so far, what are some of the things you can do? to avail yourself of that and let it arise more more often in your life, I'd like to hear from you. So if you can pass the mic to Tasha underneath the thermostat.

Mind is

not associated with negative people, avoiding negative people, it can help

until your happiness is stable enough that you can be with them and not be affected by them. And that would be a goal because if you're only trying to avoid them, without the idea that someday I hope to be able to be in their presence, then it may be a version.

So as I've developed compassion, I might be able to be with them

might be compassionate might might be a greater, greater strength of mind, where you're not caught by those feelings. Thank you. But in the meantime, maybe stay away.

here Oh,

actually I

have several. I was thinking about not trying to be perfect. And then the other things are the same category humor and playfulness.

Great. I love it. Beautiful. So not trying to be perfect and humor and playfulness.

As a mom of two small children more sleep.

That's a great one. I think it's too many people don't appreciate the importance of sleep. We sleep deprived culture. So straight back while the iron is hot, we get

a lot of happiness from loving unconditionally.

Also, some happiness and love unconditionally. straight back.

I think most of my happiness came from the spiritual practice and the fact that I built enough mindful to be aware in Luke from outside of the theater of life, outside of the glitter, the theater offline theater of life. So a lot of his happiness comes from the mindfulness that allows him to step outside of the theater of life. And in that great, thank you.

physical movement and being in nature,

physical movement in being in nature, beautiful.

So the physical movement also something like a Tai Chi Kido where you get energy flowing, you bring a lot of joy. Yes, it does. The and certainly to be encouraged Absolutely. The Buddha didn't do Tai Chi but he did a lot of walking. And I think just walking if you do a lot of it is very conditioning and supportive gets a lot of good energy going. But the warning around something like that is that it's great when you can do it. But when when you won't, what about when you can't most of you know good and a good percentage of us some point are not going to be able to do these vigorous physical things you can be old and decrepit.

And or you have some injury or something happens. And I've known people who have their happiness or Joy has been dependent on being able to be vigorous and very fit. And then when they couldn't do that because had an accident and hurt themselves or something, they felt lost. So, part of what hopefully meditation teaches, is also to develop a kind of happiness. That's not dependent on even things like movement or music or nature in all kinds of things, which are beautiful things to, and important things I feel to avail yourself of, if it's close by, but to be a little bit had a little warning associated with it. There should be a warning, a caution. Yes.

Being someone who's old and decrepit,

I depend on

keeping my heart open and being in a place of gratitude,

gratitude. What does it mean to have your heart open?

Just to be able to welcome any being in no matter what is going on, you know, like, like here there's a lot of noise to say. Okay? welcome them

in. Beautiful to be welcoming and receptive and allow whatever is happening.

No, we're all in it together. Beautiful.

Beautiful. Thank you. straight back behind you.

servicing others Hmm, very nice.

accepting my own flaws so I can accept other people's flaws beautiful.

The it relates a little bit to what they say he said about imperfection is I read a book once called This is called the spirituality of imperfection and learning together After floors. And then I'm reminded of what you said here also that there's a saying that says, it's really good to be able to laugh at yourself, because then you'll never stop being humored.

I find sometimes that I get joy just from pure mindfulness, even when it's mindfulness of things that are unpleasant to me really difficult just, there's this kind of hit of just joy. Oh, wow, I really just saw that I really noticed it.

Beautiful. Can you us, maybe try to say a little bit more? Why that should bring you happiness or joy.

Great. So I think Could you hear that? Um, the mic went out, I think the battery went out. So she said, just really, really? No, I can see it and feel it really present for it. Right. So but why would that bring joy?

Why would it bring joy just to just to know it and be there? Yeah. Um I think of it sometimes in in terms of what you spoke spoke about, I think it was two weeks ago with the contracted the contracting around something, whether it's an expensive emotion or a contract of emotion, or expanding around a to bring space around it. And just let it be there, the space tends to take over and the softening take tends to take over and there's this just pure recognition and just this pure joy that just arises then it can be very, very brief. And it's just this wonderful feeling of Wow, I just really, really saw that and there was just no tightness there was no problem. Great.

Thank you keep looking at this half of the room. No, there we go.

One of the joys I'm becoming more aware of is being present in the moment. So as I was driving here, and I knew I was going to be laid, was okay, I was driving I was going to get here eventually. And just where I was was the perfect place to be great.

Yeah, that's a that's a great lesson. It's a great lesson to be coming to a meditation center to meditate, where you're going to practice really being present purely for what's here and not be anywhere else. And then to notice that you get charged how you're trying to get there is in a hurry and ahead and it goes a bit against the very spirit of what you're trying to do. And To realize the paradox and absurdity of that is very important lesson, because then you can just let go and just be here and just come late. You know,

I'll speak for some other old, decrepit novice, grandchildren are a great source of joy. There's some great you may discover this someday that it's probably more joyous that children because this there's something about the interaction you can have if the parents are parenting properly, then you can just totally indulge them and bring them great joy. It's this relationship that is completely indulgent. And then

and then leave the parents with a conflict. Right, absolutely. Hands off and walk away.

Yeah, I'm here

to appreciate the smallest and simplest things for the most common.

Right. So appreciate the small, that's very important because it's sometimes appreciating the small and simple things builds up the muscle of appreciation of joy and happiness. So it becomes more stronger muscle that can be used more and more times in our life spread from there,

if you don't have children experiencing or expressing maternal illness to people that are needing it. I enjoy that mentoring whatever you want to call Yes, at different times. So okay.

I, I find that I'm on the way toward happiness when I start off when I stop arguing with reality.

It's not our Getting with you.

One of my spiritual teachers woman named Byron Katie

says that when you argue with reality, reality wins, but only 100% of the time.

One more in the backmatter Hall, please.

As a teacher, I have found that I get great pleasure and happiness from

the obvious enrichment and, and learning and experience of joy that my students experience in the classroom. When I see them light up with something, I get great joy.

Yes, beautiful. So, I'd like to say in conclusion that in Buddhist path, as I said earlier, Happiness is a very important emotion. And, and the pursuit of happiness is considered to be worthwhile, important thing to do. But as we go along and refine, deepen our experience of happiness, there's realizing that we can't pursue it too actively. And there's also a kind of the wonderful balance between pursuing it, and not doing it in a selfish way. Because selfishness is one of the things that destroys happiness, the real, genuine, deep happiness. And so how do we pursue it? How do we allow for without it being self centered? And I think one of the things was said by number of people was the role of service, the role of supporting other people and experiencing happiness and feeling happiness through the happiness of others. I think it's very helpful to be able to be appreciative of other people, success and happiness, for sometimes it's very helpful to them. Dissolve some of those more selfish ways in which we try to want things for ourselves and have things for ourselves. The happiness of being selfless. So why don't you spend the week and your homework is to be happy. or study your happiness. If you can't be any happier than you are. Then study your happiness to study happiness around you make it a topic, make it a topic of conversation with friends, strangers, find out what they know about happiness. Explore the different terrain of happiness and what makes you happy, the conditions for it, the different flavors of it. And, and it's a rich world. And the more you explore it, the Richard will open up to all its different flavors and tastes. So I hope that this is an enjoyable week for you. Thank you