So, this morning, Monday morning, I begin a new theme for the week. And that this is a third of the four Brahmavihāras for divine abidings that is muditā. And muditā is often translated into English as either sympathetic joy or appreciative joy. And because those two-word translations require some explanation, sometimes I prefer a single English word to translate muditā. And that's the word rejoice. I think the word rejoice captures more of the sense of, there's something particular that we're celebrating and really appreciating. And that rejoicing is a little bit more of an active, energized appreciation and gratitude and delight in something that's worth delighting about, or something is really worth celebrating.

Here, I live a block away from local high school. And when high school is in session, sometimes I'm walking by the campus when the students are leaving the end of the day. And one of their great delights, is when a couple of them are talking, or a small group talking. And they seem so happy and engaged and active. And something important that there certainly must be very important they're talking about because there's this joy. Maybe just getting out of school and seeing it, seeing it seeing each other's seeing their friends. And I just feel so happy seeing them, I feel delighted, I feel, certainly a certain kind of appreciative joy.

But it's almost like, I don't have to actively appreciate them. It's just that it's just a joyful thing to see the joy of other people and, and just experience it and and know that it's happening. And so part of mindful life is a life that is not only mindful of the present moment, but uses that capacity for present moment awareness, to start being aware in a more useful way, rather than some of the selective ways we can be on automatic pilot.

We know that some people have negativity bias, where they tend to notice what's wrong with themselves or notice what's wrong with the world. And there's a strong tendency in that direction. There's a danger bias, where people have a strong tendency to look for where the danger is - worried, and afraid of things, and very cautious. There's also a lust bias, where we’re looking for: "What can I get? What can I have that brings me pleasure, joy, satisfaction, some kind of just pleasure? Or looking for what's nice? What I can have?" There's also an anger, hostility bias that some people have. An aversion bias, looking for what's wrong again, and doing a little bit hostility. It's particularly painful when it's directed towards oneself.

And so people have these blinders on. We'll have this very selective orientation. And if we're not aware of that, then present moment awareness becomes the support for that selective bias in our awareness.
in what we're oriented towards. And it's very hard to see it because it's sometimes so ingrained and so habituated, that we just think it's normal or natural that we're the way we are.

Anyway, the point being that present moment awareness, is not always used for a good purpose, because of this tendency. And so one of the things within mindful life is to live a little bit deliberately - with intentionality, with a sense of purpose. And one purpose is to open up beyond the selectivity, to open up wider and take in more of what the experience is, in a way that maybe is actually more realistic.

And one of the ways to do that, for many people, is to appreciate what's happening. To take a little bit of time looking - and being grateful, being appreciative, being delighted by the things that are happening, that bring gratitude, that bring delight, the likeable things. It can be overdone for sure. And there are people who's selectivity bias is a little bit too romantically focused on how everything is wonderful and good. And so that has its own corrective that's needed.

It isn't so much that we're trying to have a new bias, but trying to try to open up, expand and break down the selectivity in the ways we are, so that we have a wider field of what's happening. If we do that really well, chances are, we won't be so consumed with our fantasies, our memories, our predictions about the future. And we'll start appreciating more just being present here.

It turns out that there's actually a higher percentage of things that are working and going well in the present moment, than our selectivity bias will often pick out and look at. I've had various things go wrong with my body. I had surgery last week, and surgery a year ago. Different kinds of things have happened, and I'm getting older, and different things are aching and hurting and doing this and that. It's just part of the aging process. I could get preoccupied with these things happening in my body and, be upset or worried, or spending my whole day, looking up searching, reading about every possible nuance of what's going on - spending my days concerned about it.

But I can also appreciate that, even though I have things in my body of take care of, some high percentage - 99.999% - or even higher of what it takes to make this body operate relatively harmoniously, is working. It's working very well. I mean, I don't even know everything that goes on - all the hormones and chemicals and neurons - and all the things that are needed to ensure this complicated event of having a body. It's remarkable! It's supposedly working. I'm still able to speak. What a complicated thing it is to speak words, and know what they mean, and string them together. And, wow, we shouldn't take this for granted.

I'm spending time now with some people who are have senility and the words are not there. The sentences not there; the memory is not there. It is so easy to have a selectivity bias that excludes things, and takes things for granted. So part of the sense of giving purpose to mindfulness, to a mindful life is to begin appreciating things more.

And this can give birth to muditā - this delight, appreciations, rejoicing in others. This idea of rejoicing in the success and in the good fortune of other people is, I think, one of the really great joys of this practice. Partly it's a joy because it's an antidote to the idea of being self-preoccupied, with self-concern in such a way that we set up a tension between self and other - where we have jealousy, or envy or, "Not that
person!" Or, "I want that." Or having a feeling of inadequacy. But to be able to be genuinely relaxed with an open and appreciative, delight in the good fortune of other people - like I am delighted seeing these high school students leaving their campus. This is one of the great gifts of this mindful life.

But don't take it as a chance that it might come along. Don't take any of the brahmavihāras as just a chance occurrence that you should feel that what this way. But actually spend time cultivating them, developing them, and looking for them, and recognizing them when they arise.

So to begin, spending more time in these states, or in activities of appreciation. As you appreciate things, I'd encourage you to allow yourself to feel gladness, joy, delight, or a kind of pleasure in that. Let it fill you. Take the time to let it fill you.

Now, some people might complain that what I'm talking about might be selfish, or self-absorbed - just about myself, and how I feel. There's certainly a danger of that. But I think for most of us, it's the opposite. What is selfish, or self concerned, or conceited? Are all the preoccupations that go into the selectivity bias we have for attention? Most of the ways we think about ourselves may be a little bit too much about me myself and mine - and what's in it for me, or how I am. I'm not doing well enough, or I'm unworthy, or I have to get more, or get out of the way - because I want to have that, not you. There are all kinds of things about self.

Those are the things that cause harm in our society, in our world. Appreciation doesn't cause much harm in our society. If we offer too much of it to others, they might get a little annoyed. But I think that appreciation of others, and having delight in others, rejoicing in others, sharing and their joy in a nice balanced open way isn't selfish. Don't shoot for it. Don't worry that it's leaving too much out, or not realistic.

I would venture to suggest that for many people, it's their normal way to see the world as not realistic. But by expanding our field of appreciation, rather than stepping into something unrealistic, we're actually discovering a more realistic way of being in the world - a way that doesn't deny the difficulties or the challenges, but may create a very different context for experiencing them - being with them in a way that we don't become oppressed by the challenges. We don't get limited by the challenges that we have. We take them in stride and hold them more likely.

And not very far away is our capacity to breathe, to relax, to be present here. And also just to appreciate this life. Wow, what a great thing! There is much more joy available for us than most people recognize. And if we learn to appreciate more, then we'll be able to be givers of joy, to provide the gift of joy to others. That is what I think is the great heart of muditā, of rejoicing. To know how to do this well is to give the gift of joy to others - the gift of appreciation.

So that was an introductory talk on this topic of muditā. I would encourage you - if you're at all inclined to do this over the next 24 hours - to spend some time, more time than you normally would, trying to be present for what can be appreciated. Especially appreciate it in the present moment. Then if you have some friends, you can talk about it. Talk to them about what you're discovering at the conversation about appreciating what's here as an alternative to our selectivity bias for what is not right. And may you delight in this exploration. Thank you.