2020-12-24 Brahmavihāras: Appreciative Joy (4 of 5)

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The most classic Theravāda discussion about the practice of Brahmavihāras. These four divine homes for our hearts or minds, discusses how we can use ourself as an example, for how to understand the wellbeing of others. So to cultivate loving kindness for oneself, is not meant to be selfish and self focused, its really meant to be a preparation to be able to do loving kindness towards the world around us.

And the description says that, by having oneself as an example, this is what it's like to have love. This is what it's like to receive kindness from someone. Then there's more embodiment and more sense of understanding of how to connect to others, understand others and do it for them as well.

So the same thing with muditā, with appreciative joy is that sometimes it's hard to do it for oneself, but to the degree to which we can have some sense of recognizing in ourselves something to affirm, yes, that's good. That's good about ourselves. Yes, even if 99% of ourselves is not so good. Maybe that 1% is appropriate to affirm - the 10%, that's good, or the 55%, or the 45, you know, whatever it is, that's good, and you to affirm it, to celebrate it, to enjoy or to appreciate it.

And it's so sad, to not feel some appreciation for oneself for some joy even in ourselves. Because we are kept hostage by what is not so good about ourselves. Of course, everyone has their shortcomings, everyone has something that they could find that there's their warts, or their psychological warts, their foibles, you know, it just comes with being human, of course. And so, but it's so sad to focus so much on that, that we kind of deny or ignore or push aside, that part of us, which is actually good or happy or wholesome.

And sometimes it's actually, you know, really appropriate, to not hold what's good in captivity by what is not so good. But spend some time appreciating the wholesome and the good in ourselves. And so to feel joy in oneself to discover appreciation we can appreciate in life, to, to be grateful.

Nowadays, there's a practice of every day writing down what you were grateful for, for the day and or use these to review it. And, and I haven't done the writing exercise, but I certainly done end of the day
thinking about it. What I appreciate about the day, what I'm grateful for the day, and it's such a wonderful thing to do. I just feel so buoyed and delighted and lightened by it. And sometimes it's hard not to smile, thinking about it. And what I find surprising is that I feel more joy at the end of the day thinking about it than I did, while it was happening.

Somehow is busy living my life and taking things for granted, or, I don't know, just too involved in things, to really appreciate the goodness of it. And so at the end of the day to have that, that practice of appreciation and gratitude and and including appreciation for oneself and gratitude for what is what is to be grateful for in ourselves.

Now, especially not so well. So we don't make this a selfish practice. We can think that we're doing this partly so that we are more able to offer affirmation, appreciation, gratitude, rejoicing, for others. And that is really the one of the great gifts of life is this ability to really step forward and rejoice and be happy and delighted in the success and the good fortune to happiness of other people.

I said this earlier that it's very commonly believed that it's the most the hardest, brahmavihāra because of envy, jealousy, fear of opening up, fear of sharing that joy with other people, feeling bad about oneself if we compare ourselves to others who's born more happier than we are.

All these complications that come in, people get mean and bitter sometimes around the success of other people. But the but this muditā is just one of their greatest delights, you know, because it's really a kind of steadily dropping away of self preoccupation, selfishness, and opening up.

So to experience one's own wellbeing its own joy and self appreciation as a means to really dissolve or let go of self concern, to really step forward and have a reference point or ability or inside of ourselves, just open up and just kind of not exactly lose ourselves, but close to it, and the delight and joy of others to rejoice that, Oh, this is great. And it's a happiness, it's a joy that involves no loss. It involves No need. No neediness. And no cost. It involves no asserting ourselves onto people. And having no agenda of what we want from others. And what's needed to happen.

It's not an exchange, if I'm really congratulate them and appreciate them rejoice in them, then they better do it for me. It's just kind of very simple, we don't lose anything by this kind of rejoicing, if anything we gain from how from ourselves in our ability to open and share.

And it's a wonderful contagion of joy. And it's other people's joy or wellbeing or success is contagious, it affects us. And in doing that, it's kind of a secondary joy. It's a derived joy, because the original one is there with the other person. And we kind of have this secondary continuation of it. And it's a wonderful thing to let joy be contagious or continue, have a life that's beyond itself, and goes on to another person.

And when we rejoice in other people's joy, we are then passing you know, in a sense, not necessarily intentionally. But if anybody is around us, or is in the aftermath of how we are, and really affirming the joy and wellbeing of others, maybe there's tertiary joy, they appreciate the after effects of that, and how we are as well.
And this kind of wonderful, cost free exchange, contagion of joy and wellbeing. And I think of it as a form of love - joy given maybe joy given is a love, or a form of love is is given giving joy and muditā is not a giving that is, like I said, assertive. And it's not like giving anything material, it's no cost for us if we spontaneously will feel this delight and joy. And we express it in such a way, and affirm it in such a way words deeds, and, and, and thought that other people can understand that we feel that way.

And it's a way of expressing love, our love of others. And muditā, rejoices. The rejoicing of muditā is kind of like the opposite of regrets, the opposite of hopelessness. And it's not, it's also the opposite of hope, in a certain kind of way, in that hope is more about the hope how things will be in the future, muditā is more of a celebration of what's here in the present.

And so recognizing the goodness that's here, recognizing what's appreciate what can be appreciated here and now. And as we practice, as we develop greater capacity to center ourselves on ourselves to be in the present, and be grounded deep inside to where our goodness is, our sense of lack of hostility, lack of meanness, lack of greed, lack of fear is then we have a reference point, how other people have that capacity as well.

And then sometimes you can tune into people more and more deeply. They say and that the more deeply mature person has become in this practice, the more free they are, the more able to they're more, they're able to recognize the freedom of others. If you're a person who is not free, they can't see it, they don't have no idea what it is. And they, it's invisible to them when they see it and other when they're with people who have some degree of freedom.

To some way, it's also true for a deep sense of inner wellbeing and joy and harmony, that if we don't have it for ourselves, it's harder to feel it and sense it in others. But once we begin to feel it in ourselves, then and feeling it others, becomes a reinforcement for it to grow in ourselves. The freedom of others, reinforces our own freedom. The joy of others reinforces our own joy and delight, if we have a reference place for a point place inside where we can feel it, know within ourselves.

And so this is a, I'm saying this as an encouragement to do your practice. Boy, what a great thing it is to really do the work, to show up in the present moment, to not be distracted, to be here really present. It's a slow work a deep work, it's a worthwhile work.

Because as we center ourselves and settle ourselves in this deeper and deeper place of, of maturity of freedom of joy, we began recognizing it more and more in the world. And then our affirmation of it, our celebration of it, supports it and grows it in the world. And it grows it in ourselves. And it becomes this wonderful kind of circle of joy, of rejoice of celebration, of deep appreciation, deep respect.

So that even when when we're with someone who is suffering a lot, or even if we're suffering a lot, there is access to see there's more than suffering going on. And so who knows on someone you meet to suffering tremendously, it might be one of the greatest gifts you can give them is that you have the capacity to tune in to their goodness, to the place where inside of them, where something is alive, a little flame is alive of wellbeing of joy of peace, of something.
And because you recognize it, maybe then you can be a mirror for them, for that flame. And so that flame can grow and develop; that light can grow and develop so they can experience joy and peace in the midst of their great challenges.

So muditā. There is the practice of muditā that we did little bit guided meditation. And you could start with yourself. Or you start with someone who it's really easy to have muditā - a benefactor, an uncomplicated friend, and to do the practice of muditā is to begin to stretch that muditā until you can even feel muditā for people who are hostile to you.

So there's not only people of great suffering, and you can find that little light that you can celebrate and appreciate. You can even discover it, how to do it and open your heart to people who are hostile to you.

And occasionally you find that that's the medicine that quiets the hostility, that they understand that you appreciate something about about them - not their behavior and not what they say - but maybe you can tune into something in them that's worth respecting, valuing, appreciating. And, and having some muditā for.

May it be that we become catalysts for the growth of joy and appreciation for all beings. Thank you.