

Joy of Compassion (3 of 5) Joy of Appreciation

August 23, 2023

Keyword Summary

delight, celebrate, medicine, heal, respect, uplifting, should, headlong, heart-long, obligation, responsibility, flowering, autonomy, dignity, value, kindness, heightened, positivity, lightness, ease, openness

Gil Fronsdal

We continue today with the third talk on the joy of compassion. It is easiest to understand this third kind of joy related to compassion as the joy of appreciation.

When we appreciate others – when we appreciate anything, ourselves included – appreciation has a positive feeling to it. It is an uplifting, opening, delightful feeling. There is delight of appreciation in saying, "Oh, this is good. This is valuable. This is something I care for. This is important, and it is well done. This is something I celebrate."

Appreciation usually comes with a positive disposition, a positive feeling. It may be easier to find the joy of compassion this way. This means that it is important to

practice appreciation – to find how to appreciate others – if we are going to be compassionate.

It is easy to feel obligated to be compassionate – to feel we *should* feel the suffering of the world or others. Then we are buffeted or oppressed by it and contracted or tense around it. We feel we have to do something. We have to be compassionate. One way or another, there is a headlong movement into doing compassion. We want to do what seems like the right thing or the helpful thing to do.

We do not want to be headlong, but heart-long. We want to move with the heart. We want to take time so that we are not doing compassion out of obligation. We are not doing it as a should, thinking that now we have to deal with things. We certainly want to act compassionately in the world, but let that compassion be a flowering of what is wonderful within us. Let it be a flowering of something that is medicine for the world.

The world does not need more people who feel the weight and heaviness of obligation or responsibility. We do not need to make a headlong attack on the causes of people's suffering. The world needs us to address this suffering, but in a way that is medicine for the world, supports, and is healing for the world – it brings out the best in people. Appreciation is one of those qualities. We want to take the time to appreciate.

Of course, sometimes it is hard to appreciate others. In the same category as appreciation is respect. Try to respect everyone. Express respect for their autonomy, dignity, and value. Respect their potential. Even if we disagree with someone, or feel like what they are doing is wrong, we never want to condemn people. We never want to have hostility towards anyone. We want to have respect.

With respect or with appreciation, we can say no. With respect and appreciation for who someone is, we can say, "I appreciate you. I care about you, but no, you cannot do this. This is not right." The person realizes that we are not condemning them. We are not closing them down, or judging all of who they are. We are not saying, "You are now a bad person or a wrong person." If we can't find appreciation, maybe we can come to a place of respect.

This relates to ourselves as well. If we can't find appreciation for ourselves, can we at least respect ourselves? Can we respect our basic human dignity, autonomy, and human value? There are professions in the world like doctors and nurses where respect is the fundamental ethical attitude they are supposed to have. They respect the dignity and the autonomy of the people they are supporting. They might not love them, but they still have that respect.

Take the time to appreciate and respect. Sometimes a little bit of time is all that is needed. I have been struck many times by how easy it is to rush through the supermarket line. The clerk is there and we just do not take the time to take in the clerk. Then there are other times where I take my time. I take an extra second or two to look the checkout clerk in the eye and appreciate them. I might ask a simple question like, "How are you?"

Little comments can make a human connection. There can be a spark of familiarity or recognition. Something nice can happen that doesn't come with any requirements. It doesn't mean or imply anything else. It is just a recognition of kindness or appreciation.

Many people are not appreciated enough in our society. One way to cultivate greater appreciation for others is to take the time to appreciate folks. Simply say, "Thank you. That was well done. That was helpful. That was wonderful. Thank you." Find ways to appreciate people and say it.

Be curious about what goes on inside of you that resists the expression of appreciation. I know for me sometimes it is embarrassment. Sometimes it is, "Well, if I appreciate them, they are going to want more from me." I am opening myself up to being taken advantage of, or I will seem Pollyanna-ish. Learn to find a healthy,

appropriate way to appreciate people because a lot of people are underappreciated for who they are.

There is a huge starvation of appreciation in many corners of our world. Offering appreciation helps to move and oil the gears of appreciation inside of ourselves. I have found that as I have appreciated people more, it seems natural to appreciate myself. It is not that I am trying to do it, but there seems to be more space or room to appreciate myself. I am less caught up in the negativity of life, or my version of how things are.

Appreciation is a beautiful thing, but it takes time. I would like to propose that healthy compassion takes time. Slow down and wait before you act compassionately. See if you can have heightened awareness, attunement, and appreciation. In doing that, find the joy, delight, positivity, lightness, ease, and openness.

It is a beautiful thing to be compassionate. It is wonderful to find that wonderfulness. It is wonderful to find that beauty and sweetness. It is medicine for the world. It is medicine for us.

If you would like to experiment or stretch yourself in this regard, see if there are simple ways – and I underscore the word "simple" – to appreciate the people around you. Be careful because appreciation can get

complicated if it is really big. In simple ways, appreciate the people around you. Appreciate strangers. Appreciate the clerks who are helping you in stores or places of work.

Offer appreciation and see what happens to you as you appreciate others. Learn about yourself as you appreciate. I certainly appreciate that all of you are here and that you are listening and engaged in this practice. I appreciate that we all support each other to show up here for these teachings and be together. I feel it is a wonderful thing. As we went through the pandemic this has been one of the bright lights, and this Sangha continues.

It is just a wonderful thing. So thank you, and I look forward to tomorrow.