

Joy
New Year Retreat
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The Buddha placed great emphasis on joy (mudita) and Happiness (sukkhā) as part of the path. This talk explores the place of these beautiful and precious qualities in our practice, and life. What are the foundations of happiness? What is it that allows the heart to open to joy?

And so what about joy? What about joy? We may wonder that, and it's relatively common in interviews or group interviews or for someone to say, "What about joy? You're going on and on about suffering, and I'm actually experiencing joy, and I'm not even sure if it's okay." [laughter] And to someone who might just peer in here from time to time – like some of our neighbours kind of look in on us from afar, from a safe distance – and look at people shuffling back and forth, staring at the floor, wrapped in blankets, and it looks pretty grim. [laughter]

The Buddha also referred to it as a path of joy. So he quite commonly contradicted himself, and was quite happy doing that. It was a path of joy. And his followers, you know, the monks and nuns and the lay practitioners, they were – how could you tell a follower of the Buddha? Radiance, joyfulness. It was a mark of the path.

And it's interesting: well, if we just think about Dharma in the West, last (what is it?) thirty-something years, thirty and a few, thirty-something years, a lot of emphasis on the mindfulness, on the being with, and then a little while later, sort of, "Okay maybe we need to add some *mettā*." And a big, big emphasis on kind of lubricating the practice with *mettā* and really the necessity of that, of the attention to the climate of kindness. Of course we talk about equanimity. *Mettā* [and] equanimity are two of the four what's called *brahmavihāras*, 'divine abidings.' And compassion is another one. So there's a lot of talk about these: loving-kindness, compassion, equanimity. And sometimes joy doesn't receive the same emphasis, the same care of attention, really.

The Buddha *did* actually talk a lot about joy, and there are different kinds of joy, different kinds of happiness. He talked about worldly and non-worldly happiness, or worldly and non-worldly joy, which sounds a bit strange. But worldly and spiritual joy. And so not at all to deny the range and the kinds of joy that are available to us as human beings, but when we talk about spiritual joy or Dharma joy, it's joy, happiness, not based on the ego, not based on what I am getting, not based on being better than someone, on measuring up in a certain way. Also not based on sense gratification; that's a little bit more subtle, and I'll come back to that later. Not based on sense gratification.

So it's joy that comes from cultivation of the beautiful qualities of heart; joy that comes from appreciation, cultivating appreciation; joy that comes from opening, from connecting, from perceiving beauty, from developing our capacity to perceive beauty, from the deepening of our practice, joy in practice itself, joy in the Dharma, joy in the teachings, in hearing the teachings, in the Saṅgha, in the community of people who love to practise, who are interested in practising. This is all Dharma joy, spiritual joy. And very traditionally, this third *brahmavihāra*, *muditā*, often gets translated as sympathetic joy, which means joy in the joy of others. So instead of envy or feeling, "Why have they

got this, and why haven't I got that?", it's delighting in the delight of others. That's how *muditā* is usually translated, but I feel it's a little bit too narrow of a translation. So really this *muditā*, this spiritual joy encompasses everything of what I've just said.

Maybe joy has a very significant and important place in the path. Maybe it really is something that we need to give attention to. There's deep nourishment. The being is deeply nourished through joy. Very, very powerful and profound, the nourishment that comes from joy.

One of the things we're doing in practice, as well, is we're reconditioning the mind and the heart. So it may not sound that glamorous, but our minds, in a way, are run in loops. They run round and round in loops and habits. A lot of those are not very joyful. You just have to sit a day in silence and witness some of those, see those loops, see those habits. They're not joyful or bringing of joy. And a big part of what we're doing in practice is we're reconditioning those loops. Just replacing these tired, old loops that are not helpful, replacing them with joy. When we give attention to joy, it becomes so that joy moves towards becoming a habit. The mind finds a groove in joy, instead of a groove in unhappiness, in negativity, in difficulty.

Joy, happiness, is also purifying. So this is quite an interesting one. May not at first be obvious. When we perhaps reflect or think, what does this mean, we hear about a 'path of purification,' 'this is a path of purification,' we tend to think, "What is purification going to look like and feel like? It's going to look like and feel like a lot of pretty nasty stuff coming up and out, and I kind of have to just sit through that and bear with it. And the more miserable it is, the better I'm scrubbing out the system." You know, *maybe* there's some truth to that, but I don't know.

Joy brings openness. It's purifying. Joy is also clarifying. So a joyful state has a lot more clarity in it than an unhappy state, which tends to be quite confused, agitated. Joy brings this purification through clarity. It also brings purification because it transforms our intentions – slowly, gradually, non-linearly over time. The more joy we have just coming and going, the more we feel we have enough. There's just more and more, very gradually, probably almost imperceptibly in our life, in our life of practice. More and more, we feel like we have enough. The mind doesn't need to move out so much in greed, in envy. Doesn't move so much in the tight confines of stinginess. You feel like you have enough. It's purifying. It's purifying of the intentions. We have enough. It overflows. We can give. We feel we have enough.

Joy, also, in a very natural, organic way, moves towards equanimity. Its natural movement in the fullness of time is to move towards equanimity – a beautiful, rich, deep equanimity. That's just the way joy matures. We talk a lot about equanimity and the ability to stay really steady, really spacious, really present. It's an outcome of joy. It's one of the outcomes of joy.

Śāntideva, the great Mahāyāna teacher, said joy as well is an aspect of effort. It's an indispensable ingredient of effort, along with aspiration, being clear what it is that we're aspiring to in the path. Aspiration, confidence – little old me might be able to get somewhere. Aspiration, confidence, joy, and rest. Joy, very central, part of what enables us to put forth effort on the path.

Now, we can assume, and this is, I think, quite common, that perhaps happiness is a bit superficial compared with the real heavy, dark stuff that we need to deal with. I come across that quite a lot, and certainly reflecting on my own past, really feel that I was very much in that view for quite some years. I really had to get in there, and if I was working deeply, that was when I was in contact with what was difficult. If I was in contact with what was difficult, that was a sign that, "Oh, this is really deep work."

The real work is through going through the hard stuff, which is unhappy.” So just to ask, all of us to ask ourselves: where is my assumption on that? What is my assumption on that? What do I assume about the nature of depth and happiness, or unhappiness? What do I assume about transformation? That it’s through, again, through this sort of difficult misery that it comes?

And it can be that not so much unhappiness, although perhaps unhappiness, but just a lack of happiness can, very commonly, just be our normal state. Our normal state is actually not that happy. And then we take that, because it’s normal, we take it to be natural. This is quite interesting. It takes quite a lot of, I’d say, investigation to see that unhappiness is more kind of pumped up. It takes more work to be unhappy than it does to be happy. It’s not at all obvious at first, but once you really get into this, watching the back and forth between happiness and unhappiness, what’s involved in supporting each, it takes quite a lot to support unhappiness. How much thought is often involved in supporting unhappiness? We need quite a complex sort of structure of thought holding the unhappiness up.

We might ask: do I feel that joy is possible for me? Do I feel that it’s possible in my life that joy can come as a frequent guest in the heart? Not be there all the time, of course not. But just, do I feel that’s possible for me?

So all human beings are interested in happiness, and we assume that we’re interested in happiness. But I also feel that it’s actually quite rare for someone to be, I don’t know what the word is, *ruthlessly* interested in happiness. [laughs] You know, it’s a cliché to say, we look in the wrong places for happiness. And we *do*, and we all know that, but it’s become meaningless. And we’re bombarded with advertisements saying, either deliberately telling us or very unsightly or subtly implying that you need this or you need that, or you need to do this or that, or look like this or that to be happy. That’s the kind of message. We’re bombarded with that. And so in spiritual circles, or even self-help circles, whatever it is, it’s a cliché to say we’re looking in the wrong place. But it’s actually quite rare, I think, for someone to really kind of take this bull by the horns and say, “Let me get to the bottom of this question of happiness. Let me not let go of it. Let me go right, keep hanging on, and not settle for anything kind of second best.” And it may be, I think it is actually, it may be, that a full inquiry into happiness, into joy, turns out to be the same thing as an inquiry into freedom from suffering – that to follow one question to its end is to follow the other question to its end. So it’s like two sides of the same coin in the path.

There are a lot of words, you know – joy, happiness – a lot of ranges of what that means, and I don’t want to get too hung up on words tonight. But I just want to drop something in about another word, very briefly: fulfilment. There was a survey of parents. I can’t remember where or when, but it tested in some way their happiness before being parents and after being parents. And pretty common, pretty strong result, that they were less happy once they were parents. [laughter] But fortunately there was a little sophistication on the part of the psychologists. They had another question, rating their sense of fulfilment, and that was often much higher.

What I’m trying to say is, it’s a complex picture here, and not to grab too much on one thing. If I think about teaching sometimes, you know, the truth is oftentimes it’s very challenging. It’s very hard. There’s a lot about it that’s difficult and tiring and all the rest of it. And yet, I would say, I would never – I mean, sometimes it’s totally joyful, and it’s a real joy to share the Dharma; mostly it is. But I can, without hesitation, always say that it’s deeply fulfilling. It’s something profoundly fulfilling, with all

the difficulties. Before I was a Dharma teacher, I was a musician, and in the later years a composer. The artistic process, if one really cares about creating something, really cares about what it is one's expressing, a lot of frustration in that process, a lot of the nitty-gritty and the sort of really trying to get it right. Is that a joyful process? I don't know. Is it fulfilling? Yes. So just to paint a bit of a bigger picture.

And when we talk about joy, there's such a huge range, and all the way from someone literally feeling like they're going to burst in ecstasy – that *does* happen, and there are people in this hall I know who have come to me and said something like that more than once. Bubbly joy, still joy, quiet joy, peaceful joy. Joy has so much of a range, so many textures to it, and I want to really talk about the whole thing, the whole range. A lot of joy is not that remarkable. I really want to include that tonight. If you're listening and you think, "Oh, gosh, I've never had that," I really want to include that, because that's *as* significant. The whole range is significant.

Someone was telling me in terms of this range of joy that they were listening to a piece of music – probably many of you know it: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and the Ode to Joy, it's the last movement. And so involved in it, and so swept up by it, and so overjoyed with it that afterwards, after the music had stopped, for quite a while afterwards, their perception of the world, it changed their perception so deeply for a period of time, the perception of the world was that the whole world was joy, the whole universe was the expression of joy.

So there's this huge range that's available. It's all important, and it's all good, and not to fix too much on the extreme expression of it. But what would it be to experience half an hour of joy every day? Would that be possible? How would that influence our life? How would that impact on our life? I think it would actually be life changing.

Joy can relativize a lot. The presence of joy can relativize a lot of other things in our life. We talk a lot about letting go, and say, "Let go, just let go, just let go." But oftentimes we need something else to hang on to. We need something else to hang on to before we can let go. It's too much to ask someone who feels impoverished inside to let go of something. Of course they're going to cling. When we have, when we feel nourished, when we feel we have enough, it's much easier to let go. There's a story the Buddha once – you know, because they lived on alms, just receiving whatever they received for food that day. The Buddha went on alms round one day in a village, and he was next to another monk from a different tradition, and that monk got fed and the Buddha didn't get fed. And this other monk kind of turned to the Buddha and said, "Huh, now what are you going to do?", something like that. [laughter] "Big Buddha!" [laughter] And the story goes there was just a pile of straw there, and the Buddha jumped onto the straw, crossed his legs, and sank into meditation. Just before he sank, he said, "Feeders on joy are we." [laughter] And he was fine!

So I just want to say, I'm aware listening to this that it can actually be difficult to hear. It can be difficult to hear about joy. And especially when we hear about that range and we feel like, "Gosh, no idea about ..." For some people, that *does* come, and for others it feels like totally alien to their range of experience. So it can be difficult to hear, and I really appreciate that. It can bring up for us an awareness of the absence of joy in our life. Again, like I said the other night, can there be just a backing off of the measuring, and just a listening to what's possible? What I want to talk about in this talk, as I said at the beginning, is: what nurtures joy? Can it be something that becomes possible for us more and

more?

One might be listening and have completely the opposite, or in one's day here there's actually sadness, there's unhappiness. Sadness and joy are dependent on the way we look, are dependent on the way we relate. If there is sadness at any time, if there is unhappiness, just an experiment, an experiment: what if when there's sadness and there's unhappiness, one just very delicately, very lightly put the attention on the heart centre? Just in the centre of the chest, very delicate, very light, a very allowing, delicate, open attention there. And just was *with* that sense of sadness. And in particular, in a very sort of fundamental level, with its sense of unpleasantness, the texture of the difficulty of it. Christina, I think it was Christina, talked about *vedanā* earlier: pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. What if one just stayed very, very delicate, very open, very caring with the sense of unpleasantness in the heart area when there's sadness there?

If one could do that, and one had a connection, one was connected to that with presence, one was interested, sustained an interest, and one was accepting, completely allowing of that sadness, of that unpleasantness, and one was steady with those three things: connection, interest, acceptance – C-I-A, if the CIA is there. [laughs] Maybe it's a stupid thing to say, but I would almost bet, I would almost wager that just slowly, gradually, if one can sustain that kind of relationship, it would turn into joy. Probably just a very, very quiet joy. It's through the relationship. It's through, it's dependent on our relationship that sadness arises and unhappiness arises. It's dependent on our relationship that joy arises. So this really is an invitation to experiment with this. Even as I'm talking, if you feel like, "Oof, I don't know," try this. The absence of aversion, the absence of pushing away and wanting to get rid of, brings joy.

A little while ago – I'm sure I'm not the only person who's a bit sensitive to garlic, so if I eat garlic in the evening or late at night, I find that I'm a bit, the body is quite restless and it's difficult to sleep. This happened a little while ago, and I was trying to sleep, and I had a busy day the next day or whatever. And just a feeling of irritation with it, trying to sleep and not being able to. Then I just decided, "Okay, I'll just give in to it, and I'll just get up," and just sat. And giving in to it, non-aversion. Then I got up. There was still the restlessness, but happiness came, instead of the irritation, the unhappiness. It's all in the presence of the aversion or not.

Oftentimes when we hear the teachings, and when we might be hearing about this, it's quite common to have the attitude of, "Yeah, but it's impermanent. Joy's impermanent." But I don't think that's enough. I'm not sure if that's enough. So of course it's impermanent, but I'm not sure that just kind of being afraid to develop it because, "Well, I don't want to cling to it because, you know, it'll all end in tears" – I'm not sure that's enough.

There's a poem by William Blake. I think it's sort of like this: "He who tries to hold to a joy does the winged life destroy. But he who kisses a joy as it flies lives to see eternity's sunrise." And so often what we hear in teachings – and it's a very important part of the teachings – is actually just let it all come and let it all go. Unhappiness, joy, whatever it is, just don't cling. Let it come, let it go. But maybe there's more to it than that.

So yes, it's impermanent, but we can also cultivate joy. We can really cultivate joy. And both these approaches – this is really important – both these approaches are important. So at times, we can be in a mode of practice where we're just letting everything come up and everything go. We're just into the impermanence of it, and that's totally fine. And other times, we're very interested in cultivating the joy,

and we're deliberately in a mode of nourishing something, nurturing something.

It is impossible for anyone, even a Buddha, to have joy all the time. Even a Buddha is going to rest sometimes in equanimity and just, "Phew! Turn it off for a minute!" [laughter] It's impossible to actually sustain. It's a condition and it doesn't sustain all the time. But it can be more frequent, and it can deepen, and we can learn to sustain it. This is a little bit of a different approach to the teachings. We can actually learn to sustain joy. We can practise joy. We can learn that. And we need to understand kind of how to do that. Okay, great idea, sounds wonderful – how do I do it? How does it come? What nurtures it? What builds joy? What allows joy? How do I get out of the way?

The Buddha used this word a lot, 'skill.' He used the word 'skill' a lot, which is not, for some people it's not a very attractive word, but there's something extremely just compassionate and pragmatic about it. If we said 'the art of joy,' it's a bit like, "Well, I'm not really an artist. I don't really have that." But a skill is something that we can all learn. Wherever we feel we are, we can develop more of a skill at something. And something which even might seem impossible can become just, through the gradual development of a skill, more and more possible for us.

I remember when I must have been about six or seven or something, and every year we had my cousins in Italy, and we used to drive, the whole family in the car, three days, which was interesting, across Europe to Italy, through France and Switzerland. And somewhere, I don't remember where it was, we stopped once, and there was a sort of go-kart track, ostensibly for kids, but it had traffic lights, and sort of complex road junctions, and the cars had gears and all this stuff. And I was however old, 6 or 7. My younger brother just looked right at it and leapt into the thing, full-on accelerator, and zoomed off, happy as Lewis Hamilton or whatever. And I was completely just overwhelmed, and just completely, I just froze. It seemed so complicated, and so, like, how do I even navigate this? And of course now driving is just, well, you don't even think about it. You just drive and have a complicated conversation with somebody. Just over time, it's a skill that develops. And I even remember when I was learning to drive, I was 16 or 17, also feeling overwhelmed. It's just a skill. It's just a skill, and joy, in a way, is the same.

One of my teachers, Ajaan Geoff, talks about skilful attachment, and it's actually maybe worth, in a way, getting attached to what brings joy. We talk about non-attachment and letting go; maybe grabbing hold of what brings joy. And later, we can let go of joy too. But it will only be because we're letting go for something better. So he uses an analogy of a ladder, climbing a ladder. You don't let go of one rung until you've grabbed hold of the other one. There's something that's helping our letting go, that's moving us on. That may not be an image that resonates very comfortably with a lot of people, because the notion of a ladder and holding on, it seems goal-oriented. We could get really into that; I won't tonight. What are the views about that? Is there a place for that view in the path, *as well* as this other approach? They don't have to be mutually exclusive. There's also room for another approach of "Let it all come, let it all go. It's all impermanent. Just let go. Don't cling." And we can move between these modes.

So the Buddha talked a lot about what brings joy, and just repeating a little bit what we talked about the other night: *sīla*, this attention to ethics. He talked about the bliss of blamelessness. It's just that we care so much about how we are in life and what we're putting out that we can rest in our own sense of goodness. We can rest without worry about the repercussions of our actions: "Will so-and-so find out

what I said about them behind their back? Will they find me out about whatever it is?” And there’s a real foundation for joy there. *Dāna*, he talked endlessly about *dāna*, and how much *dāna* and giving, generosity, the generous heart is a happy heart. How much faith do we have in that, as I said the other day?

So what feeds it; what also eats away at joy? Some of it’s really obvious: worry. Worry is something we really have to learn in practice – it’s a gradual learning – we learn how to work with worry, in a way, draining it of its energy. There are some things in life, you know, there’s such a cultural agreement about worrying about certain things, like money, for instance. Everyone – and it’s understandable; I don’t want to dismiss it or play it down, but it’s almost like everyone is agreeing that we need to worry about money and investments, and have you got the right interest rate and portfolio and all this stuff. And it can be that one needs to actually be really firm with oneself about worry, and particularly things like money worry. Just, “I’m actually not going to do that. I’m really going to just cut it off. I’m going to practise generosity, something that’s going against that grain,” because it has such an inner momentum and such a cultural momentum, and once we’re swept up in that, it will eat away the joy. I’m not saying that’s easy, but sometimes it’s like a kind of firmness with oneself is really important.

So, eaten away by worry; by uncharitable inner attitudes. Envy, greed, or the opposite of this sympathetic joy – sort of someone else achieves something or does something really well, and we say, “Yeah, good,” but we’re sort of a little bit putting them down. We can see ourselves doing this. It’s so interesting just to watch these – they’re just little movements, but they’re so common, they’re so repeated. We all have this. And can we just notice they’re happening, and then just put the other movement in? Celebrate, take delight in the achievements of others and the success of others.

So, judging. Ten years, it must have been at least ten years ago when I was a composer. I had this piece performed in America. I was present at all the rehearsal processes with the orchestra, and such a sort of intense process of making sure everything was right, and every little note was exactly balanced with – you know, the oboe was balanced with the flute, and not too loud, and you got the exact rhythm right, and all this. And really, really intense, precise attention to detail, wanting it to be just right and just exactly what I had in mind.

The concert came, and sitting, listening to the concert with the same attitude of, you know, “Oh, okay, that was wrong, and that wasn’t quite balanced.” It was quite an unjoyful experience, actually, to sit basically on the edge of my seat, and [huffing and puffing], noting, making mental notes of all the little mistakes everyone made.

Then a few days later, I went to visit some other friends who were musicians in New York. We just saw this advertisement for – it was an Arabic music concert in Brooklyn Public Library, and we just thought, “Cool, you know, let’s go see that.” And it was really long. It was like hours and hours. I think it was all day. And we went, and it was in a huge library. Different sort of acts would come on, and Arabic poetry. Of course we didn’t understand Arabic at all, whatever. But the scene was families and kids and picnics and grandmas, and lots of noise, and just a whole big scene together. And I remember sitting there and sort of taking in the whole beauty of the life unfolding. And of course what was very much absent was this critical, “Right. Wrong. That wasn’t quite good enough,” etc. And such joy and delight and appreciation of just the beauty of humanity sort of coming together, and living, and life just

manifesting.

Would it be possible – maybe not *easy* – would it be possible to have a real precision of the critical faculty, both inner and outer, without the aversion, without the worry, without the fear, without the judgment? Keep that there, so that there can be both this real discernment and an openness to wonder and joy. I think that *is* possible.

One huge part in nurturing joy is not overlooking it. This is really what I want to stress, because it can feel like it's a long way away. Not overlooking joy, not overlooking what it is that brings joy and what there is to appreciate. We really need to recognize joy and recognize what there is to appreciate. We can incline the attention, incline where we put our intention, we can incline towards what brings joy. So right here in the retreat, and I think I spoke about this briefly in the opening talk, can we take care of our heart and our mind by actually deliberately inclining the awareness towards seeing the beauty here? There's a lot of beauty here. Seeing what there is to appreciate here, seeing the goodness here. How much goodness is here? Just at Gaia House, how much kindness? The immense work that the managers do, the generosity of the managers just taking care of all of us. Actually, Gaia House kind of runs on kindness. I say sometimes it just kind of wobbles along, strung together by kindness. It may not *look* like that, but there's a lot of kindness behind what goes on here, through what goes on here. Can we incline the awareness to see that, deliberately? The generosity, the love. It's all here. It's totally here.

So sometimes to look around you when you're in the dining room, when you're just going about in the house, and just see: who else is here? Who's practising here? How lovely that we're here together practising, that we're supporting each other. If they weren't here, how much more difficult it would be to practise. Incline the mind. Oftentimes, too often, the habit of the mind is the other way: fault-finding, what's irritating, what's wrong, what's the problem, what's difficult. Just, you need to incline the mind. It's going against our habit. It's going against our habit, and we need to just, as I said, make new habits. So it takes some work at first, but you can really play with it.

The other day, I was just playing around with this. I was coming from somewhere, and I can't remember what it was, but I was a little bit irritated at something. I was driving, and I just said, "Okay, let me play with this." And driving along the road, and going one way, and of course the cars on the other side going the other way. I just reflected: how lovely that the other cars don't deliberately swerve into my car. [laughter] And I was, in a way, I was just being silly with it, but it actually really worked! It was quite interesting. I was really appreciating the fact that I can walk out there, I can drive out there, and of course bad things happen, and of course there are nasty people out there, of course. But actually, pretty much, on the whole, people are not that bad! [laughter] You can play with this stuff. There's a real element of play and experimentation, activity in practice, like shaking things up, and you can have fun with it.

It's interesting, too: long-term retreatants oftentimes spend so long in this very refined atmosphere here, very lovely atmosphere. We talk all the time about love and mindfulness. [laughter] And then they go to Newton Abbot or whatever it is. [laughter] And it's like, "Uhhh!" And they can, very common for judgmentalism to come in. One really has to guard against that. Incline the mind towards what is beautiful, to seeing what is beautiful – the Buddha's words, "Remaining percipient of the beautiful." It means exactly what I'm talking about.

So, you know, people make their gardens beautiful. Just really small stuff; actually it's significant. The managers sometimes get this newspaper. It's called *Positive News*. I don't know if many of you know it. It is admittedly only a few pages. [laughter] *The Times* on Sunday sort of ... [gestures a huge size] But actually it's all full of positive news, lovely things that people are doing, whereas you flick through another newspaper, you put the news at ten on, and it's kind of, "Pheugh!", you know? And so we're just inundated with that. We need to take care of this. Where are we inclining the attention?

Very important, too, appreciating one's own good qualities. This is absolutely huge, and how often we don't take care of this. Can I appreciate my own good qualities? Just being here, all the effort that gets put forth, all the willingness, all the courage, all the steadiness, everything. Can I appreciate that? Not to overlook it. It's absolutely indispensable as a foundation for joy.

A friend, actually he died recently, but a friend I had was a psychotherapist, and he worked with many different kinds of clients. One group he worked with was addicts of different kinds, people with different kinds of addictions. And one of the ways he would work with addicts in particular, one of the pieces that he would do with them, was he would ask them to make an inventory of things they were grateful for. They would come every week, and he would say, "Here's a piece of paper. Come back and write [I've forgotten what it was] ten things or something that you're grateful for." Almost without exception the reaction was, "Pff! I'm not doing that. That's stupid!" And yet, often they *would* do it, and would report, "Wow, what a difference that made!" And it's just this inclining the mind towards what we have to be grateful for. Huge is the power of gratitude. And not just for addicts, obviously. [audio cuts out briefly at 46:21] And a lot of it is about having a buddy and touching base with them, I think every day even, and just saying to them one thing that you're grateful for that day, one thing that touched your heart, one thing that was appreciative. And what a difference it makes!

There is the place in practice for being with what's difficult, of course there is, and opening to it and being patient and being kind with what's difficult. We talk a lot about that. Definitely, definitely, really important. And there is also the place of inclining the mind, shaking it up a bit, doing something different – inclining the mind towards gratitude, appreciation, beauty, etc. They're both important. Again, what's the assumption? Does one sound superficial?

What else feeds joy? The other divine abidings, the other *brahmavihāras*. Loving-kindness brings joy. Over time it brings joy. It brings joy into the heart, brings happiness into the heart. Compassion also brings happiness. This is an interesting one, because oftentimes even people on retreat feel like, "Oh, compassion is a bit scary." Feel like you're going to be overwhelmed with the sadness of the world. But if one works with the art of compassion practice, it's actually a very happy practice. There's a lot of happiness there. One needs to know how to work with it. Compassion brings happiness. The wish to serve others – again, Śāntideva, and he talks about *bodhicitta*, this desire, this overwhelming desire just to give to others, to work for the benefit of others, and what joy that brings. He talks in very dramatic language, but again, it can be very undramatic. Don't know if anyone's either seen or heard Mother Teresa? Tremendous amount of giving, and such joy in it. She talks a lot about the joy in the giving – it needs to be there.

What else? Mindfulness, when there's mindfulness, attentiveness, presence, with curiosity and the curiosity of investigation, that can be there, and a kind of energy with that, that we're injecting some energy into that. That brings joy. It's actually quite similar. The Buddha taught a little formula:

mindfulness, curiosity of investigation, and the energy that comes with that, and just stay with that, and joy comes. Again, it might not be that remarkable, but it doesn't matter. Is it possible sometimes, when we're sitting, and say, "Yeah, I'm mindful. I'm here," can we inject our attentiveness, inject our mindfulness with these qualities? Curiosity, investigation, energy.

One thing that becomes really significant in this is attention to joy itself. The Buddha said, a very significant quote, "Whatever one frequently dwells upon, that will become the inclination of the heart, the inclination of the mind." To really reflect on the implications of that. If we dwell on joy, pay attention to joy, it becomes the inclination of the mind. So when there is joy (and the whole spectrum of what I'm talking about; please remember that – very undramatic, unremarkable-seeming, to the whole range of you're peeling yourself off the ceiling), how does it feel in the body? It's really, really significant. How does it feel in the body? So joy, happiness actually does have a vibration in the body, has a resonance there, reverberation. And if we can tune into that and just hold that in our attentiveness (remember, even if it's nothing particularly strong), just have a look, see what's there in the body. How does the mind feel? But particularly, how does the body feel? And just tune into that vibration. It's a way that builds joy. And through that, we become more and more familiar with that, more and more familiar with happiness. It becomes more and more accessible to us. And it deepens. It goes on a journey of deepening.

It's interesting, when there's joy there, to whatever degree, what feeds it and what doesn't. And I know for myself and many retreatants have come to me and reported, "There's so much joy I feel like dancing." And oftentimes people *do*. Sometimes very early in the morning, no one else is up, and yogis are dancing down the corridor. If you get up early, you open your door, and you think you're on the set of *Strictly Come Dancing* or whatever. [laughter] I'm exaggerating! But a person may really feel like, one tunes into it in the body, and it actually feels like it wants to express. Or one's in the fields, and one just feels like wheeling and turning in the fields, and it's there and it wants to come out. Again, experiment with this if it's there and it feels strong. Move. See what that's like. What does that do to the joy? And then there's also the experiment with just really being still with it and letting it kind of grow, letting it build inside. So all this, there's a lot of experimentation with all of it. But the attention to how it feels is really important.

[checks time] Yikes. Okay. So this spiritual joy, what the Buddha called, and sometimes this physical aspect of joy is called *pīti*, and it can come also out of concentration. It's a pleasure that's not based on the senses. It's not based on sense pleasure. This is quite a significant point. It's not that we're interested in *closing* the senses, but there is I think in practice, as it matures, a maturing of the relationship with sense pleasure. And so, rather than being hungry for it and sort of reliant on sense pleasure, we can be open to the pleasure through the senses, but it's actually a sense of wonder or mystery through the senses that we're tuning into more and more, rather than the aspect of it being pleasant or unpleasant, lovely taste or lovely this or that. There's something that's available through the senses different than pleasure, different than sense pleasure, that's actually deeper and more nourishing, that has to do with wonder. We see something, the rain – maybe rain's not that pleasant; there's a wonder in it. Not dependent on pleasant or unpleasant; dependent on something else.

We can develop this physical feeling of joy – and again, this is talking about long-term practice now – by giving attention to it. It can seem like it comes out of concentration sometimes, and it does.

That's true. But it also comes out of, or what it *really* comes out of, is non-entanglement. When we're not entangled with what's going on, when there's openness, that allows joy, allows happiness. And it can be, it can come to the point where one really feels one has a choice with this. So something difficult goes on – I remember about a month after 9/11, and living in America, and the US Army invaded Afghanistan, and I felt really sad, saddened by that. But I had just been on retreat a while ago, and there was a lot of access to this happiness. It was just interesting to notice that I could actually just decide to be sad or happy. Don't have to be a victim; there's some choice. Not *always* one would have this choice. Training the mind and the power of training the mind. This *is* available.

I'm not sure about time, but are we still okay-ish? Yeah? I talked the other night about the three characteristics – contemplating impermanence, contemplating unsatisfactoriness, and contemplating things being not-self. And the more we contemplate that, the more joy it brings. We can see this. So they're not depressing. There's a letting go. If we really inquire into joy, we realize that joy and wonder – wonder being an aspect of joy, one of the faces of joy – it's kind of inversely, so to speak, related to how much selfing there is going on. The more self-concern, the more self-view, the less the capacity for wonder. So to really see this, that there's something in letting go of the self-view, releasing that, letting go of the identification that allows joy, allows wonder in particular.

Gradually, as the path progresses, we open more and more to a joy that's not from *things*. So that's a lot what contemplating the three characteristics has to do with: letting go of our addiction to things and our dependency on things to give us a sense of well-being and okayness and happiness. Not to dismiss things, and the beauty of things and objects and sense pleasures and all that, but one eventually realizes their limitation in a very real way.

There's that story of the frog that lives in the ocean, and he visits a frog that lives in a puddle. The frog in the puddle wants to say, you know, "Look at my puddle! It's pretty neat, isn't it?" And the ocean frog says, "Yeah ..." [laughter] And the puddle frog says, "Where do you live?" And he says, "Well, *pff*, you'd have to kind of come and check it out. I can't really explain."¹ And it's a little bit like that. It's something that we mature into in a very natural and organic way as the path deepens.

So letting go of things and our dependency on things can sound bleak, but I really don't think it is. How much unhappiness is there in the world because one *believes* I need something to be happy? It's not the fact that I don't have it; it's the fact that I *believe* that I need it. In itself, it may not have anything to do with it. Very often, for example, money or relationship – there's so much hype about romantic love in our culture, and so a person who doesn't have that very often feels, "I need that." But maybe that's not the actual thing. Maybe it's just the belief that they don't have something which they feel they should have, or need to have. A bit more investigation.

So one, again, very naturally develops – a joy in absence comes, a joy in absence. And it's not based on aversion. There's a poem I really love by Rumi, a very short poem. It says:

Come to the orchard in Spring.
There is light and wine, and sweethearts in the pomegranate flowers.
If you do not come, these things do not matter.
If you do come, these things do not matter.

Something about our relationship with things changes, and the joy is not dependent on the things, beautiful as they are. It's part of the unfoldment of the path. Through the movement of cultivating joy, as joy comes and goes and comes and goes, and happiness comes and goes, we begin to notice, too, how our sense of things and the perception of things changes depending on whether there's happiness or not there. We see the emptiness of things and our perception of things. Looks *this* way if I feel happy, looks *this* way if I feel unhappy. Begin to lose our infatuation with believing that things are a certain way. It depends on the mind state. We see that through the coming and going of happiness.

Just finally: there is, of course, the joy of freedom, not being dependent. The joy of release, not being bound in the self and defining the self and defining the world, not being bound by things. The joy of freedom, the joy of emptiness. One of my teachers, Ajaan Geoff, he was very fond of saying, "The Buddha was someone who did not let go. He did not let go in his search for the highest happiness." He actually clung to that, where most of the rest of us would let go at some point, and say "Oh, okay, I'll settle for this." He actually did not let go in his search for a deathless happiness. And also, as my same teacher, Ajaan Geoff, says, "All the happiness that we experience in life – we're going to die. How good can it be if it all ends in death?" Is it possible to find a happiness beyond the things of life, a joy beyond the things of life? And sometimes the mind just boggles with that: "Or what, after death, or what? What does it mean?" But how good can it be? However good it gets, it's going to end. It's going to be wiped out by death. What would it be to take the inquiry into joy *that* deeply?

So in a way, how tenacious, how ruthless, with kindness, of course with kindness, how honest, how thorough might we be in questioning the kinds of joy and the kinds of happiness there are? Because as I said, there's a huge range of it. There is, of course, happiness in sense pleasure. There's happiness in being somebody important in the eyes of others, in praise. There's happiness in winning something, in competing. Just knowing the whole range. Really letting ourselves experiment and taste the whole range. Keeping that inquiry alive, so that we know, and it's not what a teacher says, or the Dharma says, or an advertisement says, or this says or that says; we know in ourselves, in our hearts, about the kinds of joy and what feels the best. It's not coming from 'should.' We know it in the heart. We know it in the life. We know it in the cells.

And what I really want to say is that joy, like all aspects of the Dharma, is an inquiry, and not to feel like it's impossible. It's a skill and an inquiry, and it's available, and it has a whole range to it that we can explore. We can learn what it is that nourishes that. This *is*, *is*, *is* available to us.

Let's sit for a couple of minutes together.

¹ Coleman Barks, a translator of Rumi's works, first heard the story of the ocean frog from a teacher named Bawa Mahaiyaddeen, and further traces the story's origin not to Rumi but to a Taoist text by Chuang Tzu. See Coleman Barks, tr., *Rumi: Soul Fury: Rumi and Shams Tabriz on Friendship* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 7–8.