



OPEN EYE

Meditation Group

See for Yourself

Shared Joy and It's Cultivation

Four Divine Abodes: Joy or Mudita, Compassion or Karuna, Loving-Kindness or Metta, Equanimity or Upekkha

Shared Joy

(Mudita: gladness at other's good fortune, or empathetic joy)

- C.F. Knight

A feature of the Buddha's teachings is recognition of the pairs of opposites to get beyond them. The Buddha's method of mental training and development was to first define unwholesome or unskillful thoughts, words, and deeds, or practices which characterize many of one's habits, and then to show the opposites of wholesome or skillful nature as an achievement to be sought after for the abolition of them both, eventually, when even the good must be left behind as well as the evil; when even the Raft of Dhamma Teachings is to be abandoned — after crossing the flood of samsara. The Buddha's method of expounding the negative and the positive, the passive, and the dynamic aspects of behavior, in both abstract and concrete terms, is to create awareness of what is to be abandoned and what is to be sought after and nurtured.

The basic ignorance pointed out by the Buddha is not so much a rejection of the truth, but a failure to perceive truth. It is, as it were, a "blind spot" in our perception akin to the weakened section of the brain or the nervous system which results in limited understanding. In other words, the depth of our ignorance may be measured by our lack of consciousness of it.

This is why it is so necessary that we should see and recognize our ignorance if we are to eradicate it. It is also important that we should be mindful of "the good that has arisen," and to foster and develop it to the point of wholeness. To realize our ignorance is the beginning of wisdom — the first light to shine on the darkness of our obscured view. While we are blissfully unaware of unwholesome states of mind within ourselves, such states will continue to flourish, and their roots will dig deeper into our very being. Just so too, in our

relationships with our fellow men, the unperceived evils will be repeated unconsciously and unrecognized, building up a cumulative unhappy future for us under the retributive causal law of karma.

As with all wholesome states, these four desirable characteristics are the antidotes to the poisons of their opposite unwholesome states. Less has been said or written of mudita than of the other three of these four characteristics. While loving-kindness and compassion are objective, reaching out to all sentient beings, mudita and equanimity are subjective, or personal in their application.

How is Joy an antidote to other unwholesome states?

We never tire of asserting the interdependence of every aspect of the Buddha's teachings. We have already stated that ignorance is a failure of perception, and it is true that greed and hatred do arise through the lack of understanding of their source and lack of understanding of their results; that craving born of ignorance is the culprit, and the purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to eliminate craving. It is craving that gives rise to jealousy, envy, covetousness, avarice, and greed in all of its manifestations. Here mudita, when practiced and developed, becomes a "sublime" and "boundless" state of mind to be "dwelt in" as a corrective characteristic — one has taken fuel away from the unwholesome, by turning one's intentions and attention instead to the wholesome state of gladness.

One of the most frequently used similes by the Buddha was that of fire. At times it was the destructive quality of fire that was likened to the destructive nature of the ignorance. At other times it was the ardent nature of fire that was to be emulated in the pursuance of the path of liberation. In its uncontrolled existence fire is a destructive danger. When fire is understood it can be one of our greatest boons and blessings.

The three roots of evil — greed, hatred, and delusion — are also known as "the three fires." On one occasion the Buddha and his band of monks were staying on Gaya Head, a mountain near the city of Gaya. From their elevated position they watched one of the great

fires that from time to time ravaged the countryside. This inspired what is known as “The Fire Sermon,” which is the third recorded discourse delivered by the Buddha subsequent to his Enlightenment, and at the beginning of his long ministry. To the Buddha, the world of ignorance was like the flaming plains below, “Everything is burning,” said the Buddha, “burning with the fire of greed, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion.” (Vin. 21)

It is these three fires that give rise to jealousy, envy, covetousness, and avarice. The craving for possessions, the craving for sense pleasures, the begrudged success of others, the hatred that is begotten by the gains of others, the odious comparison of greater status compared with our humble circumstances, these are the “fires” that burn endlessly, causing suffering, if unattended..

It is now evident why gladness is such an important characteristic to be cultivated. When we view the success of others with the gladness—in the same way we would offer compassion and loving-kindness to those who suffer grief and distress, sadness and tribulation, sorrow and mourning—then we are experiencing empathetic joy, and are eradicating our own greed and craving. Developed still further, we can reach the stage of sharing with others their joy of possession, their financial or social successes, their elevation to positions of civic or national importance, or their receipt of titles and honorifics. In such a manner joy is an antidote to conceits of all kinds, and its growth and development removes craving’s grip and our own suffering.

Finding Joy in the Joy of Others: How to Cultivate It.

- Patrick Zeis

Before we explore four ways that you can begin practicing Mudita in daily life, two words of caution should be mentioned. First, when practicing Mudita, it is important to remember to not celebrate the material acquisitions or possession another receives, rather only the feelings of joy they experience. Because external objects, social status, and financial wealth are impermanent in nature, it is vital that we do not attach ourselves to their obtainment. Secondly, it is also important to express Mudita with internal equanimity and avoid over-exuberance, as this signals a deprivation from moments of happiness. Now, let’s look at four ways we can practice Mudita in our daily lives:

1. Using intention and attention to develop Mudita:

One of the best strategies that we can use to develop and cultivate any personal quality is through the power of intention and attention. After deciding that the practice of Mudita is something we want to start utilizing, we can take five to ten minutes each day to focus on the benefits others and ourselves will obtain from our practice. Similarly, we can use this time to focus on the negatives that come from living with envy, hatred, and resentment.

2. Cultivating Mudita while using social media:

Social media websites and Apps like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are oftentimes used by individuals who want to celebrate the good things happening in their lives. Over the past decade, scientific research has shown how individuals often experience feelings of jealousy when seeing or reading about the good fortune of others. We can use social media to first become aware of the feelings that arise when others post or tweet about their success and/or happiness. If we have negative or envious feelings, we can consciously make the effort to replace them with feeling of joy.

3. Practicing Mudita in everyday encounters: There are particular times throughout each of our lives when we see individuals living expressively happy. Due to cultural conditioning and society’s overtly negative outlook on life, it is easy to get annoyed when individuals openly express joy. We may judgmentally ask ourselves, ‘Why are these people so happy?’ before giving them a look of scorn. If we are able to consciously be aware of our resentful reactions to others who exhibit happiness in our everyday encounters, we can begin to purposefully replace our negative feelings with Mudita.

4. Cultivating Mudita in meditation: There are a number of Buddhist meditation practices that focus directly on the cultivation of Mudita. One such practice tells us to cultivate Mudita inside of ourselves and visualize a number of people we can send positive feelings towards. In sequential order, we may want to send feelings of Mudita towards an affectionate friend, a successful benefactor, a neutral person, and a person we dislike, before sending it towards all beings. Moreover, we can use a number of mantra based sayings after we send joyful feelings towards one individual and once again when we have completed the practice. For example, you may want to say: I’m happy that you’re happy. May your happiness continue. May your happiness increase. May your good fortune shine.
