

Joy

Good morning everyone! This is today's Dharma Espresso on joy.

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I would like to talk about a very important feature which will help you untangle knots and cultivate better. It is the element of joy, one of the four unlimited aspects of our mind (loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity). Joy is the feeling of boundless and limitless bliss. Loving-kindness is lovability. Compassion is love spreading out to other beings. And equanimity is the ability to give and to forgive. We seldom talk about immeasurable joy, but we do not know that it is a very important inner joy. Among the seven manifestations of enlightenment, also called the seven characteristics of Bodhi or seven factors of enlightenment, are mindfulness, investigation of all phenomena, diligence, joy, tranquility, Samadhi (concentration), and equanimity.

Joy is the fourth characteristic and also a manifestation of enlightenment. Most of the time, we do not pay attention to joy, we do not even think that joy is an important characteristic we should have. Why do you think that ascetics continue to practice severe disciplines and austerity? It turns out that behind their cultivation time, they experience joy. If you want to understand joy, you have to delve into the practice of deep meditation.

If you do not follow the Avatamsaka method and just cultivate normally by practicing meditation, you will surely go through the following stages:

First, land of bliss born from detachment from hindrances (sense-desires and unwholesome thoughts)

Second, land of delight and happiness born from concentration

Third, land of pervasive happiness born from the fading of raptures

Fourth, land of purification born from equanimity

I will now explain to you the first meditation stage (dhyana): Land of bliss born from detachment from hindrances. (I will explain the word bliss or joy at another time.) Now I will talk about the first state. When you meditate, in silence, unmoved, and relaxed to the point of having no more physical pain, you begin to experience a kind of joy or bliss. This bliss seems to spread out from each cell in our body.

The process of body relaxation has to go through several stages. First, the muscles must be unmoved but relaxed. After total relaxation, blood circulation will slow down, as will your heartbeat. Breathing will also slow down, becoming more gentle, refined, and subtle. Your brain will gradually get accustomed to a smaller input of oxygen, but will still be very clear, healthy, and focused. Pain in the body will disappear naturally and you will get into a new and very joyful state. As if your cells are shifting into a new kind of energy, your consciousness feels very gentle and blissful. Normally, if you are a beginner in meditation, you will see that this bliss may last for one or two hours. But if you are a seasoned meditator, the bliss may last for a whole day. This bliss is amazing because your body is unmoved. If you keep your body still for a while, you will feel that your body is so constrained in the beginning, but gradually you will feel as if your mind is getting out of your body. The Shurangama Sutra skillfully described this state: "Our inner light flows out, overwhelming the altered states in our mind." This inner light is no longer stuck in our body; it runs out and

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flows over. This image is to help us perceive that we and our mind are not stuck in our body anymore. Don't think that there is really something flowing out. As you see, everything we do is related to this body, for this body. Now imagine that our mind is no longer stuck to this body! This is not an out of body experience which does not pertain to Buddhism. The state when your mind is not stuck in the body is a little bit unusual; but in this state you will feel the joy of being liberated from the body. This kind of bliss rises naturally from our brain cells and from all our body cells and makes us feel that we're no longer stuck to the body. This bliss means that we are liberated from the skandha of form, and it will continue to liberate us from the skandhas of feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness to finally merge with our non-dual true mind. This bliss is the nature of our true mind and we need to go gradually through all the meditation stages.

Here I want to explain to you that in order to free yourselves from your body, you need to practice meditation. When you don't move and completely relax, your mind will be able to reach the blissful state. Just like love, kindness, compassion, and equanimity are manifestations of your true mind, bliss is also a manifestation of the true mind. Bliss does not come from your getting something. For example, you receive a gift, so you are happy; you meet a certain person or you get an opportunity to travel, so you are happy; but this happiness comes from your ego, from the satisfaction of your desires and hopes. The joy that comes from the four unlimited aspects of mind is a kind of bliss which happens because we are no longer stuck in our body; our body is no longer the center of focus (nexus), the place that binds us. We are beginning to get away from it.

You will certainly want to get to the land of bliss born from detachment from hindrances. This bliss is already there, but not accessible. If you want to access it, you surely have to meditate, sit in silence for a long time until your body pain subsides, in order to experience the transformation of your body and to liberate yourself from it.

This is only the first step, not something very advanced. But you have to begin somewhere to access this bliss which is now trapped in your body.

If you don't completely understand, you should listen to this a few more times and drink a few more cups of coffee to awaken yourself.

Thank you for listening. I wish you a happy and awakening day.

Dharma Master Heng Chang

Translated by Kim Chi and edited by Hoang-Tam.

Question or comment, please send email to css.translators@gmail.com.