

COMPASSION WORKS FOR ALL

Dharma Friends

For people in real and imagined prisons | Issue 238 | April 2022

HOW JOY SETS US FREE

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Responses To The Last Newsletter

"I'm thankful for that opportunity to have you make that impact in my life...the universe always sends its agents - we just have to be aware enough to recognize them! So there you go...just a quick word to encourage you to keep shining in the dark...just because many may not write don't mean they don't remember ...many of us are just distracted."

-Tim, AR

"Thank you so much for keeping me on your mailing list; it has been at least 17 years that you have been sending me Dharma Friends newsletter. Over the years, you have given me deep and beautiful insights. Also, you have helped me to maintain and increase my discipline. In bad times, you have helped me to live with compassion. I thank you with all my heart and mind."

-Ernest, MI

"Dear family at Compassion Works for All, Thank you for your love. You bring me joy."

-Adrian, CA



A quick sketch of Cory

-Adrian, CA

From The Director



Recently our family was leaving the house. We have 8 kids so going anywhere can sometimes feel like a chore. Everyone was dressed, wearing

shoes, and heading out to the van. As I often do, I made one last sweep just to make sure the doors were locked, the oven was off, candles were blown out, etc. And, for some reason, I got it in my head that I didn't have my wallet. So I went to our bedroom and looked in all my usual places: the nightstand, the dresser, the closet. No wallet.

I checked the kitchen, the living room, the kitchen again, the bathroom, and still, no wallet. I went outside and got in the car I typically drive and searched under the seat and in the pocket of the door. I looked in the backseat and beneath the console. I shut the door and went to the van where the whole family was waiting for me. "Has anyone seen my wallet?" I asked. Of course, no one had. My wife got out and came into the house with me to help me look. She checked all the places I'd gone as I scoured

obscure places like the refrigerator and pantry, the laundry room, and, because why not - the microwave. We met in the hall with the look on our faces that said in unison, "No wallet." Just as I began to grow frustrated she said, "It's not in your pocket right?" I shook my head no as I reached back to check.

But as you may have already guessed, there it was. The wallet was in my pocket the whole time.

I think joy is like that. We look everywhere and to everything for something we've had inside us the whole time. We think external things give us joy. But we cannot be given something we already have. As practitioners of mindfulness and meditation, our task is always to remember. Remember that joy is in your back pocket at all times. You just have to look.

Namaste,

Cory
cory@compassionarkansas.org



A Meditation

Consider if there is an attachment in your life that you could use as a teacher to help you develop greater self-awareness. Perhaps it is an ordinary life relationship, or an addiction, or a life circumstance. It can be something that you consider emotionally positive or emotionally negative. Chances are though that it carries both of those qualities for you. Choose something reflective of an aspect of your life that has a bit of a hold on you. In this meditation, it will become your teacher that tells you when you are enmeshed in a perspective that perpetuates your suffering - even when you have labeled it as something good in your life. If someone asked you if you would like to achieve enlightenment right now, your first thought might be that "No, I don't want to become enlightened because it would cause me to lose (??? whatever

ills in this blank for you)". We all would rather stay attached to those compelling parts of our lives than choose liberation! And, of course, that is what we are choosing and is one of the obstacles that is possibly keeping us stuck in our practice. To allow this attachment to become a vehicle for our enlightenment means that we must change our relationship to it. We must find a view that allows us to experience the essential emptiness of our source of attachment. We must find how we try to keep our object of attachment permanent, predictably fulfilling, and the fantasized source of happiness or (if we prefer) unhappiness. . We must hold this relationship in a much vaster and more subtle wisdom view. Only by resting in awareness when our compulsions and desires arise, at other times analyzing our relationship and all of its underlying aspects, and in seeing the true nature of that perceived solace

to our heart's longing, can we lift the deluded promises that it makes to us. Our meditation is to allow ourselves to meditate each day on this relationship or attachment as our teacher. Analyze, go deeper, and rest in all that it is for us. When we are in especially great pain because of our relationship or attachment, do nothing to try to fix things. Meditate and rest in what is. Let the lessons and awareness arise and teach you about you. Find gratitude in having such a powerful and resourceful teacher in your life.

It is crucial to know when it is appropriate to withdraw our attention from things that disturb our mind. However, if the only way we know how to deal with certain objects is to avoid them, there will be a severe limit as to how far our spiritual practice can take us.

A Poem



Perennial Lily

By John, AR

Life sometimes seems unfair,
But most times the most effective growth comes in our darkest of night.
Like the purple moon flower, the rare holland rainbow rose,
The perennial lily
All night bloomers - all blooming in the dark.

The caterpillar has its phase of metamorphosis
And we discover him a butterfly.
I come to prison to hallow my heart,
And learning from old mistakes -
Finding purpose.

I am a broken man.
I've fought and followed my demons through the deepest pits of hell
To discover that God is everywhere.
Even in hell the devil has no tyranny,
No absolute authority.

I will emerge from darkness,
And they will discover me in the light...
Someone flicked the switch and I was there.
From the previous night I'd bloomed,
And I am beautiful - like one of the ancients.
I am worthy of your ears - I am worthy of your eyes, "Look on me!"
Because I live, and from the darkness - I have arrived.

Yoga On The Inside

5 MIN GENTLE MORNING YOGA STRETCH

YOGAWITHULIANA.COM



1. Child's pose.

Deepen the breath.
Keep your hands far forward and elbows off the ground, stretching the upper body.



2. Cat-Cow stretch.

Inhale - drop the belly, cow pose.
Exhale - round the spine, cat pose.
Repeat 5-8 times.



3. Thread the needle.

Stay for 3-5 breaths on each side.



4. Downward facing dog.

Bend knees one by one, stretching out the back of the legs.



5. Ragdoll.

Hug elbows, knees can be bent, release neck and spine.
Rock side to side.



6. Seated spinal twist.

Stay for 3-5 breath on each side.

THOUGHTS ON JOY

From Anna Cox, December 2002

Joy is a state of ecstasy that has a spiritual generosity to it. It is subtle and expansive: an experience of the heart. Pleasure is more an experience of our physical senses – touching, seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling. When we are enjoying such pleasurable physical sensations, we want more. Joy teaches us about opening the heart. We learn to grow beyond ordinary emotions of anger, revenge, selfishness, and desire. These emotional states all contribute to our suffering because they focus upon emotional quests that will always prove unfulfilling in the long run. We can't force this non-attachment to those objects of our cravings. To expect that we can eliminate such desire from our lives simply by an intellectual decision will only lead to suppression and at some point, these unresolved desires will erupt. We can only take on the process of finding deeper resolutions so that these emotions will lift naturally as we arrive at a more transcendent focus. These compelling but more subtle experiences that define our reality unfold as the fruit of motivation, practice, resting in mediation and receiving the blessings and support of our teachers. Resolving attachments through wisdom understandings and following a spiritual path of seeing into the essential nature of our desires leads to their dissolution. To liberate ourselves from the control of our emotional needs opens up to the state of Joy. Joy is the experience of bliss and compassion that has always been present but has been clouded by the strength of our ordinary desires. Joy is what awaits us as all of these states of confusion and delusion lift.

A **Dhammapada** text tells us what our experience is after our desperate seeking of ego needs subsides through our meditation practice. It tells us that:

Never feeling enmity towards those who bear us malice, wonderful our lives become – free from enemies even in the midst of the most inimical. Never harming those who would hurt us, how wonderful our lives become -- never harmed even in the midst of harmful people.

When anger and the desire for revenge fall away, underneath we find that we

no longer experience a belief in enemies or harm.

Never feeling selfish even in the midst of selfish people, how wonderful our lives become – free from possessiveness even in the midst of those who would take everything. Never possessing anything, how wonderful our lives become – nourished by the same food of joy as the gods of light.

When we transcend our attachment to possessions, underneath we find a Joy nourished by pure radiance. We give up all of these ordinary promises of nourishing our hearts with ordinary desires and we rest in the highest Joy of great peace...

To allow the struggles of addiction to ordinary desire to become a spiritual path can be very helpful. An example of this type of practice is the Hindu tradition of the worship of Krishna. The followers make the God Krishna their heartfelt desire.

In a less concrete way, Vajrayana Buddhist practitioners may find that one of the deities that represent the qualities of Buddha's wisdom becomes the mirror of their own inner Buddha. They feel that prayers to that deity is their path. A part of the meditation is to open their hearts to the profound states of love that they feel for that particular Buddha deity while knowing that Buddha is, in truth, inseparable from all Buddhas.

Often we hear about the spiritual practice of conceptualizing a life partner or even one who awakens strong passions as our spiritual teacher. Not a teacher who gives us verbal teachings, but a teacher in that they awaken our desires in a way that we are emotionally tossed about with attachment.

Our verse, Joy, says that this teaching was given by the Buddha O a monk about his attraction to a woman:

There is no fire like desire, no provocation that can equal hate, no suffering like this heap of flesh, no happiness higher than peace.

Many can easily identify with the power of sexual and emotional attraction and how it turns our equanimity into chaos and distraction. When we long for a partner or fear losing a partner, we can be obsessed and we are hardly able to hold our meditative focus. This obsession and emotional pain often become much more powerful than our spiritual path.

So, to use that energy to fuel our spirituality and to make these strong emotions the focus of our path can be enormously beneficial. One can reconceptualize the object of our desires as a Buddha and treat him or her with the same profound devotion as if we knew 100% that he or she is truly a Buddha in person (which they actually are when we see beyond our delusions!). In every way, our relationship is thus transformed. Think of all of the ways that we would be compelled to act differently toward our beloved if they became our teachers in our spiritual practice.

Joy also urges us to support our spiritual journey by spending time with those who are saints and with others who will reinforce and guide us. To spend time with those who hold us back or dissuade us from our spiritual path – the fools – while we are still vulnerable to their influence will perpetuate our suffering.

Rely on the noble, the spiritual, the steady; the learned, the prudent, the wise. One wise enough to follow such beings is like the moon on the path of the stars.

Choose all the influences in our life as wisely as we can. Let those who can truly support and guide us be our mentors and friends. Choose to focus on that which will eliminate desire and attachment. When these ordinary aspects of our life are too strong to merely ignore, we can turn them into fuel on our path and use them to see ourselves in the mirror of life experiences more clearly. As we become ever clearer about our attachments, as we rest in meditation giving our attachments more space and balance, they will fall away. Joy is what is left.

Bulletin Board

Write To Us!

Ask Tim

Tim answers letters asking for help with those things that we know you cannot do in prison. Tim looks up resources, but there are a few things he cannot do: Tim is not qualified to counsel about personal and/or relationship problems. Money or 'things' will never be given to any writer. We will not provide addresses of individuals in the free world to anyone. We cannot provide information obtained from Facebook or other social media websites.

Request Topics

Let us know what topics you'd like to read about. Whether you're brand new to mindfulness and meditation or a seasoned pro, let us know what piques your interest and it might be featured in a future newsletter.

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Rev. Susan Shannon, M.Div., BCC.
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To know yourself as the Being underneath the
thinker, the stillness underneath the mental noise, the
love and joy underneath the pain, is freedom,
salvation, enlightenment.

- Eckhart Tolle

