

Meditation Month 2024 Video 4 Transcript

Welcome to our fourth and final session of this series on practices for opening your heart. In today's session, we're going to work with boundless joyfulness. Boundless joyfulness really comes down to a practice of seeing the goodness in others. So we saw this in the practice of lovingkindness and compassion. But with joyfulness, this takes a more active approach, where, in the present moment, or through remembering a past event, we deliberately try to generate joy in another person's happiness. Of course, with all these practices, it's the same. It also applies to our own happiness. But in the traditional practice, usually we work with others. And so, here, we might reflect on a moment where someone we love was experiencing happiness, experiencing joy themselves, maybe they heard a really good joke, and they're having a really good laugh. Or they're just smiling because they saw a beautiful flower or a beautiful image, or maybe you showed up in the room, and they smiled. And what we do is we actively take joy in their joy. We actively take joy in their happiness. In other words, we rejoice in the happiness of what's around us.

For me, this has been a really transformative practice, because my disposition is not necessarily to seek that out throughout the day. I'm not necessarily noticing those small moments of joy that others are experiencing around me. And it's kind of infectious, as maybe you'll find with this practice, too. When we do it, we just start to notice those moments more. That's why I'll say the practice of joyfulness is really a great antidote to cynicism. And this is just one thing I want to point out because I noticed, you know, bad news is so prevalent, because good news doesn't really, you know, make money that much, unfortunately. And so there's so much bad news out there. And this can create a lot of cynicism for us where it's harder to see the goodness all around us. It's harder to take joy and happiness that's happening because we're being fair or we're focusing on bad news. And so I find joyfulness to be also one of the greatest antidotes to cynicism, which is just a really common problem that a lot of us struggle with these days.

Another antidote is to jealousy, as when someone is getting something we want, or they have something we don't have, and jealousy pops up for us. The practice of joyfulness is really useful, because instead of creating jealousy, and covetousness, where we wish we had the thing they had or the relationship they have, or whatever it is, or the job they have, we can deliberately generate joyfulness. We can take joy in that they got what they wanted, and that they're experiencing some happiness from that. And of course, who does this affect the most? It affects us. Because jealousy is a really sticky, afflictive emotion. When we're caught in jealousy, it's really uncomfortable, and it's really painful. So we can see in the dharma, the buddhadharma, everything is here to help us expand and get out of our self enclosure. It's to help us connect with a more unlimited sense of being, a more open, spacious, boundless way of being. One of the practices that can really help with connecting with more boundlessness and, you know, helping us to come out of or to antidote things like jealousy, is boundless joyfulness.

The practice is quite simple. And we're going to do a meditation in a few moments. The practice is remembering a variety of moments to take joy in. And we simply try our best to express or feel joy in that person or a set of people's happiness, right? And so we're gonna start with those

close to us; that's a little easier. I also really like working with either, you know, my daughter or other small kids, where it's so easy for them to feel joy, to laugh, to giggle, or scream with excitement or fun. [I] just take joy in that.

We can start with easier things like that. And then we can move to more challenging things like those we have jealousy toward, and also for me, sometimes it's toward those who are creating a circumstance like someone I don't know, creating a circumstance that's disturbing me like I'm trying to sleep and instead, my neighbor wants to play really loud music. But what are they actually doing? If they are doing something they want to do, they are doing something that they're taking joy in, that makes them happy. And yeah, it's disturbing and not letting me sleep. But at the same moment, there's this opportunity that I can see happiness happening around me, that I can see joy happening around me. And, of course, this helps to antidote my frustration. It doesn't necessarily help my sleep, but it helps with my emotional reaction, right? [That], again, is going to put me in a more peaceful and more open, more boundless space. So based on this introduction to boundless joyfulness, let's go ahead and do a practice.

Feel free to find a space that puts you at ease, where you can adopt a posture that's relaxed, yet alert, basically, allowing the back and spine to become straight, but relaxed, and everything to remain not too tight, but not too loose. If you'd like, you can close your eyes, or, as we've done in the previous practices, you could also leave them half open or fully open.

We'll begin to connect with the breath in the body, connecting with the breath coming up from the earth, into the feet, on the inhalation, and the exhalation, coming down into the earth and resting there. Of course, if you prefer to connect with the breath at the tip of your nose, or the feeling of the abdomen expanding and contracting, go ahead and do that. Basically it's just finding a place that helps to bring you and center you into the body, in this moment, where you can start to cultivate a sense of mindful awareness.

Just as we did for the previous three boundless state practices, we're going to bring in a person or a set of people. And one of these categories, if you're newer, I suggest working with a close one. If you are more seasoned, intermediate, or advanced in this practice, I recommend a difficult person or someone you're more indifferent toward. We're going to start with that. But then we're going to actually open into other moments all together.

So just take a moment to invite them into the room again. It could be a similar person or being that you worked with in a past meditation or, you know, let someone new arise. And you bring them in through imagination, both felt, and visual, also auditory. So we open up all of our senses toward really making this practice lifelike. Imagination is so powerful, so we try to use as much of the components of our imagination as we can.

Here, we try to recall a moment where this person was experiencing happiness. So obviously, with a close one, that's going to be easier. With someone that we have difficulty toward, if we have had a complex relationship with them, we might be able to recall moments when they were experiencing joy, or happiness. And with someone we're indifferent toward, we're probably

going to have to imagine it as they're more of a stranger than others. We just bring up a moment of joy. And sometimes when I'm having to imagine it, I try to bring in a human experience that, you know, most of us can share, like the joy of a good meal after being really hungry, or the joy of seeing a family member after being apart for some time, or the joy of being around our children if we have kids or a pet. A pet is actually a really useful one because I think we can all relate to that. Of course in any of these relationships, we have ups and downs. So obviously I'm implying more the ups here. Of course, with our close one, there's many moments. So what I like to do here is just imagine them laughing or smiling. And as they laugh or smile, I take joy. And joy feels like love.

But also in the mind, there's this component of "wow," or "how amazing." There's a little bit of a sense of awe with joyfulness and of course, a sense of connection. It's like, we're sharing in that joyful moment with them. So if they're smiling or laughing, you know, maybe we're smiling or laughing.

I know for me, when I take joy in someone's smile, it's like an inner smile comes so see if you can reflect in that way. And again, the outcome is OK. However, it is just giving you some examples. The main thing is to engage in the practice of just attempting to take joy in your joyfulness. It's kind of infectious. It's like, maybe starting out, it's a little tougher, but the more you do it, it's like a ball rolling downhill. It gains steam against speed, gains momentum. So just give yourself a chance to gain momentum here.

Of course, if you're working with a close one, you might have many moments where you already felt joy in this person or being. So remember to bring that into the present. And like I said, with someone we have difficulty towards, if we're working with that, or someone we're indifferent toward, we have to be a little bit more creative here. But it's also there. There are moments. And again, just let your heart smile. It's another way to think of joyfulness: Allowing the heart to open, to see the goodness and another, and to rejoice in that goodness. Maybe I'll define goodness here.

Goodness doesn't mean they did something good. Goodness means their innate basic being is already good. It's already OK.

This harkens back to when we talked a little bit about buddhanature, or awakened nature. This means, basically, we all seek connection and love. And of course we do things that can disturb others, disturb ourselves, things that are harmful. But from a Buddhist perspective, that's done out of confusion or misperception, and that can be remedied and removed. But what remains is connection, what remains is our basic warmth, our basic ability to be awake and free. So we could also take joy in that if we want. There's so much here. And I'm sure you're experiencing that, right?

As we start to expand our range of focus, we can focus on different moments, but we can even just focus or bring into the practice just the sense of innate goodness, in both ourselves and in others, and take joy in that.

OK, so now moving away from this particular vein of practice, we're going to move to work more with an indifferent one, if you haven't already. Here I really like applying boundless joyfulness to those around me because usually when we're walking around in our neighborhood, we're with people, you know, maybe we see but we don't know so well. So there's more neutrality toward [them]. We don't notice these moments of joy or joyfulness so actively. Maybe some of us do, but as I said, for myself, it's not something I do naturally. I need to reflect on it.

So I want you to imagine people around you experiencing just small moments of happiness. Start to take joy in that. We can't even imagine the last time we walked down a busy street—what that felt like. We might not be able to see the smaller moments of joy here, but we can just imply them. Maybe someone's really just enjoying a walk in good weather. Or maybe they're going to work but actually enjoying the project they get to go work on. So again, instead of going to the cynical, we start to move toward other opportunities, other possibilities. It doesn't mean that's the reality, we're just imagining it here. Or in my case, I might work with someone playing music late at night, my neighbor, and just instead of growing resentment towards them, instead just taking joy, that they're enjoying that there's a reason they're doing that because they want that moment of joy from music.

For these more difficult ones, where we tend to have resentment, just do it in small doses, so you just take joy... think, "How amazing," "Good for them..." Any phrase that helps you to open up into a sense of joyfulness. Again, I find the best way to practice these four boundless states with any kind of phrase is to make the phrase really relatable. Like how we would normally speak. So when I see someone enjoying something, usually I'll say something like that. "Awesome." "Good for you." "Oh, that's great." You know, that's how I speak. But that might not be how you speak. Make it real for yourself.

Another example, because I just want to give you some different examples, is if you can find your own creativity in this practice. You know, I have a store pretty close to where I live right now. And there's a lot of busyness going in and out. And sometimes I like to focus on the people coming out. Of course, they might not be smiling, but they just got what they needed. They went into the store seeking a drink, or snack, whatever they needed. And they came out receiving it. And so, you know, I'm guessing there's some sense of relief, at least, maybe some happiness. And so I practice taking joy in them, taking joy in their happiness.

And, of course, there's all of us meditating with this kind of practice. There's ones in the past who have done it, present, and future meditating on these four boundless states. At least in the Buddhist traditions, these have been organized in this way for more than 2,600 years, since the time of the historical Buddha and when he taught these. So we can take joy and all the practitioners who have embodied these practices who have realized them who have actually uncovered their boundless state of being these practices. So you can see, there's a lot of room to take joy, both in those things we see and also what we don't see. Just take a few moments to play with this creativity and when you spark a sense of joy. You can just also let go of the reflection for a moment and just be with the feeling of joyfulness. That's also a totally fine way to practice this.

And we'll just practice this for a few more moments. As always, if you'd like to continue the practice, feel free. But for now, we'll close the practice by coming back to our breath and body just the way we started the practice: Breath at the tip of the nose, at the abdomen, as it expands and contracts, or at the feet as we ground ourselves into the earth.

As we continue to connect with breath and body, feel free to open your eyes if they've been closed and just allow the gaze to rest on the space in front of you for a few moments.

Thank you so much for joining me in this series of practices aimed at helping us to open our hearts more. These four boundless states have been a part of my practice for many years. And of course, there's a rich tradition of them throughout various Buddhist lineages. So I really want to encourage you to go deeper. I consider this an introduction to these practices. And there's really more to mine, if you wish to. But of course, the basic essence is here, and so if you practice these in the way we talked about them, as I said earlier, you're going to be able to transform. And transformation is this interesting word, because in the Buddhist tradition, you don't hear it that much. Sometimes in a modern context of Buddhism, you hear it. But the way I'm applying it is more toward the essential meaning of boundlessness itself, where boundlessness is our nature. Boundlessness is who and what we fundamentally are. And of course, boundlessness is always in connection with the world around us. So how do we access more openness, more boundlessness? There's many ways to do that to the Buddhist path, but this is really one of the key ways through these four boundless states. So with that, I just want to encourage you to learn and practice more. And thanks so much for joining me. Take care.