



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

Chapter 35 – An appropriate response – Appreciative Joy

“Joy arises when we celebrate the happiness of another, for in that moment our hearts grow wider than the small self.” ~ Jack Kornfield,

“*When we learn to delight in what is good in ourselves, we are no longer driven by lack. Joy becomes the expression of enoughness.*” ~ Christina Feldman

The joy of well-being

Having embraced Gotama (the Buddha’s) third realisation that ‘Freedom’ from cravings, aversions, compulsions and confusion can be personally experienced and verified, we now cultivate the appropriate heart response for this third stage of our journey – ‘Appreciative Joy’ (*Muditā*).

This is the third of the four *Brahma Viharas* (Divine Abodes) of Buddhism, the qualities that form the resilient ropes that bind our raft together. Recognising moments of peace, non-craving, and skillful action is inherently joyful and ‘Appreciative Joy’ is the heart’s spontaneous gladness when it witnesses growth, virtue, and freedom.

Dimensions of Joy

Appreciative joy is a quality we intentionally cultivate – an outward-facing gladness that responds to the well-being, successes, and small moments of goodness in our own lives and in the lives of others. It softens the heart, steadies the mind, and reminds us that joy does not only arise from our own achievements, but from recognising and honouring the flourishing of anyone we

encounter.

In contrast, ‘Energising Joy’ (chapter 47) is more spontaneous – a natural uplift, zest, or rapture that can emerge as our practice deepens and as the hard edges of grasping begin to fall away. Energetic Joy is bright, buoyant joy often arrives unbidden, a side-effect of letting go rather than something we strive to create. For now, our task is simpler and more foundational: to build the resilient, warm, and ever-renewable heart of appreciative joy, trusting that energetic joy may bloom in its own time as our practice matures.

‘Appreciative Joy’ is the capacity to genuinely rejoice in and appreciate well-being, both our own and that of others. This gladness is crucial because it functions as a form of wholesome reward. When we see that unwholesome states have been abandoned, gladness arises. This joy and gladness are not distractions but confirmations that reactivity has paused. This felt lift arises from *letting go* rather than from *getting*, distinguishing it from the joy of compulsive pleasure.

Why cultivate Appreciative Joy?

Because each moment we pause to recognise something good – a small freedom, a skilful choice, a gentle shift in behaviour – we strengthen the neural pathways that make these wholesome states more familiar and more likely to reappear. Appreciative Joy directly counters the mind’s habitual tilt toward negativity: it softens despair, loosens the grip of cynicism, and dissolves envy or self-pity by reminding us that goodness is not scarce. At the same time, it fuels a steady, wholesome motivation (Noble Desire– Chapter 21), encouraging us to keep moving along the path by taking joy in our own progress and in the flourishing of others. And gradually, it broadens our whole perspective – shifting our attention from what is missing or wrong toward what is possible, nourishing, and deeply connected.

Self-reflections

Explore your relationship with joy and appreciation:

1. How easy or difficult is it to feel genuinely happy about successes or positive qualities in yourself, and what internal voices commonly arise?

2. How easy or difficult is it to feel genuinely happy for others' good fortune or success, and to what extent do comparison or envy tend to appear?
3. What kinds of events, actions, or qualities most readily spark feelings of Appreciative Joy?
4. How can one distinguish between a stable, grounded sense of gladness and a more fleeting excitement or pleasure?
5. When attempting 'Self-Appreciation', what typical thoughts, emotions, or forms of resistance tend to arise?
6. Where in the body is gladness or appreciation most often felt, and is this a familiar or unfamiliar sensation?
7. In what ways might actively cultivating 'Appreciative Joy' influence overall mood, resilience, and motivation on the path of practice?

Journaling prompts

Use writing to cultivate Appreciative Joy:

1. **Joy/Appreciation log:** Keep a log specifically noting moments (internal or external) that sparked feelings of gladness or appreciation.
2. **Self-Appreciation:** Write down three things you genuinely appreciate about yourself today – perhaps an effort made, a kind thought, a moment of awareness, or simply your resilience.
3. **Rejoicing with others:** Think of someone who has recently experienced success or happiness. Write a short reflection focusing on feeling genuine joy for them, setting aside any comparison.
4. **Appreciative phrases for self:** Practice writing out and repeating phrases for self-appreciation for 5 minutes. Note any resistance or feelings that arise during the practice.
5. **Countering envy:** Recall a situation where you felt envy or comparison. Gently explore the underlying feeling, then consciously try to shift towards appreciating your own positive qualities or progress in that moment, or wishing the other person well.
6. **Write a short 'thank you' letter:** to yourself for one skillful choice you made this week, no matter how small.
7. **Observe the world around you:** for 10 minutes. Write down three examples of simple, ordinary goodness you witnessed (a kind gesture, a growing plant, and so forth.) and how it felt to appreciate them.

Remember to remember

Appreciative Joy is the appropriate heart practice for the third stage of our journey, allowing us to truly experience and verify freedom by celebrating its arrival. It is the skillful response to recognising Gotama's third realisation – that the cessation of suffering is possible and directly experienceable.

By consciously cultivating gladness for our own and others' well-being, we counter negativity, fuel motivation, strengthen resilience, and make the journey to freedom itself more joyful and sustainable. Joy matures when self-appreciation replaces self-criticism, as when the heart accepts itself, joy becomes the natural rhythm of being alive.

“Rejoicing in yourself — your courage, your humour, your wisdom — is not arrogance but sanity.” ~ Pema Chödrön

“Radical acceptance is the willingness to experience ourselves and our lives as they are. Only then can our natural joy and belonging shine through.” ~ Tara Brach

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