

*Cultivating the Field of Joy*

*Buddhist Readings*

*to Lift Up the Heart*

*by Jason Espada*



## Preface I

We may not know how important joy is until we really need it. Joy brings light to the mind, and inner strength. It keeps us from getting out of balance when we are doing the sometimes difficult work, of healing, and straightening out our own lives, and caring for others.

Some things prove themselves over time, and this is surely one of them- that we have abundant resources to draw from, but we need to make these truths a part of our life all along the way. Then they are there when we need them, and we can encourage others as well.

Here then are some of the writings and reflections that have helped me the most over the years.

May they bring you happiness, well being and strength

Jason Espada  
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Preface II, from 'Where Joy Can Be Found'

Joy is necessary for each of our flourishing, and joy is available. This is what I'd like people to know.

We may think of joy as a luxury, as something we can only get when we're finished with our day to day tasks, or after achieving some goal. The reality though is that we need this quality that enlivens all throughout our life, if we're going to bring out the best we have in us.

Some would object that there's too much strife and trouble in our world to have any happiness, and that it's self centered and egotistical to pursue such a low aim. But these goals we set for ourselves need to be sustained, and the beauty and righteousness that adorns our world is here to help us, and is necessary along the way. Joy is the food of the bodhisattvas, those of us who are dedicated to helping others with wisdom and compassion.

There are an abundance of resources available, and in these pages I try to point to where we can look for that vital nourishment.

May we all find our way to health, strength, and peace.

*Cultivating the Field of Joy - Buddhist Readings to Lift Up the Heart*

Preface I and II

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*Friend, we're traveling together.  
Throw off your tiredness  
and let me show you  
one tiny spot of the beauty  
that cannot be spoken.*

*- Rumi*

*My joy is like Spring,  
so warm, it makes flowers bloom all over the earth...*

*- Thich Nhat Hanh*



*At night in my prayers I often stop  
And ask a thousand angels to join in  
And Applaud,*

*And Applaud Anything,  
Anything in this world  
That can bring your heart comfort!*

*- Hafiz*

Two verses on joy

I will abide  
pervading the world  
with a heart that rejoices in the good,  
everywhere it is found,  
in the arts,  
in the natural world,  
in children,  
in myself and in others,  
in teachers, and in healers,  
in kind and caring people,  
in cherished elders, ancestors,  
family and friends

I will abide  
pervading this all encompassing world  
with joy and celebration  
abundant, exalted, immeasurable

\*\*\*

I rejoice in all that is beautiful and right in the world,  
in all virtue and positive action,  
and in all success, happiness and good fortune...

On Celebration, from the teachings of Khandro Rinpoche, with notes for reflection

As practitioners we should learn to celebrate. And what does it mean when we say “celebrate?” To celebrate is to take a moment to pause, reflect and then give rise to pure joy which fills us with renewed vigor and resolve to persevere on our path of practice.

Celebrate the wonderful innate qualities of kindness and love.

*of grandmothers and grandfathers,  
of elders and ancestors...*

*of mothers and fathers,  
caregivers,  
volunteers,  
and their generosity, gentleness, and commitment,  
their willingness to meet others right where they are,  
lighting up this world*

Celebrate the ability to give happiness to others.  
Celebrate contentment and simplicity -

*the feeling that  
What I have is enough,  
and more than enough!*

...

Celebrate that fact that you are human with boundless goodness.

Celebrate who you are,  
and how you can evolve to being a source of joy to all.  
Celebrate how far you have come,  
and all that has led you to this point.

Celebrate the opportunity to practice the Dharma.

*and the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sanghas;  
practice centers, bodhi-mandas -  
places of awakening,  
places of sustenance...  
healing and renewal,*

Celebrate silence.

Celebrate solitude.

Celebrate small moments of joy.

Celebrate all beings and your inter-connectedness to all.

*The fresh air,  
and every leaf and every stream...*

*forests, mountains, and oceans...*

*deer and otter,  
our faithful animal companions,  
teaching us selfless love,  
joy, and devotion*

Celebrate every moment knowing that each moment carries the full potential of liberation.

Celebrate not just once the new year but each new moment as it arises.

Celebrate the fact that the glorious teachers appeared and gave rise to immeasurable benefit.

*Lama Yeshe, Thich Nhat Hanh,  
The Karmapa,  
Bokar Rinpoche, Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche,*

*Longchenpa,*

*Tara and Avalokiteshvara*

*Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Lama Lodro,  
Mattieu Ricard and Ani Tenzin Palmo,  
Ajahn Pasanno, Ringu Tulku...*

Celebrate virtue and merit.

Celebrate the happiness and success of others.

True celebration brings appreciation, strengthened vows, and vitality in our practice and lives.

## On gladdening the mind - from the teachings of Ajahn Pasanno

There is a goal of happiness and well-being, but it is also *what we rely on* as a basis for continued development and maturation.

\* \* \*

Take an object that brings up gladness, delight, and well being...

Take the mood of brightness, and allow the mind to dwell in that brightness...

As one is breathing in, really imbue the breath with this brightness, suffusing the body and the mind with this brightness, this quality of gladness that is associated with brightness, brightening the mind...

As the breath comes in, really allow that brightness and delight to be come into the heart, staying, and settling, being established there... allow it to radiate from that point... breathing out, brightness, the meditation is working from a point, a center of brightness...

Joy is the food of the bodhisattvas

On nourishing ourselves with joy - for all my activists friends

If we want to be as effective as we can be in our work, we need to be nourished by what is beautiful, by the best things this life has to offer.

Such things as the beauty of that child, and your smile, and so much more, feed us. They sustain our souls and make them healthy and robust.

Especially in these times, we need the strength that can come from art, from our extraordinary natural world, from friendship, from the inspiration of our teachers, and the work of our allies.

When they talk about 'the ten-thousand joys, and the ten-thousand sorrows' in Buddhism, practically speaking, the ten-thousand joys have to come first, or we may not get to the rest of it.

Nourish yourselves well. Joy is the food of the bodhisattvas.

## From Cultivating Joy

Cultivating joy has a reputation in Buddhism for being an easy practice, one that anybody can do, and that really takes just a few moments. Just sit back and think about some of the great things that people have done, and are doing now, or the beauty that is in this world...

To take delight in the wonderful things people do is so easy, it's amazing. It comes naturally to the heart.

Anytime we think to ourselves, 'wow – that's great!' – that's celebrating.

We can celebrate the 'small', everyday things we see, such as a mother picking up her child because the child is tired – child reaches up his arms, and without hesitating, the mother picks up her child. Or a child gets a good grade, or even just *tries* on a test, or makes a lovely painting in school... these may seem 'small', or common, but in their own way they are extraordinary, and something we can delight in.

We can and should acknowledge and rejoice in our own good actions, and intentions. For some reason in the West many people have a hard time with this, myself included sometimes. But we should be able to appreciate our own positive actions, just as if someone else were doing them. This is not for pride's sake, but for our own well founded self-esteem. All that's good in us should be celebrated...

Then we can celebrate and praise the great works that people have done, and the victories they have achieved. I think of ML King, Nelson Mandela, and others, including my father.

I have a folder I keep and add to, called 'The Power of Joy' that I started after having the thought that, anytime we celebrate something, we claim it as part of our spiritual heritage.



People throughout time have known this, and that's what communal celebrations are for. They're not just to remember, but they are so we can continue to be enriched and guided by those gifts we've received. And part of the wisdom of these regular celebrations is that it keeps us from forgetting.

So in the folder on joy I keep a list of my heroes, friends and benefactors, and of the gifts we've received, to remind myself, for example, of the gift of Rumi, the legacy of the civil rights moment, the Buddha's teaching, the works of my compassionate friends, and our ancestors who have left us knowledge of healing methods.

These are just a few examples. Make your own list.

Then, if we set our mind on something wonderful for a while, we can have the experience of 'breaking through the veil' of our mundane view.

For example, if I think of the lives of my teachers, such as the Dalai Lama, or Martin Luther King, and I think about what they've been through, and how much inspiration and strength, and joy and freedom they've brought to others, something in me changes.

*This mind of appreciation and delight is different from the mind I may have had even just a few moments before.*

The feeling fades, and so I need to practice regularly, so that my knowing these good and great things can be like a fresh stream in my life – nourishing and sustaining...

Have you ever noticed how the happiest people seem to be those who are really appreciative of others, wherever they go? I'm thinking here of Matthieu Ricard and Thich Nhat Hanh, but you can probably think of your own examples. Their gratitude and their joy in others is very present everywhere they go.

\* \* \*

I think they say rejoicing is such an easy method because it puts us in touch with wonderful qualities, and helps those same qualities to wake up in us, without our having to do that work ourselves.

Rumi said:

*We get to pick up the jewels,  
while the real work is being done outside,  
by someone digging in the ground...*

The Bible expresses the same idea, when speaking of the grace that is freely offered:

*I called you to the harvest,  
others have tended the field,  
now receive the fruits of that labor...*

While it's true that rejoicing is easy to do, and that there are many opportunities for it, and that delighting in something special only takes a few moments, we shouldn't underestimate its great value.

Personally, I know I need a lot of this kind of practice, to keep from getting too one sided – too serious and ponderous.... it works, most of the time, I'm happy to report!

When we're really aware of what we've received from our supremely kind hearted teachers and ancestors, from friends and noble people, and from this whole magnificent world, and touch that truth, that stream can become a mighty river in us.

Joy can then be a strength that we cultivate in our lives, such that it can have far reaching benefits, supporting us in all the good things we would do.

I rejoice in all of the virtues and activities of my teachers,  
and of all holy beings

I rejoice in all of the pure intentions and actions  
of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,  
of all kind hearted people,  
and myself

I celebrate all the efforts that people have made,  
and to alleviate distress,  
and discomfort,  
and the miseries of samsara

to befriend those in need  
and to offer help and kindness

to create beauty,  
to share medicine, food,  
clothing and shelter

to adorn this wondrous world  
with still more loveliness

I rejoice in the faith and devotion of myself and others,  
however much of it there is;

in finding the sanctuary of Refuge,  
and affirming our commitment to Precepts,  
on this very day, in this very hour

I celebrate those dedicated to their sobriety,  
and all their efforts each day,  
and all the support and care they give

I celebrate all the encouragement of teachers,  
family, and friends,  
and complete strangers too-

those angels that arrive just when we need them  
the inspiration that miraculously appears  
the invisible food  
the strength of love

the new birth  
the immutable willingness  
to bear witness  
to live out our compassion  
and our companionship here

I rejoice in all those who have reached the shore of freedom  
and all those who have only just sighted it,  
or heard it spoken of,  
or dreamed of it

I rejoice in the efforts of all those who fall,  
who fail, but don't give up  
and who find it in themselves to try again,  
and again and again

and in the lives of  
*all* those who are dedicated to helping others

that beauty in this wilderness  
that clarion message  
that stirring call  
that clear word for everyone

Tonight I am celebrating all the love there is in this world,  
all this greatness of spirit  
of my teachers and family and friends  
and what I find in myself when my vision clears,  
even for a moment...

## Joy and Resilience

On the path of healing, we're then going to want to gather around ourselves a wealth of supporting conditions. These can include good friends, a peaceful environment, a flexible schedule at work, or time off, enough exercise, plenty of rest and good food. The most important factors we can bring together are those that nourish our spirit. Being surrounded by art does this for me, as does bringing to mind and celebrating the good things people have done, and are doing now in our world.

It's easy to overlook the place of joy in healing, and in having a full life. Sometimes it seems almost indulgent, from a time-pressed, Western materialistic, practical point of view to enjoy ourselves. But this is something we all need to regain balance, and to gain in strength.

In her book *Maps to Ecstasy*, Gabrielle Roth taught that,

*In many shamanic societies, if you came to a medicine person complaining of being disheartened, dispirited, or depressed, they would ask one of four questions: "When did you stop dancing? When did you stop singing? When did you stop being enchanted by stories? When did you stop being comforted by the sweet territory of silence?"*

The good news is that there are beautiful resources all around us that we can enjoy, and that can reconnect us to all the best things in life. The flight of birds, the endless beauty of our natural world, and children, literature, music, extraordinary acts of love, all of these feed us deeply, and make our spirits robust.

We can develop a strong psychological immune system. I hope we can all discover how it's possible to build up our resilience, so that *whatever* we meet, we feel we can respond to it well. What's more, we can feel confident we have the resources to deal with the suffering in our lives, however it has come to us, and to reach a deep resolution. When we are well nourished

spiritually, our constitution becomes strong, and life takes on a new character. We become durable, adaptable to changing conditions, fearless and full of joy.



## Being In touch with Healing Elements

The blue sky, the flower, the river, the cloud, these things have a healing nature. If you allow yourself to be in touch with these healing elements, the wounds within your body and your mind will be healed. We should allow ourselves to be healed, and therefore, we should allow ourselves to be in the heart of life, which contains so many wonderful things, like the children, the flower, and so on...

The seeds in our consciousness can function like anti-bodies. What is important is that you continue to plant new seeds, the kind of seeds that are both refreshing and healing. And if you just do that, by practicing mindful living so that you can be in touch with the flower, with the cypress tree, with the fresh air, with the beautiful eyes of the children, then these seeds will be planted in yourself, and they will naturally take care of the seeds of your suffering. You don't even have to touch them. And that is something I think the practice of Buddhism can contribute to psychotherapy in the west...

- Thich Nhat Hahn

## Encouragement

There's a range of how we can be towards ourselves when we sit down to meditate, or practice walking meditation. One choice is that we can be a very good friend to ourselves, gentle, and loving, and warmly encouraging, much like a grandparent or a kind teacher would be. When we do this we can see and feel the results right away. This makes our practice so much easier.

In the Jewish tradition, I've heard, they say there's an angel leaning over every blade of grass, whispering, *grow!, grow!*, and it's this kind of divine love we offer ourselves and each other every time we are gently and affectionately encouraging. It's a gift we can delight in.

## The Joy of Meditation

When we have a method of meditation that works for us even a little, this in itself is something to celebrate. It's very much a personal matter, and so we should experiment until we find a technique that suits us well. One of the signs that we've found a method that matches our temperament is that we will experience peace and joy right there in its practice. Meditation shouldn't be thought of as an obligation, or as something to be gotten through – not at all! When we find a method that suits us well, in fact, it is pleasurable. No one has to tell us to do it, as we'll find ourselves drawn to it naturally.

As with loving kindness meditation, quiet meditation on the breath is inherently enjoyable. To be able to put aside our worries and preoccupations for a time, and to allow our mind to settle and become clear brings relief. The breath itself is also universally regarded as refreshing and healing to both the body and mind. When we practice, we can nourish ourselves with feelings of well being that arise.

As Thich Nhat Hanh says, 'Breathing brings the sweet joy of meditation to you.' In his commentary on the Buddha's Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing, he says, 'The sweet joy of meditation is the great happiness that meditation brings. It is food. If you are nourished by the sweet joy of meditation, you become joyful, fresh, and tolerant, and everyone around you will benefit from your joy.'

## The place of renewal and joy

If the value of self care is becoming more well known these days, what is less often talked about is how *joy and being in touch with beauty is vital for us as human beings*. Without it, the world grows dark. It appears in a distorted way to the depressed, angry, afflicted, and fearful person. Joy is in fact essential to sustained activism, and to a full flourishing of our human intelligence. All this is laid out quite scientifically in Buddhism, and in other traditions that teach psychological causality. More than just a theory though, this idea is offered as encouragement for us to see for ourselves.

Deeply nourished by beauty, the world appears as it is - luminous, enthralling, a sacred place. We live with what Abraham Joshua Heschel called a 'radical amazement'. We are also empowered, more than ever, to meet challenges, and to uplift and inspire others.

What is needed now, what has always been needed, is the deeper knowledge of the ocean of light that is in us and around us at all times, this essential freedom that dwells within us at all times.

The same view the individual person needs is also what is needed most in our collective culture: the widespread knowledge of this life's profound, and precious nature. We each need to awaken fully, and to help all others achieve this very same state.

There is a phrase I've been hearing just recently in the media, 'to be a prisoner of the moment', which is a vivid and interesting expression. It means that we can be so caught up in the immediacy of what is happening now that we lose perspective.

It also implies its opposite - the state of being not caught, or of being free in this moment. When that happens, we are not having what is going on dictate our reactions.

When meeting with people's fears or contraction, don't let the flaw in their vision become the flaw in your vision, about yourself, or about them. In that moment instead, become the radical knowledge-medicine we all need.

*"An incomparable spark of divinity is to be found in the heart of each human being, waiting to radiate love and wisdom everywhere, because that is its nature. Amazing!"*

- Eknath Easwaran

*"Dwelling deep within our hearts and the hearts of all beings without exception, is an inexhaustible source of love and wisdom. And the ultimate purpose of all spiritual practices, whether they are called Buddhist or not, is to make contact with this essentially pure nature."*

– Lama Thubten Yeshe

We find then that a spiritual perspective is unyielding. It is ever a source of inspiration and renewal. It is constant, illuminating and healing all generations.

A list of things that are healing

Beauty is healing  
and love is healing  
and peace is healing

and laughter,  
and kindness is healing

the friendliness and warmth in a voice  
and gratitude is healing

friendship is healing  
and human touch, when there is love,  
is healing

drawing on the strength of our ancestors is healing

natural light is healing  
enjoying the peace, freshness  
and joy of a new day

Our blue sky, and the magnificent oceans,  
and the trees,  
and flowering plants,  
all the wonderful colors and scents of the earth,  
these are healing

and all our family in the natural world,  
mammal, bird, insect and fish-  
these are healing...

fresh fruit, and vegetables, grains and bread, and homemade soup  
give to our bodies and to our souls the power of the sun,  
and the pure rain

all of these are  
healthy and beautiful  
and if needed, they are healing

food cooked with love is healthy, life giving  
gifts given generously with love are divine,  
they are health and life itself  
and if need be, they are healing to us all,  
the whole circle

children are healing  
with their beauty, and purity,  
and playfulness and wonder,  
with their overflowing joy  
they are angels among us...

Friends and family, kindred spirits,  
beautiful souls, delight of the world, wherever they go  
these are healing

Grandmothers and Grandfathers,  
with their kindness and gentleness and wisdom are healing

Mothers and Fathers with us even now  
these are healing

optimism, looking up,  
and having a great aim  
this is healing

patience and gentleness,  
smiling to ourselves,  
and to each other  
this is healing

our dreams are healing  
our visions, and our sacred songs,  
our dances,

the awe and wonder we feel,  
knowing the Divine  
this is supremely beneficial,  
this is supremely healing

and art is healing  
need I say it? -  
*all* of these gifts,  
the loveliness of one thing done well,  
with great care, and with boldness too...

drawing,  
and  
painting  
what wonders!

sculpture  
dance  
photography,

poetry  
architecture  
needlepoint  
dress  
and on and on it goes...



music is healing

these and more  
all of it,  
*all of it*, healing

make your own lists today from these bright oceans...  
from all this wonder and joy...

the artist's vision  
is health  
it is life  
it is healing

sacred places, such as this one, healing

loving pets, healing

angels and ancestors,  
friendships,  
now and recalled to mind  
these are healing

learning about people of good will,  
and stories of heroes and heroines,  
famous or less known  
these are healing  
*and how these gifts continue – oh!*

Traditions are a source of healing  
Saints and great teachers are healing  
and our faith and devotion connects us to them

Oh Great Song!,  
Ethics, meditation and wisdom,  
prayer, mantra, and samadhi,  
these are healing

wonder, joy and celebration,  
and gratitude  
these are healing

stillness, and quieting the mind,  
and thinking, rightly used too  
these are healing

honoring the tremendous richness of oneself and others  
this is healing

breathing in and out  
and smiling  
peacefully  
with an awareness of our body and our feelings  
with gentleness,  
and with great love  
this is healing

## The Practice of Smiling to Oneself

One of the ways our goodwill is communicated is by smiling. We usually think of this as a social act, but in fact we can also smile warmly to ourselves.

I first heard about what the Taoists call the inner smile from Thich Nhat Hanh in the late 1980's. At that time he combined meditation on the breath with smiling to oneself, with an appreciation of each part of our body. So, for example, he taught that we can think: 'breathing in and out, I am aware of the hair on my head... breathing in and out, I smile to my hair... breathing in and out, I am aware of my eyes... breathing in and out, I smile and am thankful to my eyes...' This can be done a few times. Going through the body from head to toe, when we find a part of the body or ourselves that needs extra kindness and attention, we can stay there for a while, with love and care.

The effect of such a practice can be felt right away. Kindness is like a balm for whatever is struggling or suffering. A smile communicates encouragement, patience, acceptance, warmth, understanding and compassion, gentleness, respect, and a shared joy. That we can give this gift to ourselves at any time is really something remarkable, and it's something we should all learn to do.

Especially when things are not going well in some areas of our life, this basic attitude of acceptance, encouragement and unconditional love and support becomes even more important. I remember Thich Nhat Hanh being asked, 'But what if I don't feel like smiling?' (this was from a woman who was pregnant at the time) and he said, 'You should smile anyway. If you can smile now, your baby will receive that nourishment from you. He also said that 'sometimes your happiness is the cause of your smile, and sometimes your smile can be the cause of your happiness'. He called this, only half-kiddingly, 'mouth yoga'.

Think of the warm smile of a wise elder, or of a teacher that you know. What is communicated with that expression is their experience, patience, and natural, effortless generosity. Often being with someone who is older and wiser than ourselves resets our system. Our restlessness and anxiety melt away in their kind presence, which feels like a gift to our whole person.

We can also access the wisdom-self we have within, and that we know in our better times, when we take up this practice of smiling to ourselves. When we do this, it gets easier to access this source of joy and healing energy we all have within, and to share it with others as well.

Smiling and being kind to ourselves may not always be the very first step in developing on the path of love, but at some point it becomes essential. We do need to be comfortable being close to ourselves to really understand what we carry with us, what we still struggle with, what it feels like to hope and to dream and to be a human being. This gradually becomes easier when we develop genuine kindness, and heartfelt well-wishing for ourself.

We all know that some people go through their entire lives avoiding what is difficult to hold. They are divided in themselves, diminished, out of touch with their own pain and tender selves, and, more often than not, they are lacking empathy, compassion and forgiveness for others. All this stems from their not having received enough loving care from others, and never having fully learned to unconditionally love themselves. It is a great work, and something that's truly essential for us to live whole, integrated, fulfilled lives. One way or another, how we are with ourselves over time becomes the basis for the quality of all our relationships.

Smiling is a simple practice, but it has such far reaching effects, that I'd like to recommend it to all my friends. It graces our days and nights, and helps us create beauty in our lives, and in the lives of all those we love.

## Mindful Breathing as a Loving Kindness Practice

Breath meditation and loving kindness practice are usually taught separately, however it can be greatly healing to combine these two practices. In the Buddha's teachings, when we practice breath meditation, after finding the in and out breath, the next step is to become aware of our whole body, while breathing in and out, and to calm this body of ours. Often in commentaries this is gone through briefly, on the way to other meditations.

When *Metta* or loving kindness practice is taught by itself, we can get a good sense of what pure kindness feels like. There is an acceptance, gentleness and encouragement that we can know from the inside. To begin with, we're told to bring to mind whoever is easiest to generate feelings of warmth and love for. When we think of children, for example, the feeling is uncomplicated and unconditional love, clear and bright. We would do anything for them, naturally. We wish them every conceivable happiness. We then take this same feeling and do our best to direct it towards other people, including ourselves.

In his book *The Path of Emancipation*, Thich Nhat Hanh explains how we can join breath meditation with an awareness of the body with having love and compassion for ourselves, and why this is necessary. Here are a few notes. He says that, *Sometimes we believe our body is a stranger to us, we are alienated from our own body, and that is why we have to go home to our body and reconcile ourselves with it.*

For many reasons, it can be painful to inhabit the body. The physical carries the memory of the wounds we have suffered, as well as those of our ancestors. Often we have judged ourselves and found ourselves wanting. Thay says that when we practice breathing in and out with an awareness of our body *we go home to our body and embrace it. We reconcile*

*ourselves with our body. It is very important to go back to our body and show our concern, attention, and love. Our body might be suffering. It might have been abandoned for a long time. That is why we generate the energy of mindfulness and go back to embrace our body. This is the beginning of the practice of love.*

In the past, we've may have taken to food, drugs, sex, and endless distractions to avoid feeling. Even meditation can be an escape into some ideal of what it means to be 'a meditator'. We were divided. Now we can try something different. We can begin to awaken more kindness and compassion for ourselves. He continues: *We embrace our body tenderly during our in-breath and out-breath, with the intention to reconcile ourselves with it, to take care of it, and to show our concern and loving kindness. You may want to modify the language a little, but the content of the practice is the same: "Breathing in, I am aware of my body. Breathing out, I smile to my body." This is a smile of awareness, a smile that shows your concern and loving kindness.*

Smiling, directing the sunlight of warmth, acceptance and care to the our body is healing, and unifying. It can slowly reestablish our connection with our physical self. An inner smile communicates love. With it, we uphold what is good in us. It is also a way to be with what is difficult, without turning away. Just as a mother would embrace her child, we can tenderly hold whatever we feel is broken, or flawed, or is in any way lacking in ourselves. We can gently embrace ourselves, breath by breath, and step by step. They continues *When you go back to your body, first you may want to embrace your body as a whole, in its entirety. Afterwards, you can pay attention to the different parts of your body. Each part should be embraced by our mindfulness, and we should smile to it. This is the practice of compassion, of love, directed to your body.*

We can practice like this, with or without the words: Breathing in, I am aware of my right shoulder, breathing out, I smile to my right shoulder; Breathing in, I am aware of my left shoulder, breathing out, I smile to my shoulder... We go through our whole body this way, from top to bottom, front and back, right and left, our face, throat, chest, arms, abdomen, groin,

legs... Where there is some discomfort or tension, we can stay in that place longer, breathing in and out, and directing our attention and care to that part of ourselves. When we practice in this way, some parts of ourselves, such as our heart, may respond immediately, with a feeling of great relief and gratitude. It's been waiting such a long time to be comforted! Clearly, the experience of this body of ours contains our feelings and our mind. They 'inter-are'.

Where there is suffering, either in ourselves or in our world, it is because there has been a lack of attention, love, and understanding. Now, each breath, each look, each thought we direct towards ourselves can be brimming with love, Each step, and every attentive moment can be like a gentle caress. It can be like nectar, true medicine, and a firm embrace. After a time, having loving kindness towards ourselves allows us to settle peacefully, with a calm and clear mind that is then a basis for further insight. Compared to simple awareness of the breath and movement, this is bringing more of our beautiful inner qualities to bear on our practice. We can use all of our inner resources. When we learn to be with that is difficult, with an open heart, gradually it can help to awaken our humanity. We can learn to calm our discomfort, our fears, and insecurities, and see deeply into them. As people who practice meditation for any length of time can tell you, this can have far reaching effects.

No matter what our temperament, I think that each one of us needs to have kindness for ourselves. We need patience, gentleness, and warmth to heal, to become whole, and to travel a path of greater self understanding and inner freedom. This is so important for all of our sake, so experiment and see what methods work best for you. If you like, you can try practicing metta and breath meditation separately, and then combining them and see what effect it has. We are all called to a great work. However we approach it, understanding ourselves and others and this world, and having something to offer starts here, with taking care of ourselves well. It begins with us.

## From The Awakened Heart

What is an awakened heart?

I'd say it is a heart that receives, and is enriched by beauty, and the wonders of life;

it is one that has gratitude for the gifts that our teachers, family and friends have given us, is alive to their preciousness;

Everywhere they go, a person with an awakened heart gives happiness to others – that's just their nature;

We've all known people like this...

Like the sail on a ship, an awakened heart is inspired by the works of meaningful purpose that are going on in our world *today*;

To have an awakened heart means to have right values, and a moral compass in daily life, independent of authority and tradition;

An awakened heart is everywhere sensitive to other lives, and naturally acts to fulfill the needs and wishes of others, without needing to be told what to do.

An awakened heart is expansive, by its nature it reaches out, more and more, until all are included, to nurture, to comfort, to uplift;

*'When we hear the cries of the world, we must be engaged...'*

When the heart is awake, there is a radical and uncompromising solidarity with the poor, of every kind, with all those who are struggling in any way;



and there is the willingness to do whatever needs to be done to ease the way for them;

For these reasons, it is a heart full of joy every day;

In any place, and at any time, a person with such a heart has great inner strength, courage, confidence and resourcefulness.

It is always this way.

## An Unmatched Joy

I was the man walking out of the desert; I was the one covered with sores; I was blind, I knew hunger, cold, loneliness, and confusion...

The only joy greater than the release from suffering is to offer to another that same freedom.

I knew the pit...

This I remember, and now, I've tasted joys, watched the flowering of young hands, felt the fresh dew on my face in the morning, and known the taste of something made just for me, and how good it is!

I've known the joys of family, of music, of light woven through the years; I've seen generosity, heard inspiring ideas – all these I know and cherish...

but what lifts itself up to me now, as the greatest happiness, is that of giving to anyone in need

because I remember,

and then, all the delightful breezes, all the wonder goes out to meet that one I can love today

because I know what it is to need, and somehow, even more than my own release, to shelter and to soothe you, friend, this has the most meaning to me.

It is an unmatched joy, to share with you, as you so wish it to be.

More than my own freedom, great as that is, somehow, to give broadly, abundantly, the best I have to offer, there's nothing else in the world quite like this.

There is grace. There is something divine moving throughout this world,  
and this is it.

From Stabilizing in the Bodhimind, by Shantideva

In the spiritual energy that relieves  
The anguish of beings in misery and  
Places depressed beings in eternal joy,  
I lift up my heart and rejoice.

In the goodness producing illumination  
I lift up my heart and rejoice.

I rejoice in the beings who have gained  
Eternal liberation from suffering,  
And I rejoice in those attained to Buddhahood  
As well as in their offspring, the noble Bodhisattvas.

In the ocean-like virtue of the bodhimind  
That brings joy to all beings  
And in accomplishing the well-being of others,  
I lift up my heart and rejoice.

There is nothing I can give you which you do not have, but there is much that, while I cannot give it, you can take. No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today. Take heaven. No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present instant. Take peace.

The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within reach, is joy. There is radiance and glory in darkness, could we but see, and to see, we have only to look. I beseech you to look.

Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by their covering, cast them away as ugly or hard. Remove the covering, and you will find beneath it a living splendor, woven of love, by wisdom, with power. Welcome it, grasp it, and you touch the angel's hand that brings it to you.

In everything we call a trial, a sorrow or a duty, the angel's hand is there, the gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing presence. Our joys, too, be not content with them as joys. They, too, conceal diviner gifts.

And so at this time I greet you, not quite as the world sends greetings, but with profound esteem, and the prayer that for you, now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

- Fra Giovanni

## From Joy in Buddhist Practice

What I'm realizing the more I look into it, and work with it, is that joy, happiness and well being are potentials that can be developed far more than I knew, and far more than we are ever taught.

### The place of joy in the full development of a person

Reading, and listening to talks, and doing my best to practice the teachings called The Four Immeasurables, of Love, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and the Immutable Strength of Love, I found myself again looking at the subject of compassion, with a willingness to practice it, but what felt like a lack of ability.

To me, this is such a crucial point. We all know of good hearted people that reach their limit. But why is this? and more importantly, what, if anything can be done about it? *I think now that the difference between someone who is able do more and someone who, with all their good intentions, can't accomplish as much is just this one factor, of how much they've been able to receive and be strengthened and nourished by joy.*

I found this limit in myself to cultivating compassion, just because I often didn't feel capable. The capacity to respond to suffering is described as something we work with, as with loving kindness, to increase, and extend, more and more, until it is all inclusive. But what is the path to being able to do this?

I'd say that one part of it is developing the ability to be nourished, inspired, and sustained by what is beautiful in life, by the best things that this life has to offer. If we don't do this, I'd say we're not taking advantage of all that's here, of all that is around us, in fact. When they talk about 'the ten-thousand joys, and the ten-thousand sorrows' in Buddhism, practically speaking, the ten- thousand joys have to come first, or we may not get to the rest of it.

Although 'Mudita', or Sympathetic Joy, is often overlooked in the teachings on the Four Immeasurables, it is, in truth, one of the factors we need to develop the other states, of Great Love, Compassion, and Impartiality. So I wrote out these five questions to live with, to look into, and use as reminders to open up to the joy that is available here. They are:

1. *How much beauty is there in the world?...*
2. *How many things are there that can make us feel wonder?...*
3. *How deep can gratitude go?...*
4. *How much strength can a person get from loving?...*

and,

5. *How much happiness is there in friendship?...*

These kinds of reflections keep me on course, developing the strength of the emotional body, and benefitting from extending that positive energy throughout body, mind, and spirit.

When we feel well and happy, the mind becomes bright and clear, and it settles down comfortably more easily. It is able to remain calmly settled. It's said that, 'In the mind of happiness, attention finds a true foundation.' This naturally supports the development of liberating insight, fulfilling one of the central aims in Buddhism.

*It's being sustained and strengthened by the beauty of life that allows us to progress on the path of becoming a whole, healthy, capable and responsive human being.*

## Taking advantage of what is offered

I think if we begin to realize the vital importance of experiencing joy, we'll start to find more ways to cultivate this necessary part of life, for all our sake. Sometimes, it's just a matter of the focus, of a slight attentional shift. For example, we can do all the necessary actions and practices we already are doing, such as making breakfast, and driving the kids to school, taking a parent shopping, mindful breathing, loving kindness meditation, the practice, when needed, of patience, or diligence, but now with an awareness of the joy of them.

If we key in on the joyful aspect of any of these, or other positive, healthy practices or ways of living, that happiness will increase, and will heal, energize, and nourish us, more and more, and the benefit will definitely be known, in some way or another, in all the lives we are connected to, our whole family.



## On nourishing ourselves with joy

We are made for joy. If we're without it for long, we feel out of sorts, because it's not natural to be that way. We can see the relationship between our mind and body so easily when we cultivate joy. Having our lives nourished and sustained by joy is how we have a healthy immune system, physically and spiritually. It helps us now, and in our whole life.

### A method - extended

In his instructions on breath meditation, the Thai teacher, Ajaan Lee said we should regard those places in the body that ache or are uncomfortable as being like hoodlums or fools. Our task is to find some place in the body that is comfortable and to focus on that.

In his method, Ajaan Lee taught that we should then let this comfortable sensation spread throughout our entire body, to increase our sense of well being and stability. He says this is like hanging out with good people – eventually they'll drive off the hoodlums and fools.

The same principle can be used when it comes to negative emotions or states of mind – regard them too as hoodlums and fools. We can then choose to focus on something positive and uplifting, and drive off the discomfort and suffering.

Many people do something like this already. On a mantle at home, or at the office, we have photographs of our children, teachers, or pets, or of a sunset. Looking at this brings us some uplift, but maybe the experience is not as full as it could be. Perhaps looking at the pictures, people will just sort of zone out... like....'aaahhhh...'

To get the most out of any meditation, we have to enter into it consciously, and remain aware. Just as with the breathing meditation, when looking at a picture, or, bringing some positive memory to mind, or listening to music,

we can identify the positive, uplifting energy, and, immersing ourselves in it for a time, we can allow this beautiful energy to saturate our body and mind, through and through. We can enjoy the feeling, and remain awake with it.

In contrast to our usual way of looking at a picture, or memory, or listening, this method takes intention, gentle concentration, to the exclusion of everything else for a while, and remaining conscious throughout. We can then permeate our body and mind with healthy feelings. This is one way to ward off the hoodlums and fools of our negative mental – emotional states.

It's my hope that we all *regularly* put our mind on things that are uplifting. It's not enough to just do this once in a while, or when we're having some problem. Of course, it works somewhat then too, but it's better to build up the strength of this practice when things are going well, and in ordinary times. That way, we gradually build up a shelter, a refuge for ourselves, and it will be there when we really need it. This is just a forward thinking, common sense way to take care of ourselves.

*A strong psychological immune system...*

After we are out of a suffering state, even temporarily, then nourishing ourselves spiritually takes on another role. This is the way we gradually develop a strong, robust psychological immune system. We can actually experience ourselves becoming resistant to negative thoughts and emotions, less reactive, and with a higher level of overall happiness and well being.

Something like this happens, for example, when we are just back from a vacation, but here we are producing this effect consciously, and regularly, as a way of taking care of ourselves.

Mind effects body, body effects mind

Certainly, neurological and chemical changes take place in us because of our thoughts and feelings. Positive states are healthy and strengthening to our body, and this in turn can support our cultivation of the life we want for ourselves.

## Rediscovering Joy

### Putting the joy back in Joyful Effort

In Buddhism, we call a bodhisattva someone who's intent on helping others in every needed way. He or she does this through what are called the Six Perfections, which are Generosity, Ethics, Patience, *Joyful Effort*, Meditation and Wisdom. This is, or should be, a path of unsurpassed happiness, and mature joy, because this is not a small ambition to have. Such great love is, in fact, the fulfillment of our lives here. Sometimes, however, we lose our zeal.

We may start enthusiastically, with a fine motivation, but there are times when we can get caught by the appearance that things are not happening fast enough. Our days can feel like a slog. Whatever the season, it can feel like deep Winter, with short days, and long hours of darkness and biting wind.

It's times like these that we especially need to bring out that vivifying quality we call joy. It was there in the beginning, when we were first inspired to accomplish some good purpose. Unlike our other movements though, we saw something of great value, and we set our mind on accomplishing that for our family.

All along the way, we need to remember why we are spending our days and nights as we do. It is possible even now to have some feeling for the goal. We can have this live inside us as we travel, like the vision of a golden city we carry in our heart on this Winter road.

When we are able to tap into the pleasure another will feel when they are loved, and safe, and well fed, then we can take the next step, and the next, with joy and with ease.

Our goals are what sustain us. They bring light to the mind and renewed inspiration. If we've gone to the mountain top, and even for a moment glimpsed the promised land, we need to keep this in our mind and heart. Sometimes our charts get covered over with dust, or we get lost on some back road, and we despair. The sky threatens, the streets empty, the stores shutter their doors. It's times like these that we need to rest and recover the clear image of what we would accomplish for the children of our world, for our friends and neighbors, for our close family and loved ones.

Fields are being planted, and fresh water is here. In time, all will be invited to this feast, and music will be shared. Have you seen the color of the fruit on the trees? Have you seen the metamorphosis on a branch?

Joy is the thread we use to weave the fabric of a noble life here on earth. We take up these gifts again, so generously given by our ancestors and teachers, fashion them into other beautiful forms, and pass them along. The works of our hands, we must remind ourselves now, will outlast these bodies, made of food and drink. Light is what we have received, and light is what we give.

When we sit and walk, learn, speak and listen with the joy of knowing our greater purpose here, the way is easy. Whatever the situation, there is a center of peace and clarity, of light and well being we can draw from, as much as needed.

A vision is something we carry with us. Sometimes it is as vivid as holding a cup in our hands, and at other times it recedes to a faint memory. Our sight narrows at such times, and our shoulders sag. Then, like breath returning, we re-awaken the sense of why we are here, and a beautiful vision animates all we do, in stillness and activity, in silence and in speech.

What Thomas A Kempis said is true:

*Love makes what is heavy, light*

*and everything that is bitter,  
sweet and tasteful...*

So take the hand of your beloved, even now, take the hand of your child. Take the hand of your parent, and of those who are in need of strength and sustenance. From wherever you are sitting or walking or lying down just now, *re-member* your gift of love, and this joy of our traveling together.

Our roots go deeper than we know – a reflection on the power of gratitude

In every traditional culture, we find parents and elders teaching their children gratitude, and the essence is always the same, that of cultivating a living sense of appreciation for what we've received. Parents don't do this for their own sake, instead they do it as a gift to their children. They do it because they've known these blessings themselves, and they know that this is what will sustain future generations.

When I compare how I feel when I have gratitude for my teachers, for my ancestors, and the natural world, with those times when I lose this sense, there's a great difference. When I'm not aware of these gifts in any kind of real, tangible way, I feel impoverished, with few resources, and living in a shadow that is the absence of joy.

I think many people feel this way sometimes, and what's more, what it means to have gratitude is not something that is talked about much in this culture, and so I thought I'd sketch out a few thoughts about it here, for those who might like to pick up on this theme, and awaken more thankfulness in their lives.

I marvel sometimes at the gift of friendship, and how it is a sustaining power in our lives. We may have only spent a short time with someone, years ago, but our time together was graced with a special quality that has stayed with us.

Thinking again of that friendship brings that power to the fore. We are nourished by that love on a spiritual level, and it is this energy that gives us strength for all we would accomplish in the world.

We've received love, support and encouragement from our parents and teachers, and the quality of that love is something profound. Remembering

that gift, we can't help but be moved, grateful, and dedicated to living a righteous life.

Thinking of the lives of our parents and teachers, and spiritual ancestors, and of what they have offered us, we can see that they in turn were nourished by their own parents and teachers. This is what they received, and passed on to us, this love, encouragement, strength and wisdom.

When I say our roots go deeper than we know, I'm thinking of how we don't often look into the richness of what we have with us now. Generations have brought us to where we are now, and their sustaining power is here for us to know, and to be upheld and inspired by.

If we forget, we feel weak, easily intimidated by life. When we remember again who we are, and how we got here, we can't help but feel optimistic, and dedicated to caring for the needs of this time, and those of future generations.

To take just two examples of the vision and commitment that has come before, and that has brought us to where we are today, we can think of our modern education, and of the civil rights movement.

A century ago, ninety percent of the people in this country lived in rural areas. The recorded rate of literacy, even then was already high, but the level of education, compared to today was very basic.

During the last century, access to public libraries and to higher education has increased to the point that we almost take it for granted. Compared to a hundred years ago, many more of us have opened the treasury of learning.

It's only because people in previous generations saw the great value in public education that we have these advantages today, which are almost impossible to measure. All the knowledge of the arts, history, science and



technology, and philosophy has come to us because of the efforts of generations of educators.

Most of their names have been forgotten, but we have all this nourishment for our souls because of their love, vision and dedication.

When I look for examples of true heroes and spiritual ancestors in modern times, I can see that there were many great souls who only just recently came before us in the Civil Rights era. People who study that history know the names of Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Ralph Abernathy, Bob Moses, and A. Phillip Randolph. Looking further, we see that each of them were nourished and sustained not only by their fellow workers for human rights and dignity, but also by the labors of people like Ghandi, Emerson and Thoreau.

Every step the marchers were taking during those dangerous, difficult times was moved by love, and strengthened by those who went before them. They were encouraged to keep going towards justice, dignity and equality by those in their past, and by their hope for the future.

This same gift, this same power is what we've received, those of us who are heirs to their legacy.

This is something that lives, something that we can touch again, when we remember them with gratitude for their great vision and efforts. And then, considering what we've received from them, how can we do anything other than try to take the next step to advance the cause of human rights in our own times?

It is this way too when we have the great fortune of connecting with a spiritual tradition. All those who have come before us, right down to our own teachers, have not left us. They have passed forward the gifts of their practice to us. Praise and gratitude awakens the sense that this really is so.

Something of their power, kindness, compassion and commitment is with us now, and this is something we can celebrate and draw from every day.

Like a tree, through its roots, drawing up the sap of nutriment, breath by breath, we can reach down and feel our whole body fill with the health and strength, light, courage and love that is their gift to us.

We can remove ourselves from all these virtues when we hold the idea of ourselves as separate from all this – from each other, and from all our ancestors. This mistaken concept isn't something we would ever consciously plan to do – instead it's the character of a delusion – a result of miseducation, that persists, until it is unlearned, seen through and discarded.

There's a scene in the movie *Amistad*, where the character of John Adams is talking to an African man he is representing in an American court, and telling him how there's been a setback in the trial. At first the man, Sikey, doesn't understand, but then, when he does, he goes into a frenzy, and it's not until days later that Adams can talk with him again. When he does, he sees that Sikey is relaxed and smiling. He tells John Adams that he knows everything will be alright now. I remember he said,

*'I spoke with my ancestors last night'*

*'I called them all into myself, and they assured me of our victory'*

*'I am the whole reason now that they lived'.*

We can assuredly say the same thing about our spiritual ancestors – those who came before us and struggled to make this world a righteous place. The power of the work they did did not end with them, but is with us now.

They had their work, the work of their time, which was not our work; and now we have our own work to do, in order to pass this same gift forward to our children, and the coming generations.

When you look at religions throughout different cultures and over time, you often see this gesture of looking back with admiration, and appreciation, with love and rejoicing at the gifts we've received. This brings it more clearly into the present, as a palpable force, as a revered energy and direction, by which we can live our lives.

From gratitude, naturally comes works, effortlessly in a way, as the overflow of our heart of love.

We've all received many gifts, by being here, and they are alive, and with us now.

*May we all know the true measure of our heritage,  
to be living now, on this extraordinary earth;  
and all our noble ancestry,*

*and with this energy, may we continue to work,  
in our own way, for the sake of our children,  
and our children's children.*

Consider how precious every aspect of our situation is: we have encountered the Dharma and are able to receive teachings. The opportunities presented by the teacher and the blessings of the lineage are very special. They have not happened accidentally, nor have they come about by themselves. There are many causes and conditions contributing to this unique occasion.

Everything has come together in such a beautiful way. We have many good reasons to feel grateful and appreciative, to fully enjoy the total wealth of our situation and bring blessings to others. This understanding empowers us, inspiring trust and devotion.

- Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

## Recognizing Our Great Good Fortune, from Vivid Awareness, by Thrangu Rinpoche

This is very important: you are a fortunate and worthy student- you are extraordinary in this regard. Even if the Dharma spreads throughout the world and is preserved, if you are not fortunate, you will not be able to practice them. For example, in Asia the Dharma is close and conditions are good. All you need to practice Dharma is here: there are places to study the Dharma and practice the Dharma. There are many opportunities. Yet even so, many people do not have the fortune to take advantage of this.

Dharma is close, available, and important for them to practice, but they are not inclined to practice and their minds are distracted by worldly affairs when they should be looking up toward the Dharma. Such people are not fortunate. In contrast, many Westerners will travel long distances, crossing great oceans just to study and practice the Dharma. Even those who stay in their own country often now have the interest and ability to practice.

You are very fortunate to be able to encounter the Dharma at this particular time and to have the wish to practice it. For example, if you had been born seventy years earlier, you would not have had the opportunity to encounter the Dharma because at that time it was almost impossible to even hear of the Dharma, let alone encounter it. Even those Westerners who encountered the Dharma at that time often did not have the wish to practice it...

When I first traveled to the West, there were people who had some faith in the Dharma, but they often had doubts about some things. Most people wanted to hear certain types of Dharma teachings, but often they were not interested in receiving empowerments or did not know that they should take empowerments. They believed some Dharma teachings but doubted others. Nowadays as the Dharma spreads and becomes popular in the West, people are developing a stronger belief in the Dharma.

Some people even have complete faith in the Dharma, which is excellent.

Even though the Dharma has spread to many lands, not everyone is able to enter the gate of the Dharma and practice it. Not everyone is able to believe the Dharma. Even many who have started to learn about the Dharma and begun to believe it are unable to practice it. But you are not like that: you have fortune to be able to practice the Dharma.

Over a long time, you have gathered a tremendous amount of merit, because of which you now have had the good fortune to be born in a precious human body, encounter the Dharma, and recognize how valuable it is. You have seen how the Dharma will be beneficial for your life and have developed faith in it.

Not only do you have faith, but you actually have the wish to practice the Dharma. Such an intention is actually very difficult to come by. This is a wonderful, great fortune, and this is what it means to be a worthy student.

Now that you have this good fortune, it is important that you be diligent in your Dharma practice. It is important to realize how fortunate we are. Sometimes we forget and think to ourselves, "Well, I've started practicing Dharma but I haven't had any signs of experience or realization." We might get depressed or discouraged about it, but there is really no need for that.

We have entered the gate of the Dharma and are what is here called a worthy student. We should recognize this for the good fortune that it is. We should remember that practicing the Dharma is good and beneficial, and reflect on how lucky we are to be able to practice it.

When we are receiving instructions, it is important that we have faith and devotion, and the most important thing for that is to be really excited. We need to realize how fortunate we are to be able to do this. If we really see how fortunate we are, this will be really wonderful and extremely beneficial for us, but if we have this great fortune and instead of

recognizing it we think it is something ordinary, we will not be able to extract much power out of the instructions.

This is why the great teacher Shantideva said:

*Those who thus with clear intelligence  
Take hold of the awakened mind with clear and lucid joy,  
That they may now increase what they have gained  
Should lift their hearts with praises such as these.*

We need to be joyful and excited, because if we feel enthusiasm for our practice, we will be more and more diligent. Then our practice will just get better and better. On the other hand, if we are not excited about our practice and do not have any joy for it, it will not really go anywhere.

Similarly, in order to confess and get rid of our wrongdoings, nonvirtues, and negativities, we should regret them and think, "Oh, that was not so good." If we do that, they will naturally decrease. Otherwise, if we think, "That was great!" they will grow stronger and stronger. Therefore we should always be excited and happy about our Dharma practice and regret our misdeeds and nonvirtues.

\*Sometimes we set the foundation for our Dharma practice by generating weariness with the world. We think about the impermanence of all phenomena. We think about suffering. By doing that, we develop world-weariness, and from that we recognize that we really need to practice the Dharma. Out of that recognition, we begin to actually practice the Dharma.

Sometimes when we practice, we do not worry about developing world-weariness. Instead, we have joy and excitement. We think about how fortunate we are to be able to practice. Now that we have this good fortune, it is important to practice.

These are two different methods of inspiring ourselves to practice, one through world-weariness and the other through joy and excitement. The method we should use now is to generate joy and excitement. This is not merely a question of feeling joy and excitement within our minds. We need to contemplate how extremely fortunate we are to be able to practice the Dharma in this world now...

The Dharma of the great vehicle has spread. The Dharma of the Theravada tradition has also spread. The Dharma of the secret mantra vajrayana has spread. These three different types of Dharma have all appeared in this world... We have this great fortune...

Now we have all the favorable conditions we need to practice the Dharma. The instructions are here, and we have the opportunity to practice the best Dharma.

When the Buddha appeared in India, he taught the Dharma and had many followers- arhats and mahasiddhas- who preserved and protected the Dharma. They practiced the Dharma and passed on the oral instructions for their practices. All of these instructions were preserved in their entirety in Tibet, but they were not just preserved as mere words or intellectual knowledge; the great masters practiced these instructions and many of them achieved realization through the instructions. All of these instructions have been preserved in Tibet without deteriorating or being lost.

In terms of external circumstances, there have been some difficulties, but in terms of the internal practice, the essence of all the spiritual instructions that were given and preserved in India and then spread to Tibet has not encountered any obstacles. These instructions have been maintained in an unbroken continuum in Tibet. We are very fortunate that the Dharma that the Buddha taught has not been lost but has been preserved.

In the ninth century, there was a Tibetan king who tried to eradicate the Dharma in Tibet. He destroyed many temples and tried to stamp out the



Dharma, but he did not succeed. The lineages of the Dharma and the instructions were preserved through that period.

If we look at recent history, there was the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, but even during the Cultural Revolution, the Dharma did not disappear. They destroyed temples, tore down statues, and burned sacred texts, but the lineage of the Dharma was not lost. That lineage of the Dharma still exists and you as a Dharma practitioner have the great fortune to read these teachings.

You have the opportunity to practice and should remember this great fortune.

## The treasures we carry

In their studies of Native Americans, African Americans, and Jewish descendants of victims of the holocaust, scientists speak nowadays of trauma being passed on through our DNA, and this feels true to me. It also feels like, once again, science is late to the game, catching up only now with what contemplatives, poets and healers have long known.

*And while it's true that we have inherited from our family lines the memories of harms that have been done, great injustices, and devastation, we've also inherited great riches from them.* I don't expect science to catch up with this part of our human experience any time soon, and so I will have to at least try to speak of this here.

If it's possible to inherit ancestral trauma, in ways that can now be measured, then it only makes sense that we have also inherited positive experiences, insights and abilities from the past. These are also something we don't have to do anything to create or manufacture - they are our true inheritance. I would go further though than identifying as our legacy only what we've received through our parents. I would say that all of humanity's injuries, insights and qualities are ours as well. This was the idea behind what Jung called the collective unconscious.

Why is it that we don't know these things? I would say that it's the volume and intensity of our experiences that often blocks this knowledge. We have abundant resources in us, but are we able to quiet down, and to access them?

Our past and present familial inheritance is closer to us than the more general collective, and this is where most of us can begin our meditations to access the strengths and qualities that we need now.

My father and his father, mother, and grandfather transmitted their strength and courage, their creativity and great love. When I can tap into

this, there's a fresh stream of light and inspiration I can bring into my work and daily living.

The same goes for my mother's side of the family. Though I only met one uncle of my mother's, their guiding influence and love are certainly now a part of my life.

We can also speak of inheriting the lineages of social activism that came before us, and that are with us now, empowering each generation. All this is with us now, if we choose to tap into it, and use it in our work.

Our spiritual traditions and teachers past and present too have an element to them that goes beyond any one era, enhancing, vivifying, illuminating, nourishing each generation of practitioners. If we have a connection, and faith, then without a doubt, their blessings pour down on us, and move through our lives in profound ways.

We have all this to draw from in our life and work.

## From The Celebratory Gift of Metta

Metta - loving kindness makes our world larger. We can count among the gifts we've received all those accomplishments that others have shared with us, either placing them directly into our hand, or indirectly, through their exemplary lives, or work, or philosophy.

The Buddha recommended looking at what goes to make up our living. Just hearing from someone else how we are rich we are is not enough to elevate the mind. We have to see *and feel* those gifts we've received for ourselves, and really know them.

\* \* \*

Metta, or love makes us more sensitive to beauty, in all its forms, in the natural world, in the arts, and in all the expressions of people's generosity that enrich and sustain our lives.

As we become more attentive to what is being offered to us, all the time, we are fully formed by it. Generosity, we say, is then an outpouring.

Among others, I'm thinking of my father as I write this, whose extraordinary generosity I had the wonderful privilege of witnessing for many years. His had a very rich life, and over the years he abundantly shared his gifts with his family, friends and students, with great joy. This could have only happened because he was so full as a person.

To me, he vividly illustrates how, when there is generosity, it's because so much has been received first that what follows just happens by itself. No great effort needs to be made.

\* \* \*

How many times a day can we stop and say, to ourselves, or out loud, 'now, isn't that something?', or, 'Oh, my!' Expressing our wonder and joy and gratitude is great medicine, both for ourselves, and for our family, and the world. From this heart of love realized in metta, we find that appreciation and praise are gifts we can so easily give. They lift up others, and, in doing so, we find that we too have been raised up.

## From On Brightening the Mind

*During the day and night, incline yourself to things that brighten the mind...*

The qualities of joy, wonder, patience, gratitude, and careful attentiveness to what we are doing – these are available to us, if we choose to make use of them throughout the day. And when we do, it can be surprising, actually, there's much more of a feeling of continuity between sitting and walking meditation and the rest of the day and night.

The nourishment that we can receive from our meditation and contemplation is a kind of sustenance that isn't received any other way. Even the most well meaning friend or teacher can't give this to us – it's a gift only we can give ourselves. And because it's something that benefits everyone and everything, it's really something that everyone should find the time to do.

'Joy receptors'

A couple of years ago, the term 'joy receptors' came to mind, to refer to our capacity to experience beauty, what is lovely, and rich. I know that these 'joy receptors' can sometimes get covered over, and so, Rumi, Pablo Neruda, Hafiz, Mark Twain, Martin Luther King, and our Spiritual Friends can help a lot here.

I saw a photo someone shared on facebook recently, of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh together, greeting each other and smiling. Maybe you saw it?

I wrote:

*When two oceans meet,  
joy overflows,  
filling all the world...*

This is the kind of thing that cleans the mind. What a gift they are to us all!

In addition, if we are aware of our nature, and how this capacity to experience joy can increase or decrease in us, we can stop doing the things that limit us – like watching or reading the news when it only stays on the surface, or is intended to shock or to titillate– which is literally just so much *stupefaction*.

Thay has often shared a traditional Buddhist teaching on what are called ‘the four nutriments’ of life, which are: food, sense impressions, states of consciousness, and intentions. If we know that these are all things that shape our lives, and that influence the very quality of our lives, then we can choose wisely.

This is definitely part of brightening the mind.

\* \* \*

I had to ask myself at some point, how clear can we become? An obscured mind can be right in the middle of a paradise, and not know it. And what a loss that would be! So this is something that I hope everyone will pick up on, in one way or another, to learn about in their own living.

The way I’m thinking about it now, there are so many things we do already that brighten the mind, and if we’re aware of what brightens and uplifts, we can gather these things to us, as allies, so to speak. This makes living very enjoyable indeed.

Then, when we do sitting or walking meditation, calming the mind, the other of the necessary factors, of clarity, will naturally be there. We’ve planted good seeds, and the harvest will be right there for us to benefit from as we will.

\* \* \*

## Cultivating Joy and Metta Practice

When I think of things that brighten the mind, on the top of my list are two practices that are taught in Buddhism, those of cultivating joy, and 'Metta bhavana', or loving kindness.

They are the easiest ways to bring freshness and light into the mind, and the results, even for someone who has never practiced before, can be immediate and lasting. And if we find a way to make these regular practices, their power and benefit only increases the more we do them.



## The Cultivation of Loving Kindness

Having seen that like oneself  
all beings seek for happiness,  
one patiently then cultivates love for all beings

May all the precious children of this world  
be entirely well and at their ease...

May I be happy, healthy, and peaceful  
May I be free from suffering

May my family, friends,  
neutral ones, and all honored guests  
have every happiness  
May they be free from all suffering  
May they be free from all danger, and all difficulty

Within the boundaries of this town,  
may all beings have happiness  
Likewise those in other places,  
in other cities, and countries,  
in all places,  
may they all have happiness, health and peace

All creatures and all breathing things,  
all persons and all entities...  
men, women and children,  
the Noble Ones, the unawake,  
Devas, and unhappy ones  
who in the ten directions dwell -

*May all beings be happy and at peace,  
and may their hearts be filled with joy!*

## Selections from Heart Qualities, and States of Mind That Serve Us Well

### Wonder

A close cousin of delight, wonder stops us where we are, and lets the mystery in. This is what we speak of as awe. We are filled with the shining beauty.

Wonder is a moment out of time. If we are to have wonder in our lives, we have to slow down, or to pause at regular intervals, and let ourselves be renewed.

When it comes to wonder, how much can we really say, since it stops all the talk about lesser things, at least for a time?

It really sets us straight.

In what only a moment ago seemed small, like the hand of a child, or the first bright flower seen in Spring, can reveal itself to be something great, after all.

That we are here on this earth, with so many noble, inspiring lives, and endless beauty, gives us one opportunity after another to enter the grandeur of life in this world.

It is bliss.

\* \* \*

## Gratitude

When we have gratitude, we're able to be nourished and sustained by the gifts we're received. No matter how long ago, or how brief the encounter, or how small the gift seemed at the time, if we keep the feeling of thankfulness for it, it continues to be a blessing in our lives.

Gratitude for friends, for family, for our opportunities and education can also increase in us, as time goes on. This is something we see at times in our elders, who can be so full of joy, and so enriched by what we share with them. This is because gratitude has become fully mature in them.

This thankfulness, I feel sometimes as a running stream, or a continuous hum, that is joyful.

It's hard to be complaining at the same time as we're feeling thankful, so any of that quiets down in us, more and more.

Gratitude is a kind of re-awakening, ever fresh. Like these other heart-attitudes, it costs nothing, and adds richness to all our days.

\* \* \*

## Love

If there were one quality that stands out as sovereign among all the others, it is love. When we think about it, this includes all the others – it brings strength, joy, and purpose.

Feeling love, for family and friends, for teachers, for our natural world, is the best kind of food for our spirit. *'We are beings of light, and this is what we live on.'* Well fed, we're then able to help support and sustain others.

With love, there is inspiration and courage, faith and determination. It's the light shining in darkness, the knowledge that we are not alone in our struggles, and that we have something to give.

Love is the seed, flower and fruit of everything worthwhile that we see in this world of ours. It's the strength of our limbs, the calm of our voice, and that which is certain and unchanging in life.

The bible says that God is love, and he who dwells in love, dwells in God. I can think of no better way to live, can you?

This is the true standard of measure, and not those false standards, of beauty, or worth. This is the true eye that we see with, our spiritual vision.

Every blessing we give and receive, comes from love.

Let your heart shine!

\* \* \*

Joy

Taking delight in what we are doing is what let's us keep going. It's food and gifts, light, and strength for the body.

We need to have an eye for the 'low hanging fruit' that's within reach every day. The thought of our children, our own family's stories, of heroism, the modern day saint's fidelity to their cause. All these and more are refreshing and invigorating to think on.

We can even feel the excitement arise when we come up with ideas that we can set in motion. This too is a kind of joy.

We know what we have in mind, and, as the poet Rumi said,

*'before the mines are dug,  
they weigh up the jewels;  
before fields are plowed,  
they taste the bread*

They call this enjoying the nutriment of intention in Buddhism. With joy, something fresh and timeless is here. We know it, and thrill to it, and are made young.

In joy, there is hope for our world. It's a gift we can receive and give, with the simplest of means – a smile, a warm hearted response to someone, and kind word.

\* \* \*

## Compassion

Compassion is the natural response of love when it sees suffering. It's a source of great strength, resolve, and resourcefulness.

Compassion puts our priorities in order. If this world were only enjoyments, that would be one thing, but, as we all know, we live in a world where there are pressing needs, and we're bound to ask, how much can one person do?

Now, there are two ways of holding this question, actually – one is that of resignation, throwing up our hands, 'I'm outta here' – and the other is, 'yes, now, let's see... how much *can* a person do?'

If we live with this question, sensing the importance of it, we'll find ways to help we wouldn't have imagined before.

Compassion is uplifting and ennobling. It's available to everyone, of every age, profession, place and time. When we see someone acting compassionately, it restores our faith in humanity. We want to become like that, as much as we can.

Compassion is what has us search for solutions to problems, with unyielding dedication. This is what has us look ahead as well. We know it's not enough for us to be comfortable today only – that we have to find a safe refuge for our family and friends, and for all our loved ones everywhere.

Compassion is far seeing. Whenever we have this one quality, wherever we are, whatever we're doing, our life has purpose. We can have a sense of inner wealth and ingenuity, as well as our connection with others we share this life path with.

We know that are not alone in our work, and it's a joy to know this. We support one another, and are upheld, encouraged and inspired by our fellow brothers and sisters.

Our ancestors support us, Great World Teachers, guardians and protectors watch over us. As long as there is compassion in the world, hope, and the remedy to the long standing problems we face is something we can believe in.

\* \* \*

## Generosity

As a heart quality, generosity brings joy to everyday life. It's something we can always do, even if we're a person of only modest means. Our plans can be great, our prayers can be deep and rich, and can reach far.

We can be generous in listening, in our thinking something over, in our praise, and in our dedication. We can always be looking for, and finding new ways to be generous.

Nothing feels quite the same as giving a gift. When it's from the heart, the other person knows it. They can feel, 'this person thought of me, with care'. That's the real gift, it seems to me, and not so much what was physically given. This is what we remember of it.

A true gift can last for our whole life. I remember some kind words, and even some encouraging glances at times when I needed them most, more than the physical things that I've received. This tells me that it's the generosity of the person behind the gift that's the real blessing. I try to keep this in mind.

As time goes on, we can watch what has stayed with us, and continues to nourish and inspire us. It's amazing how much of it is what people did for us out of their kindness. Such was their generosity that, all these years later, we remember them with lasting gratitude. This is how I want my generosity to be as well.

It's a great happiness to know we've added to another's life, in some way. Generosity is one of the jewels of our being here. That we can give and receive gifts is truly a wonder.

\* \* \*

#### Coda: Reverence

What we know as reverence is the deepest kind of respect, coupled with an attentive care. It's an awakening to the great value of what is here. Sometimes, from reverence, we can even open to a kind of awe, an exultation.

We all need this kind of love, which is a sense of the sacred, somewhere in our lives, to give them the light and fullness we long for. Without reverence, or even respect, people often feel there's nothing worth living for, or that they can overlook, or mistreat others. Without this ever-deepening love and respect, there's no zest, or motivation.

I remember writing once, *'Awe is a necessary human emotion'* – without it, we wither. Beginning with respect, and with the truly precious examples of our teachers, we can learn to see how deep the feelings of love and care can go.

Reverence for life makes us humble, and more receptive to the gifts that are offered freely, and in such abundance. It makes for an intimacy with these things, and to our being able to be deeply nourished by them.

We hold this life tenderly, and with profound gratitude, with the simple wish to honor it, and to do it justice.