

Appreciative Joy

Muditā is another boundless heart quality: the illimitable release of joy that comes from appreciation. A quick contemplation to consider: have you had a moment of joy without some appreciation being present? Is it possible to have appreciation without some joy coming to life?

It is most often easier to develop an appreciation for life than it is to leap into a state of joy. We could say that appreciation plants seeds of joy. Therefore, a key aspect of cultivating muditā could be to express appreciation such as cultivating interest, admiration, gratitude, or cherishing.

Furthermore, you may notice we use the word appreciate to express how something is increased or enhanced. When we direct appreciation towards phenomena, they may grow in detail or dimension, and fill more of our awareness. If we notice a certain beauty or delight in what we attend to, any sense of joy present can grow to the point where it feels to fill and/or fulfil our being.

Habitually, when another being gets something we might wish to have, we often feel the sting of jealousy. In this way, we could say we make dukkha (stress) out of sukhā (pleasure). Muditā practise calls into question that movement. Sometimes, muditā is translated as unselfish or altruistic joy. This helps us hear how this practice directs our attention in a way we broadly could call selfless. Or more accurately, attending with a much quieter, almost imperceptible self-interest. Curiously, self-quietening occurs even when directing muditā towards ourselves.

In practise, we see dukkha (the contracted and stressful feeling of non-freedom) coexists with a strong and rigid self-view or sense of self. As a result, it stands to reason that the more joyful experience of releasing dukkha would also result in the release of the problematic self-sense. All brahmavihārās take us beyond self-obsession and into a larger field of interconnectedness. In muditā, this manifests as joyful release, announcing its precious place on an onward-leading path of deeper and more subtle liberation.

Feel what happens to your mood, sense of self, other, & world of phenomena you attend to when there is more muditā. Remember, muditā practice is a cultivation. We may not feel joyful in each moment of practice. Yet, overtime, as we exercise this way of attending, we develop a tendency, perhaps by literally strengthening a neural pathway, of inclining towards joy.

Some appreciative joy phrases to try:

May **I / You / We** learn to appreciate the joy **I / You / We** experience
May the joy **I / You / We** experience continue and grow
May **I / You / We** be filled with joy and gladness