

Delight

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With a lot of the pleasures of the world, the real pleasure is not so much in the pleasure itself, but in the delight we take in it: anticipating how good it's going to be and, after it's done, talking to ourselves about how great it was. This is our way of encouraging ourselves to look for it again. This delight, as the Buddha said, usually is one of the accompaniments of craving. It's what nourishes craving. And in most cases, craving is a bad thing. It leads to suffering.

We delight in things that really don't have much true happiness to offer, true pleasure to offer. But the delight is all in the way we dress them up. Like that dog that visits us every now and then—the one that wears sunglasses and little outfits. A lot of the owner's pleasure is in the outfits and the sunglasses. This, the Buddha said, is the reason why we fall for things that really don't give us much satisfaction.

But we can learn how to delight in good things, too. After all, when you're getting started on the path, you need something to encourage you. Craving and desire are part of our motivation. *We want* to put an end to suffering. So you have to learn how to feed that desire, to keep it going.

The Buddha lists six kinds of skillful delight that really are worth cultivating as part of the path. He says that as you engage in these kinds of delight, you gain happiness in the here and now, simply anticipating how good it's going to be as you practice the path, and as you reach the end of the path. This delight is also what provides the nourishment for staying on the path.

The first is delight in the Dhamma—the fact that there is a Dhamma that teaches us that there is an end of suffering, and it can be attained through human effort. It explains how we suffer, why we suffer. It explains the big issues of life: aging, illness, death, separation. It gives reliable guidance in how to act, how to speak, how to think. It reassures us that the effort put into developing skillful actions is well spent. It basically lays things out.

As the Buddha said, it's admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. In other words, the words of the Dhamma are inspiring. The practice is a noble practice, one in which we engage in developing the noble qualities of our own minds. And the end is total freedom from suffering of any kind, freedom from restrictions of any kind. It's a good Dhamma. So we can take delight in that.

There's that conversation the Buddha had with the asura who talked about how the asuras take delight in the ocean, which has many marvelous qualities.

They looked at the Dhamma and Vinaya of the Buddha, and noticed it had many marvelous qualities as well. So when your practice begins to flag, remind yourself that you've got a good road map here, the most reliable one there is. It's been tested for more than two thousand years. It deals with the big issues in life, issues that are not specific to any race, class, nation, or culture. It not only presents the issues, but also solves them. It points the way to a happiness that's free from aging, free from illness, free from death. So take delight in that.

The next two types of delight are delighting in developing and delighting in abandoning: in other words, developing skillful qualities and abandoning unskillful ones. The Buddha recommends this from the very beginning of the path, as in his instructions to Rahula, when he says that you should try to act only on skillful intentions. When you look at your actions and you see that they actually are harmless, you take delight in that. That should be your energy to keep on practicing to get better and better at the practice.

Ajaan Maha Boowa talks about taking delight in seeing little flakes of defilement getting peeled off the mind, like flakes of bark peeled off a tree. In other words, regard it as a victory each time you're able to say No to a desire that you know is unskillful, or to say No to a mind state that's unskillful—to figure out why you would go there, and then to see through it to the point where you realize you don't want to go there anymore.

The next delight is delight in seclusion: enjoying being alone. It's interesting that the Pali Canon portrays Ven. Maha Kassapa as being strict and stern, yet he's got a wonderful poem where he talks about how great it is to be out in the beauties of the wilderness. This was back in the days when wilderness was not appreciated. When people wrote poetry about the beauty of nature, they were usually talking about domesticated nature. The oldest wilderness poetry we have is in the Pali Canon. It talks about the delight that comes from just being out in the wilds where there's nobody around.

Think about the Buddha's story of the elephant: When it lived with its herd, it would go down to drink the water, but everybody else in the herd had gone down and been in the water and made it muddy. When they went down to bathe, the different elephants would knock into him. So he decided to go off and live alone. Living along, he had clean water. When he went down to bathe, there was nobody to knock into him. When he felt an itch, he would take a branch and scratch himself.

The Buddha makes a comparison with a meditator out alone in the forest: You look around, and there's nobody to interfere with you, nobody to harass you, nobody to take up your time. You get into jhana as the branch with which you

scratch yourself, and with which you can find a pleasure that's really gratifying, a pleasure that you can't get when you're embroiled with people. So appreciate that. Because the seclusion that's being discussed here, of course, is not just physical seclusion. It's also mental seclusion. When the mind is secluded from unskillful states, it can settle down with a sense of inner ease: uninterrupted, smooth, steady. Learn to appreciate that. Learn to delight in that.

The last two kinds of delight are delight in the non-afflicted and delight in non-objectification. These are two names for nibbana, or two aspects of nibbana. But they also describe ways in which you practice. As you practice, you're not afflicting anybody: You're observing the precepts, finding pleasure in getting the mind concentrated, using your discernment to get past your defilements. You're practicing non-affliction even as you're headed toward the ultimate state of non-affliction.

The same with non-objectification: Objectification is when you start with the idea, "I am the thinker," and then from there you identify yourself as a being that needs to feed, that needs a certain part of the world to feed on, whether it's a physical part of the world or part of the world of ideas. You stake your claim and then you have to fight off other people. As the Buddha said, objectification is the kind of thinking that leads to conflict.

So instead, you think in terms of the four noble truths: simply what is suffering, what is the cause of suffering, what is the cessation of suffering, what is the path to the cessation. In other words, you think in terms that have nothing to do with becoming—a self or a world—and that cut through the processes of becoming. And you find that there's no conflict. You can delight in that.

So as you take these different kinds of delight, they give you the energy you need in order to practice. You're doing a good thing. You've got a good roadmap. You're following it. And you see it has a good impact on you and the people around you.

These six kinds of delight can also counteract types of delight that really are unskillful. Delighting in the Dhamma counteracts the delight some people take in the idea that there's really nothing explained in the world. It's all a big mystery. There's no true right or wrong. It's all a matter of different people's opinions, with some people trying to force their ideas of right and wrong on other people. Of course, if you take that attitude, it gives wide range for your defilements to roam around in. After all, if good and bad are simply social constructs, you're free to say No to any social construct. Nobody can say that you're wrong, because if they say that you're wrong, it's just a social construct too.

If you leave the processes of birth and death as a mystery, then you don't really know what to do. And when you don't really know what to do, your defilements can move in. So delight in the Dhamma helps to counteract those attitudes, some of which have become part of modern Buddhism, sad to say. But if you really delight in the Dhamma, it gives you reason to put them aside.

Similarly with delighting in abandoning and delighting in developing: The mind that doesn't delight in developing skillful qualities doesn't delight in abandoning unskillful ones is a mind that's heedless. And there's part of the mind that likes being heedless, the part that likes to say, "I don't care what happens down the line. I want what I want right now. I don't want to have to think about things in the future. It gets in the way of my enjoying the present." If you have no sense of shame, no sense of compunction, that's a mind that leaves you unguarded, unprotected, easy prey for your defilements. So when you delight in developing skillful qualities, it fights against those careless, heedless attitudes. When you delight in abandoning unskillful ones, you're basically saying, "I've been a friend to craving for a long, long time. I've taken craving as my friend, but now I realize that a lot of unskillful craving is not a true friend. I'll be more selective in who I choose as my friends, take as my examples."

When you delight in seclusion, that counteracts that, of course, your delight in getting entangled with other people. When you get entangled with other people, as the Buddha said, it's hard for you to find time to settle down with the establishings of mindfulness, to get a proper object for the mind to find the happiness, the well-being that can come when the mind gets concentrated. So learn how to delight in seclusion.

Even when you haven't developed deep concentration, the fact that you learn how to like being alone will incline the mind in the right direction. It opens the possibilities that get closed off when you're constantly dealing with other people, entangled with other people.

To delight in the non-afflicted helps overcome the part of the mind that likes to exert power over other people—the one that doesn't care how much other people suffer or how much you have to struggle with them as long as you can get them to do what you want.

Delighting in non-objectification helps to counteract the side of the mind that delights in conflict, that likes taking a stance, laying claim to things, fighting other people off.

So, given that the mind does have these unskillful types of delight, you've got to fight it with skillful delight. You can't just tell yourself, "Well, the Buddha

teaches us to be equanimous about all things, so try to clone that equanimous attitude.” It doesn’t have much strength.

The desire to stick with the path needs to be nourished. You need to learn how to talk to yourself about what a good path this is. Ultimately, it’ll take you to a state that doesn’t require all that talking and elaboration, all that embroidery.

That’s what’s so good about nibbana. It doesn’t require a review. It doesn’t require a critique. It doesn’t require your talking about it all the time. It’s just there, and you know that it’s good—good in and of itself.

The ajaans talk about this a lot, how it doesn’t require a lot of chatter, doesn’t require a lot of praise. It’s good in and of itself. It takes you to the point where you don’t need to delight in things, and you don’t miss the activity of taking delight. It’s that good. But just as the end of conceit requires a certain amount of conceit to get there, and the end of craving requires a certain amount of craving, so too the end of delight requires that you learn how to take skillful delight to give you the energy to keep you on the path, and to find a sense of well-being on the path so that you have the strength to follow it all the way through.