



Transcendent Joy - Muditā

*Muditā is joy and appreciation
flowing quietly out of the core
of one's heart toward others.⁸⁶*

The next divine abiding is called *muditā*, from the Sanskrit root *mud*; to mix, mingle, blend, and unite, friendly mud, joyous mud. Mud is where we come from, where we will go to. *Muditā* is commonly translated as “sympathetic joy” or “gladness.” When we see someone in a good state we may go into the same state. When someone is smiling and laughing, it is

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infectious, we are also full of laughter and light. Joy — not *my* joy — just joy. Feel it everywhere around you. Out of you and into something new. It brings you into a joyous state. Pervasive joy. Transcendent joy is another translation. Joy takes *you* out of you. A very big belly laugh brings you to your knees; it can render you into jelly — no *you*, just release.

If you really love what you do — joy for objects, beings, form, etc. — you will want to know about it, where it came from, its genesis. This is *muditā* as curiosity, the sheer joy of being curious. For example, earlier in the day some of us were discussing the colour vermilion, the pigment. How many vermilion pigments are there? Have you ever seen the range — it is astonishing. Nevertheless, what is the original vermilion? Originally vermilion was made from mercuric sulphide, a rock mostly red with some yellow. The pigment — crushed ore, which I saw many years ago, at the British Museum — is powerfully rich, beautiful, and poisonous! I suggest you buy the full range of available red pigments and experiment with washes, in different strengths. Today's pigments, made from synthetic dyes are generally safe to work with. Vermilion is the colour used for one of the tantric meditations on long life; the extension of life energy and nurturing a good life — vermilion represents vital life energy.⁸⁷

Muditā is the joy for and of life, good life energy. It is the joy of seeing the great and wondrous crafts people have made: wonder and joy at the exquisite, naturally-dyed baskets from the women of Zimbabwe and Botswana; the fine range of works of a superb potter; or the deep care and attention of someone's fine flower garden. It is the joy of seeing children play, making caves in a snow bank, or their talk together; bliss at beholding a display of a magnificent range of ancient Chinese jades or bronzes, or hearing the great art of an opera or symphony. Do

you feel and share joy at experiencing the incredible creations and joys of human beings?

Have you studied and participated in the crafting of beings to know this extraordinary resonance? How about non-human beings? When was the last time you looked down a microscope at diatoms and at single- and multi-cellular organisms? Or smelled the forest, witnessed the vast and bubbling array of life in the local forest and pond? Behold the joy of life of the billions of creatures about and inside you. How about sensing all your cells, alive, dancing, dividing, communicating, sending out messages; have you contacted this pervasive life joy?

I recall Namgyal Rinpoche saying during a *Vipassana* course: “I know very little, but I know it well.” If you lack richness, you lack *muditā*. *Muditā* embraces beings, resulting in prosperity of body, speech, and mind. I suggest you make collections to expand your *maṇḍala*⁸⁸, to strengthen the investigative and joyous mind. Look at the richness of nature, including humans. Gaze up into the clear night sky; deep blue-black, billions of pin pricks of light. Look through binoculars and telescopes. Name and learn the constellations, the deep space objects, the sun, planets, and moons. This is deep healing work; big, vast, and making your mind elastic. This will have immediate positive effects on your meditative practices.

I recommend going to, or participating in, a study group; for instance astronomy, bird watching, quilt making, or woodturning. Go out with astronomers or wood-turning buffs, the local birding society, or garden club. Go for a dig with archaeologists, into a rain forest with entomologists. Be with excited people; let their infectious joy and interest rub off on you. Let the mind of seeing and hearing details rub off on you. As some famous person said, “God is in the details.” Let the joy of discovery and naming bring forth energy for all life. So

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too, from the Bible, John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God.” *Logos* is a Greek word that means word, study, and speech. The initiation of all manifestation is words, a concept, or a vibration strong enough to come into being. Some concepts are strong enough to conceive more than ideas — resulting in conception, the birth of new life.

Take some time reflecting on the direct connection between concepts and conceiving. We are giving rise to new life forms all the time through thoughts and concepts; this book, building a house, starting up a friendship, purchasing a tea cup, teaching a course, the act of healing — everything. Then I ask, “And what is the word based on?” Is it conceived through loving-kindness and compassion, or aggression, rage, or dullness? Are we giving rise to concept or pro-concept, pro-knowing, a profound knowing and wisdom (*prajñā* in Sanskrit)?

As Stephen J. Gould pointed out, it is a tradition in many sciences to first become immersed in a particular study, i.e. the life of a species of wasp, a group of snails, the electron, oak trees, or roses. Then the study becomes a powerful tool for insight into generalities of nature. Here is a great statement on *muditā*.

Iconoclast that I am, I would not abandon the central wisdom of natural history from its inception — that concepts without precepts are empty (as Kant said), and that no scientist can develop an adequate “feel” for nature (that indefinable prerequisite of true understanding) without probing deeply into minute empirical details of some well-chosen group of organisms. Scientists don’t immerse themselves in particulars only for the grandiose (or self-serving)

reason that such studies may lead to important generalities. We do it for fun. The pure joy of discovering transcends import. And we do it for adventure and expansion.⁸⁹

I like museums. I spent a lot of time in museums as a child and teenager. When I was in my final year of high school I was fortunate to study for a whole year with Dr. John Volmer, head of the textile department at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. I was able to research and handle rare East Asian porcelains, paintings, sculptures, and textiles. It was a study on tactility — I have never forgotten some of these objects and their history, they are in my bones. In museums people study the richness of what other people have made, and how they used their imaginations.

Pick a subject you're interested in, but not too interested (in the sense of being presently an expert!). It doesn't absolutely have to be a physical collection that you own, but for good unfoldment I suggest that physical collections be made. You could spend the next 6 months studying lichens, something few of us know anything about. What are they? Where do they live? How do they eat? What do they eat? When and how do they reproduce? Search for lichens in many different environments. Get a book that has pictures of lichens and talks about lichen life.⁹⁰ If you make a collection, in order not to damage lichens, collect loose samples, make coloured drawings or take photographs. When I was a pre-teen my parents smoked. At that time, I made a collection of all the types of cigarettes — I did not smoke them, I studied them. Recently while in retreat, I collected dead, but well-preserved beetles, bugs, and insects. I put them on a table to constantly remind me about the transience and diversity of life. Break down the barriers and you

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start to break down your fear of exploring the universe. This is practicing *mettā* and *muditā*. This is when the concept of me/it disappears.

The biggest volume of the biomass is below the surface of the Earth and extends down two kilometres. The bacteria and worms support our life. Otherwise there would be no growth. Life as we know it would not be here. We do not even see it. Have you ever studied it? Delineate a one-meter square area of forest or garden.⁹¹ Spend time everyday, with a hand lens and microscope, studying and cataloguing all the life forms. Check out the soils, and dig deep. Study the patterns. Another good way to help the expanding *maṇḍala* is through jigsaw puzzles; bringing patterns together and making associations. This helps in so many ways. Oddly enough, it can lead you to celebrate and study people. As a generality, women do it more — the world of relating. Men study objects. People who are into people need to study objects and vice versa. This is the practice of loving-kindness and sympathetic joy.

Both the *Vimuttimaga* and the *Visuddhimagga* refer to *muditā* defeating jealousy, resentment, and derisiveness. Of course you could go to the gem section of British Museum and be jealous and resentful that you have never and probably will never be able to afford gems like that! Or laugh derisively about all that wealth! Although I am being a bit humorous, there is some truth here. Many feel jealousy and resentment at the wealth or happiness of others. Or they are derisive, scorning, mocking, and laughing at those with or without abundance. Go test yourself. Take some time and walk into a place with lots of different shops; jewellery, shoes, clothing, cameras, telescopes, beauty aids, electronics, etc. Be aware of any sensations of jealousy, resentment, and derisiveness. If there are, even in the subtle form of “who needs this stuff

anyways,” sit with the feeling or dialogue and let it transform to the experience of allowing the joy of other’s richness, happiness, and abundance support you. Try walking down a busy street and embrace (you don’t have to do this physically!) the happiness you see on people’s faces. A good place to practice *muditā* is in or beside a schoolyard — lots of laughing, giggling children.⁹² Go play with some children or happy animals. Test yourself and expand, be elastic and stretch the mind and body.

The Ancient Way of Practicing Muditā

Here is the ancient way of practicing *muditā*, which follows a similar formula used for *mettā* and *karuṇā*.

After entering a place of solitude — assuming that you are in a wholesome state — reflect on the goodness and joy of a person to whom one feels great affection or love. One then says, “*Sadhu, sadhu!* (good, good!) May he/she continue joyful for a long time.” This is embracing other’s joy and praying that it may continue. This method is used until the mind is pliant and the experience of *muditā* is stable. Then one practices with indifferent persons, and finally an enemy.

This is a wonderful practice; finding good aspects and celebrating the joy and abundance of those one dislikes or of people who strongly dislike you.

Our great teachers are: “Who, What, Why, When, and Where.” We start to enter a world incomparably vaster than ourselves, but it is our world. The power of question starts to merge and becomes the inner lights. The questions form the rose garden

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— a rich expanded mind — and each rose is another universe and each petal is a universe within universes.⁹³ We start to naturally act that way. We are a little bit of that plant, picture, etc. This is for real. Not metaphorical. We can feel and taste that material. We can associate and draw on it, when we need it. It gets into our cells, the bones. The loving-kindness of life celebrates the joys of trees, birds, bacteria, and viruses. Fear goes. It is not enough to meditate in the formal sit down sense. We need to become richly endowed human beings. Rediscover the natural curiosity we had as children. We need to get through the incessant dialogues, and appreciate — with depth — that this is profound joy, transcendent joy, the illumination, the radiance of all phenomena, for and with all beings. This is wise compassion based in *muditā*.

Muditā as a transcendent expression is always naturally with us. It requires no fabrication. The mind free of more and more obscurations is naturally a joyous, sharp mind, a light and blissful mind. As one realizes the empty nature of mind the transcendent aspect of *muditā* shines forth, like a warm sun bursting through dark clouds.

Wherever you see joy and beauty, make sure you physically feel it. You can't do this in a negative or hate state. Feel it pervading you. Breathe it in. Embrace it. Everyday we are getting served countless meals, a feast of life. Are we able to partake of the feast? How well are our senses functioning? How much of the feast are we experiencing? Are we able to make associations between what is experienced? One day at the end of a class Namgyal Rinpoche said, "You don't study the labels of the universe enough." We are resistant to reading the labels — we don't want to know. It is extraordinary what the labels tell us, little facts that can tell a big story, many

histories and possibilities. Sometimes it is the labels we don't read that do us in.

All you can do is to be aware of the full mandala of the human being. Who are *you*? That is the true spiritual involvement. The path to God should be the path of discovery. If you are not having a more abundant life, then you are not living a spiritual life. St. Francis said to his followers that they were not called to manifest suffering, but to manifest the great glory of God. If God is infinite then there is an infinite, endless exploration of God.⁹⁴

— *Namgyal Rinpoche*

It is time to go on a Safari in Africa, a trip to the Arctic, walks in a rainforest, scuba diving over a living reef, watching and learning pottery, playing with children ...

*May all sentient beings never be separated from the happiness,
which is beyond suffering.
muditā — transcendent joy*

