

JOY & MEDITATION – More Than Just a Happy Feeling

Supplementary Notes for a Non-residential retreat with Upsaka Culadasa
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Joy plays a very special role in development of every meditation practice.

- The spontaneous arising of Joy is an important event in the progress of meditation practice, the final stages in particular. The 8th stage involves being able to consistently experience the full development of Meditative Joy. The 9th stage involves becoming familiar with the state of Joy so that it is accompanied by tranquility and equanimity.
- Meditative Joy, sometimes referred to as rapture, is one of the Seven Factors of Awakening taught by the Buddha: 1. Energy (*viriyā*); 2. Investigation of phenomena (*dhamma vicāya*); 3. Concentration (*samādhi*); 4. Mindful Awareness (*sati*); 5. **Joy** (*pīti*); 6. Tranquility (*passaddhi*); and 7. Equanimity (*upekkhā*).

It can be said that, “Awakening is the result of an energetic (1) investigation of phenomena (2) by a mind that is skilled in concentration (3) and mindful awareness (4), and imbued with the qualities of joy (5), tranquility (6), and equanimity (7).”

- Meditative Joy is also one of the *Jhāna* Factors, or factors of deep meditative absorption: Unification of Mind (*ekagatta*); Directed Attention (*vitakka*); Sustained Attention (*vicāra*); **Joy** (*pīti*); Happiness (*sukha*); and Equanimity (*upekkhā*). Notice that Joy is clearly distinguished here from Happiness or Bliss, with which it can be easily confused.
- On the other hand, Meditative Joy is also described as one of the ten “Imperfections” or “Defilements” of Insight in the Theravāda Vipassana tradition: 1. Illumination (*obhasa*); 2. **Joy** (*pīti*); 3. Tranquility (*passaddhi*); 4. Happiness (*sukha*); 5. Fervor (*saddha*); 6. Exertion (*paṅgaha*); 7. Excess mindfulness (*upatthana*); 8. Knowledge (*nāna*); 9. Equanimity (*upekkhā*); and 10. Delight (*nikanti*).

Notice that this list includes 4 of the 7 Factors of Awakening, and 3 of the *Jhāna* Factors. Indeed, all but the tenth of these so-called defilements, Delight, are generally considered to be desirable attributes.

Joy is obviously a very important part of the spiritual life, and all of us would like to experience more Joy in our daily lives as well. Some of the questions we will explore here are:

1. What exactly is “Joy”, and how is it different from happiness?
2. Why is such great importance given to it in the Buddha’s teachings?
3. Is there really a downside to Joy, as seems to be implied in the “Defilements of Insight”?
4. How can I bring more joy into both my practice and my life?

What exactly is Joy, and how is it different from Happiness?

What we shall discover is that Joy is defined as a *mental state*, or emotion. As a mental state, it is conducive to Happiness. Happiness on the other hand is a *feeling*, the feeling of mental pleasure.

Joy is mental state, as are many other emotions. Emotions as mental states cause the mind to function in a particular way, which results in our thoughts, perceptions, feelings, speech and action being of a particular sort that corresponds to that emotion.

Ordinarily the mind enters the state of Joy as a result of circumstances like success, good fortune, and love. Once the mind becomes established in that mental state, Joy plays a major role in determining:

- what it is that we attend to in each moment,
- how we perceive what we attend to,
- the feelings generated in response to what we perceive,
- and the thoughts, speech and actions that we engage in as a result.

A mind that is in a state of Joy is predisposed to notice and preferentially attend to that which is beautiful, wholesome, pleasant, and satisfying, while at the same time tending to disregard that which is otherwise.

The perceptions that arise in a joyful mind will tend to emphasize the positive aspects of whatever is attended to. The glass will be perceived as half full, rather than as half empty, or as neither full nor empty.

That which is normally experienced as neither pleasant nor unpleasant, i.e. neutral, will arouse feelings of pleasure. In a state of Joy, even the simple act of breathing is pleasurable. That which is ordinarily only mildly pleasant will be experienced as more intensely pleasant. That which would otherwise be found to be mildly unpleasant will be experienced as neutral, and what would normally have been very unpleasant will be only mildly so. It can be helpful in understanding Joy as a mental state to compare it with its opposite, the mental state of sadness or grief, which has the exactly the opposite effects to those described above.

Happiness is, quite simply, a feeling of mental pleasure. Happiness is *the natural result of a joyful state of mind*.

Because Joy predisposes to pleasant experience of many kinds, it naturally creates a feeling of happiness. Notice also that pleasurable feelings and happiness tend to generate the state of Joy. So there is a potentially self-sustaining feedback loop here. Pleasant experiences contribute to the arising of Joy, and Joy in turn generates more experience of pleasure.

A more detailed examination of the meaning of the words Joy (*piti*), and Happiness (*sukha*)

The two words in Pali (the language of the Buddha’s teachings) that are of interest to us here are *piti* and *sukha*. These are the words that we are translating into English as Joy and happiness. The table below gives the English equivalents of *piti* and *sukha* that have been suggested by several of the world’s most renowned scholars of the Pali language:

<i>Piti:</i>	<i>Sukha:</i>
Joy	Happiness
Emotion of joy	Feeling of pleasure or happiness
Delight	That which is pleasant
Exuberance	Pleasurable sensation
Zest	That which is agreeable
Enthusiasm, interest	Welfare, ease, comfort
Rapture	That which is blessed

Happiness

Joy

Bliss

Bliss

It can be seen that Joy is the most preferred equivalent for *piti*, and that happiness is the most preferred equivalent of *sukha*. But notice also that some scholars have at times actually reversed this, calling *piti* happiness and *sukha* joy, and that both have been called “bliss”. This points to the sort of difficulties that are encountered when trying to translate very specific ideas from one language to another.

Notice also that in this list *piti* is clearly identified as an emotion, while *sukha* is identified as a feeling of pleasure or happiness. More can be learned by examining how these terms are used in the Buddhist teachings:

Of the five *khandas*, or groups of elements which make up an individual according to the Dharma, Joy (*piti*) belongs to the group called *sankhara*, or mental formations. It is also identified as a *cetasika*, or mental factor. What we in the West call emotions are considered to be a kind of *sankhara* and *cetasika*, they are *mental states*. So this makes Joy both a mental state and an emotion in English.

Happiness (*sukha*) belongs to the group called *vedana*, or feelings. There are three kinds of feelings: *sukha* (pleasant), *dukha* (unpleasant), and *asukha-adukha* (neutral). Each type of feeling can be of two types, bodily or mental. *Sukha* can refer to either mental or physical pleasant feeling. Happiness is pleasant feeling of the mental type.

The mental state of *piti* is given as a cause of the feeling of *sukha*, but *sukha* can continue after *piti* has faded, as happens in the 3rd Meditative Absorption, or *Jhana*. So not only are they two different from each other, they can be present independently of each other

In the list above, *piti* is also associated with energetic words like exuberance, zest, and enthusiasm, while *sukha* is designated by quieter terms like agreeable, ease and comfort. In the Pali texts, *piti* is consistently described as very energetic, while *sukha* by itself is more serene. *Piti* is exciting and often involves spontaneous body movements, goose-bumps, tingles, and thrills.

When we look at the definitions of the English words, Joy and Happiness, this is what we find:

- **Joy** = happiness, an emotion.
- **Joy** (noun) 1. the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; keen pleasure; elation: “She felt the joy of seeing her son's success”. 2. a source or cause of keen pleasure or delight; something or someone greatly valued or appreciated: “Her prose style is a pure joy”. 3. the expression or display of glad feeling; festive gaiety. 4. a state of happiness or felicity.
- **Joy** (noun) The passion or emotion excited by the acquisition or expectation of good; pleasurable feelings or emotions caused by success, good fortune, and the like, or by a rational prospect of possessing what we love or desire; gladness; exhilaration of spirits; delight. *Synonyms* -- *Gladness; pleasure; delight; happiness; exultation; transport; felicity; ecstasy; rapture; bliss; gaiety; mirth; merriment; festivity; hilarity.*
- **Joy** is our elated response to feelings of happiness, experiences of pleasure, and awareness of abundance.
- **Happiness** (noun) 1. the quality or state of being happy. 2. good fortune; pleasure; contentment; joy.
- **Happiness** - State of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy
- **Happiness** is a state of mind or feeling characterized by contentment, love, satisfaction, pleasure, or joy

What we can conclude from all of this is that, although Joy and happiness do indeed seem to be different from each other in English, they are not always clearly recognized as such. Nevertheless, Joy is the word that best corresponds to *piti* while happiness best corresponds to *sukha*, but the differences between the Pali words *piti* and *sukha* are much more clearly and precisely defined in the Dharma teachings than are the differences between Joy and happiness in English.

What, specifically, is Meditative Joy

First we must be clear that *piti*, Meditative Joy, is not something different in kind from the ordinary experience of Joy that is described in the definitions discussed above. But it is also not the same. Meditative Joy comes about due to different causes, and by this we don't just mean meditation as a cause. The underlying mental mechanisms that give rise to Meditative Joy are significantly different than with ordinary Joy. And it also produces different results.

What we might call ordinary Joy most commonly arises when we receive a gift, fall in love, get married or have a child, win a contest or prize, receive a promotion or an increase in salary, win a lottery, or enjoy some other sort of good fortune. Its causes are very clearly worldly pleasures, love, success, fame, and fortune, and this is obviously quite different from what is occurring in meditation. Meditative Joy arises when we achieve a profound state of concentration.

To help us understand the difference between ordinary Joy and meditative Joy, it will be helpful to examine another, more internally generated, kind of Joy that has been described and studied extensively by modern psychologists. This internally generated state of Joy is described as a kind of "optimal experience", and is called "flow". Flow occurs in wide variety of activities, such as sports, making music, rock climbing, dancing, sailing, chess, and so forth. It is interesting that flow much more closely resembles Meditative Joy than it does the ordinary Joy that arises due to external causes. The following is a description of the flow state:

"These investigations have revealed that what makes experience genuinely satisfying is a state of consciousness called *flow* -- a state of concentration so focused that it amounts to complete absorption in an activity. Everyone experiences flow from time to time and will recognize its characteristics: People typically feel strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious, and at the peak of their abilities. Both the sense of time and emotional problems seem to disappear, and there is an exhilarating feeling of transcendence."

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience,
by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi.

These are the characteristics of flow and the activities that give rise to it:

- The activities that give rise to the flow experience are performed as an end in themselves, not for any other purpose.
- The goals of the activity are clear, and the feedback is immediate. What is most important about the feedback is the symbolic message it contains: I

have succeeded in my goal. This creates order in the “flow” of consciousness.

- Flow appears at the boundary when the challenge of the task is perfectly balanced with the person’s ability to perform the task.
- What makes the flow experience enjoyable is the sense of successfully exercising control, which is not the same as “being in control”.
- During the flow experience, a person becomes so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic, and they cease to be aware of themselves as separate from what they are doing.
- A complete focus of attention is required, allowing only a very select range of information into awareness and leaving no room in the mind for anything else. All troubling or irrelevant thoughts are kept entirely in abeyance.
- The flow experience appears to be effortless, yet requires the application of skilled performance. While concentration lasts, everything happens seamlessly, as if by magic.
- During flow the concept of self, the information we use to represent to ourselves who we are, slips below the threshold of awareness. Losing the sense of a self separate from the world gives a feeling of union with the environment. Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been expanded.
- During the flow experience, time no longer seems to pass the way it ordinarily does, and bears little relation to the passage of time as measured by the clock.

Let us compare this to Meditative Joy. Brief, and usually not particularly intense, episodes of Meditative Joy occasionally occur in the middle stages, 4 through 7, of the progress of meditation. But the really powerful development of *piti* is not usually experienced until the 8th stage. The 8th stage is characterized by unification of mind, which produces effortless, sustained, single-pointed concentration in which we find all of the ingredients for the flow state. And indeed, it is a flow state, an ecstatically or rapturously joyful optimal state in which the sense of self slips away. and in which the experience of subjective time escapes the clock.

Clearly, meditation and Meditative Joy share all of the characteristics listed above, and so we are justified in considering Meditative Joy to be a special form of flow.

What sets both Meditative Joy and flow apart from ordinary Joy is that it is an internally generated state of mind, providing its own satisfaction independently of external rewards. What sets Meditative Joy apart from other forms of flow is that the flow-inducing activity takes place entirely within the mind itself, and the skill

being applied *is* concentration, rather than concentration arising secondary to the focused application of other skills.

Meditative Joy and unification of the mind.

The powerful arising of *piti* in meditation typically coincides with the experience of effortless concentration. Concentration becomes effortless when the mind becomes unified. The mind is unified when it is no longer in conflict with its self, when the attention no longer tends to go off in different directions, and thereafter not so much effort is required to sustain its focus.

The non-unified mind

The human mind consists of many, ongoing, separate mental processes, all occurring simultaneously, each with its own agenda and purpose within the overall functioning of the mental life of the individual. These processes function interactively yet semi-autonomously, and the vast majority of them are not conscious at any given time. But many of them have the potential to provide the contents of conscious awareness, and do so from time to time. Indeed, it is the norm for several of these processes to be in competition to provide the specific content for conscious awareness, in other words, to be attended to at any given time.

As we all know from personal experience, these processes can often be in conflict with each other, working at cross-purposes to each other and not in synchrony. Non-unification of these multiple mental processes is evidenced by non-stop activity of the mind, by the constantly shifting and changing contents of consciousness. Here is an amusing account of a first meditation experience that we can all relate to:

“Rinpoche went quiet. And shortly after Rinpoche went quiet, my mind became a combination circus/symphony/ rock concert. Seven television stations on at once, in the same small room. Grand Central Station but with a band marching through it now, advertisements being read aloud, the babbling of fifty voices...” (from “Breakfast with Buddha”, by Roland Merullo)

On the other hand, in both the state of ‘flow’ and in deep meditative concentration, the majority of these processes function more or less coherently and in harmony. At such times, conflicting processes with conflicting purposes are relatively quiescent, and so we enjoy peace of mind and happiness, the optimal experience of

the flow state and the Joy of meditation. The rest of the time we abide in a chronic state of greater or lesser degrees of inner struggle and dissatisfaction.

Even after we have acquired some skill in concentration, non-unification is still evident in the instability of an attention that wavers, shifting between objects rather than remaining steady; a scope of awareness that fluctuates, expanding and contracting so that it sometimes includes more and sometimes less; and a vulnerability to the focus of attention suddenly being usurped by a new and unintended sensory or mental object. Thoughts arise, seemingly out of nowhere, demonstrating to us that discursive mental activity is still ongoing at a subconscious level. Some non-conscious mental process filters out the majority of sounds and bodily sensations, but stubbornly insists on thrusting certain others prominently into the field of conscious awareness. Many different kinds of emotion, including restlessness, doubt, and boredom, arise out of these subconscious processes, claiming justification for their existence and demanding to be responded to.

The unified mind:

With complete unification of mind, the collective of mental processes, both conscious and non-conscious, functions more or less in unison, with common purpose, effortlessly responding to conscious volitional intention. This is the unification of mind characterized by the quality of effortlessness that is achieved in the final stages of Samatha practice. This is the mind that the Buddha has described as “serviceable”, as "malleable and wieldy". It is a mind that is perfect for the investigation of phenomenal experience and for obtaining Insight, standing in severe contrast to the mind that is wavering, shifting, and divided in its purposes. It is also the mind that is pervaded by Joy and happiness.

In the stages that precede this *complete* unification, even though there may be single-pointed focus of attention, constant vigilance and effort is required to maintain that focus. If we consider that conscious mental processes and their contents represent only the small tip of the much larger iceberg of mental activity simultaneously going on in a person’s mind, we can also see that *various degrees* of unification of mind may occur, depending upon the extent to which subconscious mental processes are included in the unification.

The degree to which that unification does or does not extend beyond the conscious level to the subconscious activities of the mind will be reflected in the changing contents of consciousness, the degree of stability of the attention, and the amount of effort required to maintain that stability. If the mind is not sufficiently unified,

any lapse in vigilance can lead to a loss of focus. For so long as there are still the whispers of discursive thought arising in the mind of the meditator, subconscious thought with all of its attendant associations and fabrications continues beneath the surface. Likewise, various emotional states can insinuate themselves into the conscious awareness of the non-unified mind. These continuing subconscious thoughts and emotions constitute the source of the instability that makes vigilance and corrective effort necessary.

A profound change takes place as a result of the practice in the 7th stage such that there is unification of mind at the subconscious as well as conscious levels, and at that point the practice becomes effortless. This unification and the effortlessness it brings is no longer dependent upon the single-pointed practice that gave rise to it. Once this unification has been achieved, there is no further necessity for attention to be confined in any way, either to a particular object or even to any object at all. There is unlimited scope for the exercise of introspective awareness. The attention may be moved at will, continuously or discontinuously, slowly or rapidly, from one to another of any and all possible objects, mental or sensory. Alternatively, it may rest in a state of openness, allowing various objects to arise and pass away without being moved by them.

Most important for the purposes of our discussion here, is that the affective state of the completely unified mind is one of ease and happiness, from which it evolves through intense *piti* (Meditative Joy) and *sukha* (happiness) to *passadhi* (tranquility) and *uppekha* (equanimity). There is a clear connection here between unification of mind in meditation and the flow state. In both cases, conflicting mental processes with conflicting purposes have ceased, and so we internally enjoy peace of mind and happiness, whereas at other times we abide in a chronic state of dissatisfaction and continue to struggle.

Do we have two different kinds of unification here? There is no reason to think so, but there are important differences between the two ways in which unification has been arrived at and what is required to sustain it. The unification of mind that is present in the flow state is secondary to and dependent upon the total immersion and absorption into an enjoyable activity. The unification of the adept meditation practitioner is the result of training rather than absorption with an activity. Absorption is not necessary either to produce it or sustain it, and so it offers the yogi immensely more latitude of application to other practices.

If Meditative Joy and flow are indeed the same phenomenon, can we use what has been discovered by psychologists about flow to better understand and cultivate Meditative Joy?

The answer is a definite yes. First of all, if flow can be intentionally cultivated, then so can Meditative Joy. It is not necessary for the yogi to just keep practicing and hope that someday, when skill in concentration has improved enough, the right combination of ingredients will come together to generate a powerful Joy experience. Instead, she can intentionally use the meditation practice itself to create a flow state. As she succeeds in doing so, Joy, happiness, and improved concentration follow. Improved concentration produces the immediate feedback of success, and so the flow state is further intensified. Meditation practice as a kind of optimal experience becomes more enjoyable, skill in concentration improves rapidly, and unification of mind occurs. With unification of mind, fully developed Meditative Joy is experienced.

So let us examine how this can be done. As we have seen, the task that gives rise to flow must be challenging, the person's skill must be equal to the task, and there must be clear and immediate feedback for flow to arise. Stabilizing the attention on a meditation object is challenging, it requires skill, the goals are a clear, and feedback is immediate. *Thus several of the criteria for creating flow are already present in the most basic of meditation activities.*

Next, notice that both flow and Meditative Joy arises at the boundary where challenge and ability are perfectly balanced, and where the feedback in the moment affirms success. Thus it is important that the performance expectations that the meditator creates for himself be fully achievable at her present skill level. Put more simply, *challenge yourself continually, but measure your success according to the level of accomplishment you are capable of now.* Take satisfaction in the exercise of your current level of skill.

What we can add to this is that, for flow to arise, the activity needs to be engaged in for its own sake, not for some other purpose. Therefore we need to practice meditation with that in mind, taking satisfaction in the practice itself while *letting go of any expectations or goals beyond that of properly performing the practice itself.* We must even give up the expectation that Joy will arise!

We have also seen that concentration plays a major role in creating flow, and indeed psychologists have found that attentional disorders effectively rule out the possibility of experiencing flow. Meditation instructors will also tell us that the

more fully concentrated the mind is, the more likely Joy is to arise in meditation. But this does not mean that flow cannot be achieved until concentration can be sustained for long periods of time. Even beginning meditators experience short periods of concentration. Dr. Csikszentmihalyi tells us with regard to flow, that “Everybody develops routines to fill in the boring gaps of the day, or to bring experience back on an even keel when anxiety threatens... These are the “microflow” activities that help us negotiate the doldrums of the day.” In the same way, every meditation session can be made into a flow activity, and every period of successfully sustained concentration, no matter how brief, can potentially become a “microflow” experience, helping us “negotiate the doldrums” of the practice, and overcoming boredom and anxiety.

We learn from flow studies that either excessive self-consciousness or being excessively self-centered can be an obstacle to flow: “Although a self-conscious person is in many respects different from a self-centered one, neither is in enough control of psychic energy to enter easily into a flow experience.... too much psychic energy is wrapped up in the self, and free attention is rigidly guided by its needs. Under these conditions it is difficult to become interested in intrinsic goals, to lose oneself in an activity that offers no rewards outside the interaction itself.” Keeping this in mind, we can further support our practice and improve our chances of success by conscientiously cultivating non-self-centered and non-self-conscious attitudes in every aspect of our lives.

What is the significance of Joy for meditators and those on a path to Awakening?

Meditative Joy is one of several important *meditation factors* that are frequently mentioned in discussions of the practice of Dharma:

Directed Attention (*vitakka*);
Sustained Attention (*vicara*);
Mindful Awareness (*sati*)
Concentration (*samadhi*)
Unification of Mind (*ekagatta*);
Joy (*piti*);
Happiness (*sukha*);
Tranquility (*passaddhi*); and
Equanimity (*upekkha*).

Of these meditation factors, directed and sustained attention, **Joy**, and happiness are often referred to as *Jhana* Factors (factors of deep meditative absorption) because they must be present before a yogi can practice the *Jhanas*. Five of these meditation factors: concentration, mindful awareness, **Joy**, tranquility, and equanimity define the supreme state of Meditative Equipoise called *Samatha*. Together with energy and investigation, these same five constitute the Seven Factors of Awakening.

All of these meditation factors are interconnected. It is through the practice of *directed* and *sustained attention* and the cultivation of *mindful awareness* that we develop *concentration*. In the progressive stages of meditation, this occupies the first 7 stages of the practice, in the process of which one becomes a skilled meditator. It is through the development of *concentration* that we achieve *unification of mind*, where concentration becomes effortless. This occurs in the 8th stage. It is the unification of mind that gives rise to *piti*, or *Meditative Joy*. The mental state of *Joy* produces feeling of *happiness*. As the state of *Joy* becomes familiar and the excitement of *Joy* subsides, *tranquility* arises. This occurs in the 9th stage. And with the emergence of *tranquility*, *equanimity* arises, and one becomes an adept.

The arising of Joy marks the pivotal achievement of *unification of mind* and effortless concentration. This is a mind that is ‘malleable and wieldy’, suitable for achieving Insight and attaining the ultimate goal of Awakening, capable of practicing many forms of *vipassana*, including the Tibetan practice of *Mahamudra*.

In the millennias-old meditation traditions of the Theravada, four different grades of incomplete and interrupted arising of *piti* are described – (1) **minor**, (2) **momentary**, (3) **wavelike** (or *showering*), and (4) **exhilarating** (or *uplifting*). The fifth and final grade of completed *piti* is described as **pervading**:

The **minor** grade consists in brief and unpredictable events in which the meditator might experience a tingling sensation spreading over their face, together with some colored light. Or there might be some twitching in the thumbs followed by a pleasurable sensation in the hands and arms and a feeling of happiness. Minor manifestations can occur at any stage in the practice, but rarely before the 4th stage. They become more likely in the 5th and 6th stages, and are almost invariably present by the 7th stage.

The **momentary** grade differs from the **minor** grade in that many different categories of phenomena – light, sound, movement, physical sensations, and autonomic reactions – are typically present. Pleasurable sensations in the body and feelings of happiness can often be a part of this experience as well.

The episodes are brief, hence the description as momentary. It is common for meditators to experience this *momentary* grade of interrupted pacification in the 7th stage, but it is not unusual in the 5th and 6th stages either. It is most typical of and consistently occurs in the 8th stage.

The next grade is called *wavelike* because, although each episode usually continues for a fair period of time, the intensity alternately increases and decreases, and so it is wavelike. All of the attendant phenomena - lights, sensations, movements, and sometimes physical pleasure and joyfulness - tend to be much more intense than with the earlier grades. A feeling as though currents of energy are moving between the core and the periphery of the body and along the spine is common. A combination of pleasant and unpleasant experiences is also not unusual, but over time as the meditator moves towards the subsequent grade, called *exhilarating*, the pleasant aspects come to predominate. The description as *showering* that is sometimes used to describe this grade reflects the often sudden spreading of intense sensation throughout the body. Wavelike manifestations are characteristic of the 8th stage but may occur as rare events even as early as the 4th stage of the practice in some individuals.

The grade called *exhilarating* involves particularly intense and sustained experiences. Pleasurable sensations and strong feelings of joy are intermittently present. Sensations that feel as though there is electricity or currents of energy moving through the body are common, and the whole body may be experienced as being a field of very fine, rapid vibrations. Ordinary bodily tactile, temperature and pain sensations are usually absent. It often seems as though the body is light and floating weightlessly in mid-air. Distorted perceptions of body position and location are typical, as are uncontrolled bodily movements such as twitches of the face or extremities and/or back and forth swaying movements of the trunk. The illumination phenomenon can be particularly intense as a part of this. The *exhilarating* grade of incomplete *piti* finally culminates in the complete development of the *pervading* grade.

Consistency in achieving the *pervading* grade marks mastery of the 8th stage and entry into the 9th.

As can be seen, the Joy that is definitive of *piti*, and from which its name is derived, is only one of many highly unusual phenomena that can occur.

Meditative Joy is one of the Factors of Awakening because it is, in its own way, liberating.

As was explained earlier, with regard to Joy in general, a mind that is in a state of Joy is predisposed to preferentially attend to that which is beautiful, wholesome, pleasant, and satisfying, and to perceive whatever is attended to in a very positive way. That which might otherwise have been experienced as unpleasant becomes less so or even neutral, what might have been regarded as neither pleasant nor unpleasant is now experienced as pleasant, and that which is found to be pleasant is experienced as being even more so than usual. What is true of ordinary Joy is even much more so in the case of Meditative Joy. This creates an overall feeling of pleasure and happiness and a tremendous emotional resilience to adversity of every kind. When even the most ordinary of phenomena are seen as good, beautiful, and pleasant, and when even unpleasant things are experienced as neutral, the normal compulsions of desire and aversion lose their power. Pleasure seeking and pain avoidance behaviors give way to an openness and receptivity to whatever the world has to present.

The Joyful mind, when also imbued with the qualities of tranquility and equanimity, is perfectly suited to apply concentration and mindful awareness to the investigation of phenomenon in pursuit of understanding the true nature of reality. It is a mind that can easily confront the most terrifying truths, and follow them through to genuine Insight and Awakening

Why is Joy considered to be a “Defilement of Insight”?

When we examine the ten “Defilements of Insight” (see list on page 1), we find that 9 of them are either very positive qualities in themselves, the development of which is promoted through Dharma practice, or, as in the case of ‘illumination’, simply incidental to the arising of other desirable qualities. Only the 10th defilement, ‘delight’, is inherently unwholesome. It is unwholesome because it produces attachment to the other nine members of the list, and herein lies the problem.

It is not unusual for a meditator who experiences Meditative Joy and these other qualities that typically accompany it, to mistakenly believe that he or she has attained the final goal of the path. The intensity of the experiences, and their great similarity to descriptions of the Awakened state, can easily create such a false impression. *Piti* is sometimes called rapture, and this is quite appropriate because a

meditator experiencing the powerful Joy, happiness, illumination, fervor, etc of *piti* can easily become enraptured by it.

When this happens, they do indeed become defilements of the practice of Insight. They typically arise together as a group just at that point in the practice where concentration has finally become powerful enough to effectively support profound Insight. In the progressive stages of Insight, these so-called defilements occur at the 4th stage which is called the Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away. Before this stage can be completed, the Insight practitioner must achieve the Knowledge of What Is and Is Not the Path. This refers quite specifically to the realization that, as delightful as they are, Meditative Joy and the other so-called defilements are indeed not the goal of the Path. Once the yogi achieves this realization, progress on the path of Insight resumes. This is traditionally referred to as the True Beginning of Insight because, 1) without the level of concentration required for these 'defilements' to arise, true Insight cannot occur; and 2) until the attachment to the defilements has been overcome, the yogi will not continue the practice and progress of Insight.

Also, some, but certainly not all, Insight practices involve a rather intense level mental activity, such as continual 'noting'. In these types of practice, even when concentration becomes very powerful, Joy often does not arise because of the intensity of that activity. If a meditator engaged in one of those practices does report Joy, the meditation instructor immediately knows that he or she has become slack in their noting practice and will advise them to intensify it once again. When the meditator does so, the Joy disappears. In this case, the presence of Joy is an indicator that the practice has become defiled in a technical sense through laxity in noting. This is another way in which Meditative Joy might be described as a defilement of Insight.

In no other sense is Meditative Joy an undesirable development, and to the contrary, it is one of the Seven Factors of Awakening.

How can I bring more joy into my practice and my life?

Knowing what Joy is, we can emulate the joyful state of mind at all times, both in and out of meditation:

In daily life, make note of and attend to that which is good, beautiful and wholesome. Cultivate an attitude of acceptance of what is, and don't get caught up in the mind's stories. When you notice yourself reacting with criticism, judgment,

dislike or disapproval, make a deliberate, conscious attempt to shift to a more positive perception. Everything has some positive aspect.

In meditation, make note of feelings of relaxation, comfort, stillness, and pleasure in the body. Also take note of any feelings of contentment, peace, mental stillness, satisfaction, or pleasure. Allow these positive perceptions to remain a part of your awareness even while practicing attending to the meditation object.

Review the nature of flow described above, and practice applying those principles to making every kind of activity, including meditation, into a flow activity.

Understanding that self-conscious and self-centered attitudes are obstacles to joy, cultivate other-centered attitudes and behaviours like generosity, patience, loving kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy. Practice being non-judgmental of yourself and others, cease making comparisons between yourself and others.

Joy creates happiness, and happiness creates Joy. As your meditation practice takes on the characteristics of a flow experience, it will become more joyful. The more you enjoy your practice, the easier it will be to deepen your state of concentration. The deeper your state of concentration, the easier it will be to tap into the intense experience of Meditative Joy. The more Joy you experience in meditation, the more Joy you will bring with you into the world when you get off the cushion.

When you cultivate Joy in your daily life, you will also bring that Joy with you to the meditation cushion. Life is full of opportunities to cultivate flow experience, and to practice being in a state of Joy as described above. It is also full of opportunities to practice generosity, patience, loving kindness, compassion to minimize your own self-centeredness. Sympathetic joy, taking pleasure in the satisfaction and happiness of others, is one of the most powerful ways that we can simultaneously cultivate both Joy and selflessness.