

## Antidote to Judgemental Mind - Resonate with the Joy of Others

### The Problem of Conflict

- Bhikkhu Bodhi

It is one of the bitterest ironies of human life that although virtually all human beings cherish a desire to live in peace, we continually find ourselves embroiled in conflict, pitted against others in relationships marred by tension, distrust or open hostility. This irony is particularly poignant because it is immediately evident to us that cordial, harmonious relations with others are a necessary condition for our own genuine happiness. Not only do such relations allow us to pursue undisturbed the goals we consider essential to our personal fulfillment, but they bring us the deeper joy of meaningful communion with our fellow human beings. Contentious living, in contrast, is always intrinsically painful, involving a hardening of our subjective armor, a tightening of the knots of anger and hate. Indeed, whatever the outcome of conflict may be — whether victory or defeat — the result itself is ultimately detrimental for both victor and victim alike. Nevertheless, although harmonious living promises such rich blessings while discordant relations entail so much harm and misery, for the most part our lives — and the lives of those around us — are entangled in a knotted net of quarrels and disputes.

**Conflict may simmer within as silent suspicion and resentment or it may explode into violent rage and devastation.**

It may impact us at the level of personal relationships, or as members of an ethnic group, a political party, a social class or a nation. But in one or another of its many manifestations, the presence of conflict in our lives seems inescapable. Peace and harmony hover in the distance as beautiful dreams for a summer's night or noble ideals to which we pledge formal allegiance. But when reality knocks and dreams are dispelled, we find ourselves drawn, usually against our better judgment, into an arena where the pleasures that we seek, exact as their price, the hard cash of struggle and contention.

The teachings of the Buddha, while framed around the goal of individual deliverance from suffering, are also expounded for the purpose of instructing us in how we can live in harmony with others. Such harmony is desirable not only as a source of satisfaction in itself, but also because it is a prerequisite for treading

the path to the higher freedom. The final peace of enlightenment can arise only in a mind that is at peace with others, and the mind can only be at peace with others when we are actively committed to a course of training that enables us to extricate the roots of conflict that lie buried deep within our hearts.

Once, in ancient India, Sakka the ruler of the gods came to the Buddha and asked:

*“By what bonds are people bound whereby, though they wish to live in peace, without hate and hostility, they yet live in conflict, with hate and hostility.”*

*The Buddha replied: “It is the bonds of envy and avarice that so bind people that, though they wish to live in peace, they live in conflict, with hate and hostility.”*

If we trace external conflicts back to their source, we will find that they originate not in wealth, position or possessions, but in the mind itself. They spring up because we envy others for the qualities they possess which we desire for ourselves, and because we are driven by an unquenchable avarice to extend the boundaries of what we can label “mine.”

Envy and avarice in turn are grounded in two more fundamental psychological conditions.

**Envy arises** because we identify things as “I,” because we perpetually seek to establish a personal identity for ourselves internally and to project that identity outward for others to recognize and accept.

**Avarice arises** because we appropriate: we attempt to carve out a territory for ourselves and to furnish that territory with possessions that will satisfy our greed and sense of personal-importance.

Conflict being thus rooted in envy and avarice, it follows that the path to non-conflict must be a course of relinquishment, of removing the constrictive thoughts and desires that pivot around the notions of “I” and “mine,” the drives to identify and to possess. This course reaches consummation with the full maturity of wisdom, with insight into the empty, egoless nature of all phenomena; for it is this insight which exposes the hollowness of the notions of “I” and “mine” that underlie envy and avarice. However, although the final liberation from clinging may lie far away, the path leading to it is a gradual one,

---

growing out of simpler, more basic steps that lie very close to our feet.

**Two such necessary steps are changes in attitude with the power to transmute envy and avarice.**

**One is empathetic joy** (mudita), the ability to view the success of others with the same gladness we experience at our own success.

**Second is generosity** (caga), the readiness to give and to relinquish.

The former is the specific antidote for envy, the latter the antidote for avarice. What is common to both is a lifting of the sense of identity from its narrow fixation on the self, and a broadening of it to encompass others who share our desire to be happy and free from suffering.

As private individuals we cannot hope to resolve by our will the larger patterns of conflict that engulf the societies and nations to which we belong. We live in a world that thrives on conflict, and in which the forces that nurture conflict are pervasive; obstinate and terribly powerful. But as practitioners what we can do and must do is to testify by our conduct to the power of peace: to avoid words and actions that engender animosity, to heal divisions, to demonstrate the value of harmony and concord. The model we must emulate is that provided by the Buddha in his description of the path: "Be one who unites the divided, who promotes friendships, enjoys harmony, rejoices in harmony, delights in harmony, and who speaks words that promote harmony."

---

### Unselfish Joy - Mudita

-Nyanaponika Thera

Admittedly, the negative impulses of humans, like aggression, envy, jealousy, etc., are much more in evidence than his positive tendencies towards communal service, mutual aid, unselfish joy, generous appreciation of the good qualities of one's fellow human beings, etc. Yet, as all these positive features are definitely found in us (though rarely developed), it is quite realistic to appeal to them, and activate and develop that potential by whatever means we can, in our personal relationships, in education, etc. ***"If it were impossible to cultivate the Good, I would not tell you to do so,"*** said the Buddha. This is, indeed, a positive, optimistic assurance.

The seed of mudita can grow into a strong plant which will blossom forth and find fruition in many other virtues, as a kind of beneficial "chain reaction": magnanimity, appreciation, generosity, friendliness, and compassion. When unselfish joy grows, many noxious weeds in the human heart will die a natural

death (or will, at least, shrink): jealousy and envy, ill will in various degrees and manifestations, cold-heartedness, miserliness (also in one's concern for others), and so forth. Unselfish joy can, indeed, act as a powerful agent in releasing dormant forces of the Good in the human heart.

We know very well how envy and jealousy (the chief opponents of unselfish joy) can poison a person's character as well as the social relationships on many levels of one's life. They can paralyze the productivity of society, on governmental, professional, industrial, and commercial levels. Should not, therefore, all effort be made to cultivate their antidote, that is mudita?

Mudita also vitalizes and ennobles community and social work. While compassion is, or should be, the inspiration for it, unselfish joy should be its boon companion. Mudita will prevent compassionate action from being marred by a condescending and patronizing attitude which often repels or hurts the recipient. Also, when active compassion and unselfish joy go together, it will be less likely that works of service turn into dead routine performed indifferently. Indifference, listlessness, boredom which are said to be the 'distant enemies' of mudita. They can be uprooted by an alliance of compassion and unselfish joy.

In this troubled world of ours, there are plenty of opportunities for thoughts and deeds of compassion; but there seem to be all too few for sharing in others' joy. Hence it is necessary for us to create new opportunities for unselfish joy, by the active practice of loving-kindness (metta [mettaa]) and compassion (karuna), in deeds, words, and meditative thought. Yet, in a world that can never be without disappointments and failures, we must also be ready prepared to bring up equanimity to allow for and balance discouragement and feelings of frustration, should we encounter difficulties in our efforts to expand the realm of unselfish joy.

In one who cultivates empathic joy will enhance the blessings imparted by these wholesome feelings: unselfishness will become more and more natural, and unselfishness joy will help one move toward a better appreciation and the final realization of the Buddha's central doctrine of "not self". One will also find it confirmed that one who is joyful in heart will gain more easily the serenity of a collected and calm mind. These are, indeed, great blessings which the cultivation of joy with others' happiness can bestow! Unselfish and altruistic joy has its natural roots in the human heart and can be of immediate benefit to the individual and society.

For a Guided Meditation on cultivating Empathetic Joy, see the video on this page. See also videos at: [www.openeyemindfulness.org/meditationrevolution](http://www.openeyemindfulness.org/meditationrevolution)

---