

True Happiness: Realizing Well-Being

A talk given by Tara Brach, PhD on April 15, 2015

(audio & video available at: tarabrach.com/true-happiness-realizing-well-being/)

Namaste and welcome.

When I was in high school — 11th grade — I took a world religion course. We were introduced most of the major religions. And when we got to Buddhism, I quickly realized that this was probably the religion that was at the bottom of my list of what I would ever want to be part of.

Its focus was all about suffering and all about getting rid of desire and, in my mind, what made life worth living was pursuing what I desired. I was kind of a sensationalist and I was seeking thrills in a kind of hedonistic way in whatever — relationships, nature, drugs, adventures — whatever it was. So the idea of getting rid of desires just didn't sit so well. Because I wanted to be happy, and I still do. And we all do. I just had some misunderstandings about it. So it took a few years, plus some more suffering, until I started getting a deeper understanding of what it really meant to be happy — true happiness.

So, in a nutshell, Buddhism does not say *get rid of desires*. It really is saying: *See if it is possible to let go of the grasping, because it hurts, it causes suffering. In fact, the grasping actually gets in the way of experiencing what we really desire.* It's kind of like that. And very central to the teachings and practices of Buddhism are ways to come into presence so that we actually can experience the most profound quality of well-being that's possible. So that's the promise and that's the invitation. It is our natural capacity to experience — and the word “happy” has a lot of different flavors — but, real well-being . . . a sense of contentment, appreciation, sometimes joy. It can be during moments that are sad, but there is still a sense of a profound *okay-ness* in the midst of it.

So this is what I'd like to explore and reflect on together. What are the blocks or the beliefs we have that get in the way of well-being? And I like that word because it's really when we are in that being-ness — when we've opened out of that narrow self-ness and we're in that being-ness — that there is this capacity to feel intrinsically well. What are the blocks? What are the beliefs that get in the way? And then what are the ways of paying attention that can really nourish and awaken true happiness? That's our area of exploration.

Reflection:

This reflection is to offer yourself the simple wish, *may I be happy*. And offer it again, with as much sincerity as you can. And perhaps even again. You can keep repeating the phrase if you'd like and, as you do, also witness what your experience is. *May I be happy. May I be happy*. What's it like to offer yourself that wish? If you'd like you can open your eyes, or you can continue with your eyes closed.

For many people, this is part of a loving-kindness practice. There can be a sense of real unfamiliarity to this offering of a wish. To even offer that is actually an act of kindness — and we are not accustomed to being kind. Sometimes, we suddenly realize: *Wow, that's a kind thing to do for myself!* Did you notice that? Just that way of being with ourselves? Did you sense the kindness that comes with the offer?

For some, it's really unfamiliar because happiness isn't on our menu. We don't even think *Oh, I could be happy*. Sometimes it feels really awkward and strange because we are really down on ourselves, we don't feel deserving, and we are in a whole different mind-state. So it feels like it is either kind of an affected gesture, or just strange to do. But in a deep way it's really beautiful, because that simple wish reminds us that happiness is a possibility.

The Buddha said, "I wouldn't teach about happiness and freedom, if they were not possible."

It is an innate potential. So just offering that wish to ourselves in some way is like this reminder — *oh, that's even possible*. And one of the findings about people that are happy is that there is a sense that happiness is something that matters and is possible. That's one of the things that's beautiful about it — that it is kind of an invitation for something that we might be forgetting. It reminds us that it's available. And the very act of self-kindness opens the door to well-being.

Another reflection that follows "May I be happy" is: *What, in this moment, is between me and a sense of well-being?* And if you'd like to check-in on that, please feel free. *What is between me and feeling happy — feeling well-being?*

What we find is that when we're not living in well-being, there is some contraction. On the most existential level, when we are not happy, it's because we are contracting against reality and there is some resistance in our system to how life is. That contraction has a sense of a self that is separate from a reality out there, our world. That's the core level. We're usually not conscious of it. If you

ask yourself the question — *what's between me and happiness* — you're not going to usually come up with, "Well, there's this core contraction of separate self-ness." That just isn't how we do it.

If you investigate, you can start feeling into that. The contraction, if we keep paying attention to it, usually has the flavor of either fear — like *this reality is unsafe and something is going to go wrong* — or the contraction has a feeling of *something is missing, I want something*. Much of the rest of our exploration will be around those two expressions of contraction — *wanting and fearing, something's wrong, something's missing*. In any moment that you really examine why there is no sense of well-being, there is some version of that *something is wrong, something is missing* experience going on. I am going to invite you not to take my word for it, but just to check that out.

We're going to look a little at this kind of assumption, in any given moment, that something is wrong or something is missing. What we find is that it doesn't quite take that shape either. If you look inside, you are not going to say, "Oh yeah, that's *something is wrong* feeling." It's more that there will be a fixation on a particular thing. You might say, "There is a particular thing going on in my life right now that I don't like in this relationship, or how my body is feeling." Something like that. Or you might notice that, in the *something is missing*, there is a particular want for something that is not here — whether it's food or attention — whatever it is. It fixates.

Now, here is the challenge. The way our contraction fixates, there is this assumption that, *if only I get what is missing, then I'll be happy* or *if only I get rid of what's wrong, if only that thing in my life was different, then I'll be happy*. And that drives our day. The notion of what's going to make us happy and what we need to get rid of drives us through the day. And the problem is that it's not real, it's not true. It's misguided.

There has been a lot of research on the relationship between the "wants" we're pursuing and how happy we are. Thirteen studies of lottery winners showed that, ultimately, the winners were no happier than the non-winners. Similarly, what we fear doesn't actually end up detracting from being happy. Paraplegics usually become as content as people who can walk. We anticipate that good things happening will make us happier than we actually get. And bad things will make us more miserable. So, how come?

Each one of us has a biological set-point for happiness. We get off a bit for a while, something good happens, and then we shoot up a bit. But within five months we are back at the same level. Something bad happens, we crash, but we

come back up again. We're very consistent in that. As long as we are moving through the day operating from *something is wrong* and *something is missing*, that biological set-point holds.

So let's look a little closer, because it's really valuable.

If we are in this trance and these energies are driving us through the day — what we think we want that'll work or what we think we don't want — and that's having a big effect on how we navigate . . . if we can see that, we can choose to step out of it. I'll give you an example:

A friend in this community, who is now at a work-study up at a meditation retreat center, has a real chronic and acute experience of shoulder pain. He says that, from the perspective of his delusional mind, this is the one block to progressing spiritually. I mean, he feels like his meditation . . . everything . . . would be cruising, if it weren't for this chronic acute pain. Now he is on to himself, but for most of us, we have something going on that is stressful, that feels bad and it feels like it's blocking us. Sometimes it can be subtle.

I have one friend who said that she had to finish her taxes before she was really going to be able to enjoy spring. And then she went for an extension. You get the idea. There goes the summer. You know, there is a saying that I want to tie up all the loose ends so the last day of my life, I'll be free to enjoy it. It's that kind of idea, right?

Sometimes it's really overt. At one workshop I taught at Kripalu, one person was in a very painful custody battle and felt a lot of anger and a lot of hurt. She said, "I just can't move forward spiritually as long as I am in this conflict." Or a child is in difficulty. Or we are sick. Or we feel we cannot really be happy until we lose a certain amount of weight. Or until somebody else changes. You know, that kind of thing. So, this is a hook, and a lot of us have it — that there is something in the landscape about our life that we're kind of waiting for it to be different, trying to get rid of it, and hitching our potential well-being to having it change.

A question that I often get is: *Don't we need to realize something's wrong in order to act?* A lot of us ask that question. *If I'm not alert to what's wrong, something very bad could happen and I won't have the energy to act.* So I want to say here, that there's a real difference between wise discrimination that detects where there's harm going on — where there are patterns of harm that either we're causing or others are causing — and, from a place of presence and compassion responds, and the *there's something wrong/bad/shouldn't be happening* flinch-reaction, out of that anger, to try and make it different. That will just perpetuate whatever is going on, that energy. So we learn the difference between responding and reacting.

We start by looking at our lives and sensing how much of the day has an undercurrent — a kind of complaint — *It should be different*. I love the way the poet Hafiz puts it. He has a poem where he really says, “What’s the difference between you and a saint?” He describes the saint as letting go and laughing and just really opening to how the universe is. And he says, “...whereas you, my dear, think you have a thousand serious moves.”¹ And isn’t it so, that we have some notion that, in order to get where we are going, we have all these serious moves?

Reflection:

Just take a pause and close your eyes. And just scan, with interest, your life right now. What’s happening, the people in your life, activities . . . and scan for where there is a real stressor — something that your habit is to frame as bad or wrong. The problem. The block to feeling good. It might be something about you. It may be that the *something wrong* or block or problem is a way that you’re operating — something to do with your body, your health. It might be something going on at work, something in a relationship. Something that you are just in the habit of flagging with *not good, wrong, shouldn’t be this way, needs to change*. See if you can, right now, in the stance of the witness, just bring in some curiosity and investigate a little. What are the kind of thoughts that typically come up around this? What are the emotions? What are the behaviors? Can you witness that sense of contractedness — that contracted self — when you are in the frame of *something is wrong*? See if you can sense the contracted egoic self that gets solidified when there is that sense of *something’s wrong* and just bear witness without judging. Coming back, take a few full breaths. . .

The flip side of the coin is that we also move through the day and through our life with a sense that there is something incomplete. *There is something missing, I am trying to get something. Something more*. And it’s the sense that the next moment contains what this moment does not — that, in some way, we’re going for something.

There is a wonderful quote from Kashmir Shaivism. “First is the suffering of separation, then the suffering of not enough, then the urge to have to do something to be complete.” This is *if-only* mind. Something is missing. “If only I had such and such. If only I had a certain food or alcohol right now, or an accomplishment, or certain possession, or certain person treating me the way I want to be treated, the right partner, the right body...” That’s *if-only* mind. You can begin to sense it in your life, it’s not hard to find.

¹ Hafiz & Ladinsky, D. J. (2006). *I Heard God Laughing: Poems of Hope and Joy: Renderings of Hafiz* (p. 66). New York, NY: Penguin Books.

I ran across a cartoon that had a bear making an order at a very elegant restaurant. It has this really fancy waiter, and the bear is saying, “I shouldn’t, but I’m going to have the garbage.”

We have those fixations and they’re substitute gratifications, we know it. One woman spoke about finding our way to happiness and inner peace, she said, “The way to achieve it is to finish all the things you’ve started. So I looked around to see all the things I had started and hadn’t finished. So today, I finished one bottle of gin, a bottle of red wine, my Prozac, a large box of chocolate, Ben & Jerry’s pistachio . . . you’ve no idea how good I feel!” You get the idea.

So it happens in relationships in a way that, as we know, causes a lot of pain — that sense of having an agenda and that, rather than appreciating somebody in our lives, we get fixated on wanting them to be more . . . different in a way . . . so that they can meet our needs in a better way. I remember Ram Dass describing that he and his father had gone through decades and decades of wanting to change each other and feeling like, “something is missing with the way you are, you should be different.” And then, at the very end of his father’s life, they accepted each other as they were and they became friends. So there is something poignant about that. It’s not always really dramatic, but there’s some sense that another person should be more or different than the way they are. It’s moving through life with an agenda. In any moment that we have an agenda with someone, any moment that we are trying to get something from them — whether it’s their attention or getting them to give us something, whatever it is — we can’t really be in that field of loving. In India they say, “When a pickpocket sees a saint, he or she only sees the saint’s pocket.” We can’t see each other if we have an agenda.

A classic story I heard few years ago is of an older woman in Miami sitting on a park bench and a very disheveled man in tattered clothing sits down next to her and she asks him, “So how are you doing and what’s up?”

And he says, “Oh, I am just out of prison, 25 years.”

“Oh, what were you in for?”

He said, “Oh, I murdered my wife.”

“So, you’re single!”

I always love that one. So, here is the suffering of *something’s missing*. Just as when there is *something wrong* we are tensing against reality, when there is *something missing*, again, it’s a kind of contraction. William James put it this way. He says, “It is as if we are in this endless fantasy always thinking we should be

doing something else, always thinking we should be experiencing something more.” Can you relate to that?

When we are wanting something more or pushing away, we are contracted and not able to inhabit the one place where well-being is possible, which is the present moment. Right here. We are contracted away from it.

So let’s just do a brief reflection on *if-only* mind so you can check and see where it’s alive for you...

Reflection:

Again, you are scanning. Just to scan your life and notice if there is something you are waiting for to change . . . something you are linking future happiness to . . . something that feels missing or incomplete . . . something that you’re wanting. It might be for a specific person to change. It might be something financial, or work-related. A state of health. Somewhere there is a sense of, “Well, if this happens, then I can relax, be happy, be content.” See if you can find the one that has the most pull for you. And if it is hard right now, if I am not giving you enough time in this exercise, try on your own. But sense the *if-only*, where the want is the strongest, and sit inside it. Sense how much it’s really in your body. And you might even experiment and, as your eyes are closed, just let your body-posture, in some way, express *if-only* mind. Maybe you will be leaning forward a little, maybe you’ll feel some tension or clutching in the hands. Feel what goes on in your heart . . . in your body . . . when there is a sense of, “There is something missing.” or “I really want this.” What’s it like inside? Sense who you are when you are caught in *if-only* mind so that you’re witnessing that kind of solidifying of that wanting self. This is how our identity shrinks. To begin to witness that contraction of *if-only* mind — *I want this. I don’t want that. Something is missing. Something is wrong* — is to witness this reactive ride of ego — the grasping and resisting that keeps us separate, that keeps us dissatisfied. It re-enforces our set-point biologically. It keeps it where it is.

The witnessing is actually the first step of being able to have more choices. Part of the evolution of consciousness is that we have the wiring and the kind of neuro-circuitry in the more recently evolved part of our brain to, instead of being caught in the grasping — *I want this* — and the resisting, to actually bear witness to it mindfully . . . not reacting, and also have compassion or empathy. In other words, we actually have the parts of our brain that have developed which correlate with a quality of real *being-ness* rather than egoic solidity.

So, the question is really how to nourish that. Because you can see it. You know, many people report, “The more I practice meditation, the less caught I am in wanting this and fearing that, and the more presence there is.” But you can also see it in brain MRIs when there is a meditative state. When we are actually mindful of

what's going on, the parts of the brain that light up are the parts that correlate with positive emotion — with happiness. There is not a sense of *something is missing*, *something is wrong*.

A story:

There is a CEO of a large company who is really admired for his energy and his drive, very well liked, but he suffered from one embarrassing problem. Each time he went for the monthly meeting with the president in the president's office, he'd wet his pants...

So this is the problem. This is the sense of *something's really wrong*.

...The kindly president advised him to see a urologist at the company's expense. But when he appeared for the next meeting the same thing happened, he wet his pants. So the president said, "What happened? Didn't you go to see the doctor?" And he said, "Well, I couldn't get an appointment, so I started doing meditation classes, and now I no longer feel embarrassed."

It's our evolutionary potential to step out of this trap of always feeling like something is wrong or something is missing — and it takes training in attention. But, again, I love the way the Buddha put it: "I would not teach this to you if genuine happiness and freedom were not possible." Well-being is possible.

The last portion of this class will be really exploring what will nourish the parts of our brain and heart and psyche and actually free us from the ways of trying to control our life so that we can experience well-being?

The first piece to mention is a basic attitude or understanding that many of us have, but we don't always connect into, which is that, whatever is arising in our life — the stuff we call the biggest hassle, problem, something wrong . . . whatever it is — can actually serve our awakening and our freedom. It can serve.

Have you ever noticed how something that was an incredibly difficult or painful season in your life, in some way, landed you up with more of a sense of who you are? More resourcefulness, more compassion, more wisdom? Have you found that you've grown through difficulty?

Most of us have had that experience. We know it. It's kind of like the diamond — you know, the coal that gets all the intensity of the elements and the weather-systems. And we grow through it.

One of the really interesting ways of looking at it is, that when we are stressed or when it feels unpleasant, the habit is to think that something is wrong. But we can actually shift how we are framing it. There's been some very interesting research on stress. I like the way Kelly McGonigal describes some of the research.² I'll give you two examples:

There is one study that tracked 30,000 people for 8 years that were stressed and one of the questions was: *How much stress did you have last year? Do you believe that stress is harmful for your health?* And then they looked at who died.

So here is what they got from this:

Of those that experienced a lot of stress in the prior year, 43 percent had more risk of dying. But that was only true for those who believed that stress was bad for their health. The lowest risk of anyone in this study were those with high stress, but that didn't believe it was bad. That's interesting. I mean, that's the power of awareness — how we're holding something.

Let me give you one more pretty cool study. This is at Harvard. Before a stress-test, they taught people to consider stress and the stress-response as helpful — the pounding heart is readying you for action and breathing faster, bringing more oxygen into the brain. Now with typical stress, there's vascular contraction too, when there is the chemistry of anxiety. But they were framing it as, "These symptoms mean it's helpful for you."

So they did a stress test. The heart-rate went up, breathing was faster and so on with everybody they'd trained. But there was no vascular constriction — and that's related to cardio problems. The stress-symptoms — the pounding heart, etc. — actually had the same profile as joy. It was highly energized aliveness, but it was framed as helpful and therefore, they didn't have a fear-reaction that turned it into constriction.

I'm sharing this with you because, if you remember, what gets in the way of us and well-being — that *being-ness* quality — is contraction. *Something is wrong. Something is missing.* Stress is inevitable. That's just part of being. That's part of the organism being alive. But how do we respond? Do we frame it as *this is bad*? If we can have stress be an invitation to deepen attention and to be more present, it actually serves us.

This brings us to how you can use this directly. In the Buddhist tradition, there's the Bodhisattva path, the path of awakening beings. There is a prayer that says, "May whatever arises serve the awakening of heart and mind." I also ran into a

² McGonigal, K. (2013). How to Make Stress Your Friend. Retrieved April 15, 2015, from https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend

quote that said, “Everything you are going through is preparing you for what you prayed for.” Isn’t that cool? So how do we bring this into our day when stress arises?

A few days ago, I was taking a spring walk. I love the wild flowers on the river and had a great time, and I thought, “I think I’m going to talk about happiness this week.” And I should have known. Because that was a great walk, but the next day I was on the same walk and, in the middle of it, I got a back spasm that was bad enough that I had to get off the trail to the road and have Jonathan come to pick me up. As I was lying out with the back spasm, I started feeling sick in ten thousand ways and I developed a cold sore, and my mind started contracting and I thought, “Give a talk on happiness? Are you kidding?” So I said, “All right, hang in there...”

Because, you know, it gets deeper when you realize that, sometimes, there are stressors. And for me, a back spasm could mean I miss a lot of spring walks . . . and I am very attached. And a cold sore means . . . I have to be in front of groups — a lot of groups . . . and I am sitting here with a cold sore. I could say, “Oh, it’s just appearance,” but, you know, still . . . it matters. So there was a lot of contraction. And that’s when I said, “Okay, may this serve awakening.” And you can add to that, “How might this serve awakening?” And the *how* brings you into presence.

Always, there is a wisdom in us that knows that, whatever is going on, if we deepen presence, it will serve awakening. So for me, it was being present with physical discomfort. It was pretty bad for a while, but just for a few hours. I iced and I was okay. And then the emotions that went around it . . . “Okay, might be a few days, might be whatever it is — I don’t know — that I can’t walk.” And then the throbbing of a cold sore. It all just became sensation and feelings, and I brought a lot of kindness to it. I just breathed with it and felt it until there was an increasing sense of not fighting reality, but resting and *becoming* reality — just a quality of kind *being-ness*. And then I realized I wasn’t happy as in, “Hey! Yay! Cheerful, happy-happy!” I was contented happy. It was okay.

Now, this story of taking stress and bringing presence might sound like the problems of the worried well, and it is. I mean, there are much greater stressors — and this works with dying and loss and everything. There is a capacity to presence ourselves into *being-ness*, where there is room for whatever is here, and to be able to hold that with a quality of ease.

I’ll give you a different example of that. In my story, that “how might this serve?” led me to being present with the actual moment-to-moment sensations.

Sometimes, the way it serves is that it catapults us into much more relationship with others.

This took place in Seattle, Washington. A 52-year old Tibetan refugee named Tenzin was diagnosed with lymphoma, admitted to a hospital and received chemo, but then he became extremely agitated, angry, and upset. He pulled the IV out of his arm and refused to cooperate. It turns out that he had been a political prisoner of the Chinese for 17 years. They'd killed his first wife and had tortured and brutalized him through his imprisonment, and something about the hospital rules and the chemotherapy was triggering flashbacks.

“I know you mean to help him,” his wife said, “but he feels tortured by your treatments. They are causing him to feel hatred inside just like he felt towards the Chinese. He needs to be able to pray and cleanse his heart.” So they discharged him and they sent him home and they gave him a hospice team to work with.

So here is the story is coming through the hospice person who first looked for some ideas on how to work with him. She was told by Amnesty International to just help talk it through.

“This person has lost his trust in humanity. If you are able to help him, you have to be able to give him some hope that he can connect.”

So, she encouraged Tenzin to talk about his experiences and he held up his hand and stopped her. She writes:

“...he said, ‘I must learn to love again if I am to heal my heart. Your job is not to ask me questions, your job is to teach me to love again.’ It’s quite an assignment for a hospice worker. I took a deep breath. ‘So how can I help you to love again?’ Tenzin replied immediately: ‘Sit down and drink my tea and eat my cookies.’”

Now, just so that you know, Tibetan tea is black tea laced with yak butter and salt, but she did it. . . for several weeks, they sat together and drank tea.

She continues:

“We also worked with his doctors to find ways to treat his physical pain, but it was his spiritual pain that seemed to be lessening. Each time I arrived Tenzin was sitting crossed-legged on his bed reciting prayers from his books. As time went on, he and his wife hung more and more colorful thangkhas (that’s Buddhist Tibetan banners) on the walls. The room was fast becoming a beautiful religious shrine.

When the spring came, I asked Tenzin, ‘What do Tibetans do when they are ill in the spring?’ He smiled brightly. He said, ‘We sit downwind from flowers.’ I

thought he must be speaking poetically, but Tenzin's words were quite literal. He told me Tibetans sit downwind so that they can be dusted with the new blossoms of pollen that float on the spring breeze. They feel that pollen is a strong medicine.

At first, finding enough blossoms seemed a bit daunting. Then one of my friends suggested that Tenzin visit some of the local flower nurseries. I called the manager of one of the nurseries and explained the situation. The manager's initial response was, 'You want to do what?' But when I explained the request, he agreed. And the next afternoon, I picked up Tenzin and his wife with their provisions – black tea, butter, salt, cups, cookies, prayer beads and prayer books. I dropped them off at the nursery and assured them I'd return at 5. The following week, Tenzin and his wife visited another nursery. The third weekend, they went to yet another. And the fourth week, I began to get calls from the nurseries inviting Tenzin and his wife to come again. One of the managers said, 'We've got a new shipment of Nicotia coming in and some wonderful Fuchsias and, ah yes, some great Daphnia. I know they'll love the scent of that Daphnia. And I almost forgot! We have some new lawn furniture that Tenzin and his wife might enjoy.' Later that day I got a call from another nursery saying they had colorful wind socks that would help Tenzin predict where the wind was blowing. Pretty soon, nurseries were competing for Tenzin's visits. People were beginning to know and care about the Tibetan couple. The nursery employees started setting out lawn furniture in the direction of the wind. Others would bring out fresh hot water for their tea. Some of the regular customers would leave their wagons of flowers near the two of them. It seemed that a community was growing around Tenzin and his wife.

At the end of the summer Tenzin returned to his doctor for another CT scan to determine the extent of the spread of the cancer. But the doctor could find no evidence of cancer at all. He was dumbfounded. He told Tenzin he just couldn't explain it. Tenzin smiled back and said, 'I know why the cancer has gone away. It could no longer live in a body so filled with love. When I began to feel all the compassion from the hospice people, from the nursery employees — all those people who wanted to know about me — I started to change inside. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to heal in this way. Doctor, please remember your medicine is not the only cure. Sometimes love can heal as well.'"

The message of this story is not that when we bring deep attention to our connectedness that the cancer will necessarily go away. It's that it brings us home to a deep sense of well-being — a well-being that can hold us as we are dying and hold others. A well-being that is bigger than the comings and goings of this life.

I have named two different pathways of presence. One is that presence with the moment-to-moment experience. The other is the presence where what's going on,

the intensity of what's going on, has us turn towards our connection with each other. The underlying principal is this: that when well-being is blocked it's because we're feeling separate. It's because we are feeling that something is missing or something is wrong. And in the moments we start coming into presence with the life that's right here and with each other, we discover a larger sense of belonging. We wake up out of that separate self that's wanting and fearing, and we are actually resting in a larger sense of being. That's where the well-being comes from. And, you know, I think about it, and there are many cultures that really know that this is what we need when we get caught — that we need this presence with a larger belonging.

A friend recently sent me different ways that this is described in different cultures. The Norwegians have *friluftsliv*, which is “free, air, life,” means outside is good for human being's mind and spirit and that we need to be in nature to remember a larger sense of belonging and to rest in well-being. The Japanese have *Shinrin-yoku*, which is called “forest-bathing,” and is preventative medicine. It's considered healing just being in the forest — because the self-sense starts dissolving as you realize you are part of the elements. In Denmark, which is one of the happiest countries in the world, there is a word *Hygge*. Pronounced *huga*. It has the meaning of togetherness and coziness. Isn't that a cool one? If those elements are there, we start dissolving our separateness and become part of what's around us. Germany — *gemuetlichkeit*, which has the same meaning of togetherness and coziness that helps us to remember a larger belonging.

I share all of this because this isn't particular to any certain religion or path. We each have an innate wisdom that can sense that when we're caught, when we're blocked, when our hearts aren't feeling open and content, it's because there is some sense of separation — that we are not connected with our own being and with the world around us.

We have really been exploring the beliefs that get in the way of feeling a sense of well-being and we'll close with just sensing into how it's not something we've to wait for. It's right here and now, this possibility of relaxing back into being and really sensing an open-heartedness.

Reflection:

So you might close your eyes for a final reflection:

First, the words of Lama Gendun Rinpoche:

“Happiness cannot be found through great effort and will-power, but it's already here in relaxation and letting go. Don't strain yourself. There's nothing to do. Let the game happen on its own, springing up and falling back, without changing

anything. Waiting to grasp the ungraspable, you exhaust yourself in vain. As soon as you relax this grasping, space is there, open, inviting and comfortable. Nothing to do. Nothing to force. Nothing to want. Everything happens by itself.”³

We started with that simple prayer, *May I be happy*. I invite you to offer that to your own heart once again.

And then just sense the possibility — *is it not true that the well-being we long for is already here?*

Can you intuit and feel into that, that the well-being we long for, that *well-being* — that being-ness — is always and already here?

“Happiness cannot be found through great effort and will-power but it is already here in relaxation and letting go.”

So we close in a simple way by offering our prayers and blessings to all beings:

May all beings everywhere discover the true happiness that is their innate potential.

May all beings rest in that well-being-ness.

And may, from that presence, may there be peace, love and freedom.

May all beings awaken.

May all beings everywhere be free.

Namaste.

³ Gendun Rinpoche. (2010). Happiness. In J. Kleinschmidt (Trans.), Heart Advice from a Mahamudra Master (pp. 120-121). Germany: Norbu Verlag.