



Samatha at Home (and elsewhere)

A weekly newsletter for the Southern Sangha: 5

Thursday April 30th 2020

Samatha at Home 5

Dear friends,

It can seem lockdown has been going on a very long time – and some people are feeling restive, as well as concerned and worried. So it is a good time to move on to the fourth factor of awakening, which is joy.

We hope you enjoy the issue and find some moments where joy is possible...from our point of view, our great happiness at the moment is receiving contributions, so do please continue to send them. It has been particularly encouraging in doing this newsletter to hear from samatha meditators outside the South of England, and outside the UK. It is very good to know you are there!

This week, contributions have come from Alabama, Berlin, Yorkshire (considered a separate country in the UK by those who come from there), and Scotland as well as Oxford and Milton Keynes. Thank you very much indeed – they cheer the day! So thanks to Peter Harvey, Melissa Lever, Isabel Pack, Charles Shaw, Pamela Yuill and Gwil Wright.

Do please send more! Next week, we consider the awakening factor of tranquillity.

Warm wishes,

Guy and Sarah

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And the story this week is about the indefatigable vigour needed to fight some monsters. It is the fifth perfection developed by the *Bodhisatta* .



To listen to the story and watch the accompanying video, you can click on this link to play it online:

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/412323932>

Or if you prefer to download the video to play it on your own device, you can do so using the link below:

<https://vimeo.com/silverbrookfilms/download/412323932/61ab2a3c35>

The fourth factor of awakening: joy (pīti)

At the moment we are taking joy where we can, and need to. In the newspapers this week one intensive care consultant said that he was constantly dealing with death and dying, and the need sometimes to break bad news, so felt under constant and unremitting pressure. But in the midst of all the pain and sorrow he found the one thing he has to make sure he has, every day, is some joy. He had found it was important to see that it was ok to experience it. He simply could not manage otherwise. So he had favourite tunes to cheer himself up, when he had odd moments to spare. Not all of us are such extreme situations, and perhaps not many of us are, but his comment is worth bearing in mind. Joy sustains, keeps us going, and makes us forget that what we are doing might be hard work – it is a kind of fuel for us all.

So, I have found taking joy in simple things in the day is very helpful. Just a walk where you feel plenty of sunshine and fresh air, or a regular routine that helps to make you feel at home and cheerful. All of these are so much needed now. Some research discussed in the papers last week said that the factors common to most people who recorded happiness were that they liked helping others, got enough sleep and exercise, and tended to enjoy projects, that they wanted to get on with. And, conversely, if people did these things, they all said they felt happier. Clearly temperament plays a part here – but I was talking to one friend this week who is usually very active, always planning house moves and holidays, but her projects are often external. She has had to cancel everything. As she said, ‘I have wasted so much time thinking about a move, or holidays, and because I have to stay at home, I have fallen in love with my garden again!’ She knows she is very lucky even to have a garden now, and is spending most of her time just enjoying it and making it her project now.

Joy changes how we see things. So a moment of joy can too. From a Samatha point of view, over the past few weeks, in the midst of so much worry and pain, there have also been moments of sheer joy. These encompass even the unruly confusion at the beginning of group practices, when people ineptly practise ‘self-mute’ing and blurt out something everyone hears. Or that bizarre moment when you realise you have been doing the shorter of touching for rather a long time, because your Skype connection has gone! The world is new to us, and it does have moments of wonderful hilarity. But at a deeper level, it is just nice to connect to other practitioners, and feel they are practising too. And in fact the stillness of depth of feeling possible in those meetings is very deeply restorative, I find, when it happens, as it seems to find some place in us where joy is possible.

Online practice is different – it is not the same as going to a group. But it does have some interesting advantages, that I am only beginning to sense. It looks to me that, perhaps because people are at home, they tend to relax more easily ‘online’ than in a class. I think this might be true of new meditators online too. One now very experienced online meditator pointed out to me that when she used to go to her group physically it did mean she enjoyed practising with people. But it was sometimes tricky to establish the practice at home, as she had to set up conditions carefully to feel ready for practice. If the practice comes to you, so to speak, you are on the same cushion and in the same place as the group

practice a couple of nights before, when you felt the support of fellow meditators and had a meaningful and useful discussion about how it was all going. She said it just felt more natural and easier to settle because of that sense of connection. New meditators reading this may feel they are not experiencing much of this joy, but it is a joy for us to know they are there... and of course they soon will!

I also wonder if the restrictions imposed on us all, or that we need to impose on ourselves, are also upping our levels of mindfulness: you have to be a bit awake to socially distance, keep things clean, and notice when you have touched things that might be carrying germs. And an increase in mindfulness, according to the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, has rather an interesting effect: it tends to make people happy (D 1.72). So it does cross my mind that because we are all having to be so disciplined, we are actually more awake. And there is a greater chance for joy to arise. Other activities we often spent time on, like walking around shopping malls vaguely trying to remember what we need, cannot be done now. So I wander on walks, and vaguely try and work out what the flowers are instead, or the various birds I hear. The mind settles on simple things nearby. Small things, like soap, have become very interesting and smell so nice; cooking is also becoming interesting. Are we being more frugal? As someone who overbought at the beginning of the crisis, I am trying not to waste it all now, and enjoy thinking up recipes to use up ingredients: black lentils, olives, capers... they make things really rich and different. *Vitakka* and *vicāra*, the first two *jhāna* factors, are compared to a bee going to a flower, and then buzzing around it. Joy can then arise. I find in daily life if the mind moves around the right sort of objects, with the attention that feels right at the time, then joy gets a chance too.

In meditation, joy seems to arise sometimes when you do not expect it, and are not trying too hard. It just seems to slip in sometimes. This seems helped by the attitude to the settling. If it is a kind of stepping back, or a making of a welcoming space, things are more likely to happen. The *Breathing Mindfulness Sutta* says you can gladden the breath. I always felt this was nonsense until I tried it, and oddly enough, it works...in the settling, if there is an attitude that the breath is bringing in some gladness, you don't try so hard to find it in a forced way, as it just comes to you, and balances what is needed at the time. Some people now are actually busier than they were before: others are tired by draining news. So, letting some gladness come in, giving you what you need, which may be a much quieter kind of joy, helps more than going out looking out for it.

But for some reason, joy is something we really do not talk about much. It is often our most hidden secret, even though it often means the most. And sometimes, for some people, in meditation it brings physical tears and some bodily shaking. People can be embarrassed about this, but it is lucky to get these 'gifts'. So when I came to think of it, I remembered one of my favourite jataka stories, about a golden peacock. He is so beautiful that when he sees his reflection in a pool he knows hunters will try and trap him. He flies away to the Himalayas. When the king's wife hears about his beauty, she wants him for herself. But generations of hunters cannot find the peacock – he protects himself every day with a chant that pays homage to the sun and the moon. One day, he forgets his chant, and, listening to the sound of a beautiful peahen, is ensnared. He is taken to the king, and teaches him the *dhamma*. The king loves him so much, he asks him to stay. But the bird cannot – he belongs to the air, not the palace. So he tells the king how to be at peace with

himself, and, promising to be the king's friend, and to come again, he flies away. This seems to me to say something about joy: that it is sometimes tempted to join us, but cannot really be captured, preferring to be a friend that visits sometimes, if we let it in.



Different kinds of Joy

I remember when I had first begun meditation practice, a few years in, when there arose opportunities to work in groups and in mindful work sessions (indispensable in the development of the Manchester Centre!), the notion of cheerful endurance came up again and again. It was apparent in all those who were practicing, usually with significant effort.

The sense of cheerfulness was also apparent in the monks and nuns who visited the University Buddhist Society in Manchester. Regardless of the hardships they endured, there was a joyful accepting of whatever came up.

This cheerfulness is an essential element in the practice. Joy is a factor of awakening because, with the other factors, it is instrumental turning the mind towards enlightenment. It is also a natural consequence of practice.

Joy is the third of the five *jhāna* factors, following initial application and sustained application. In its early stages it is manifested as interest. We apply the mind to an object, and then explore the object more closely and naturally interest develops. Because joy develops positive interest in the object it is the factor of meditation that overcomes the hindrance of ill-will, which is the mental factor which has an aversion to an object.

In the classic commentary, the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification), five distinct categories of joy are described in the development of meditation up to the level of *jhāna*:

- 1) minor joy, (*khuddakapīti*),
- 2) momentary joy, (*khaṇikapīti*),
- 3) showering joy, (*okkantikapīti*),
- 4) uplifting joy, (*ubbegapīti*), and
- 5) pervading joy, (*pharaṇapīti*).

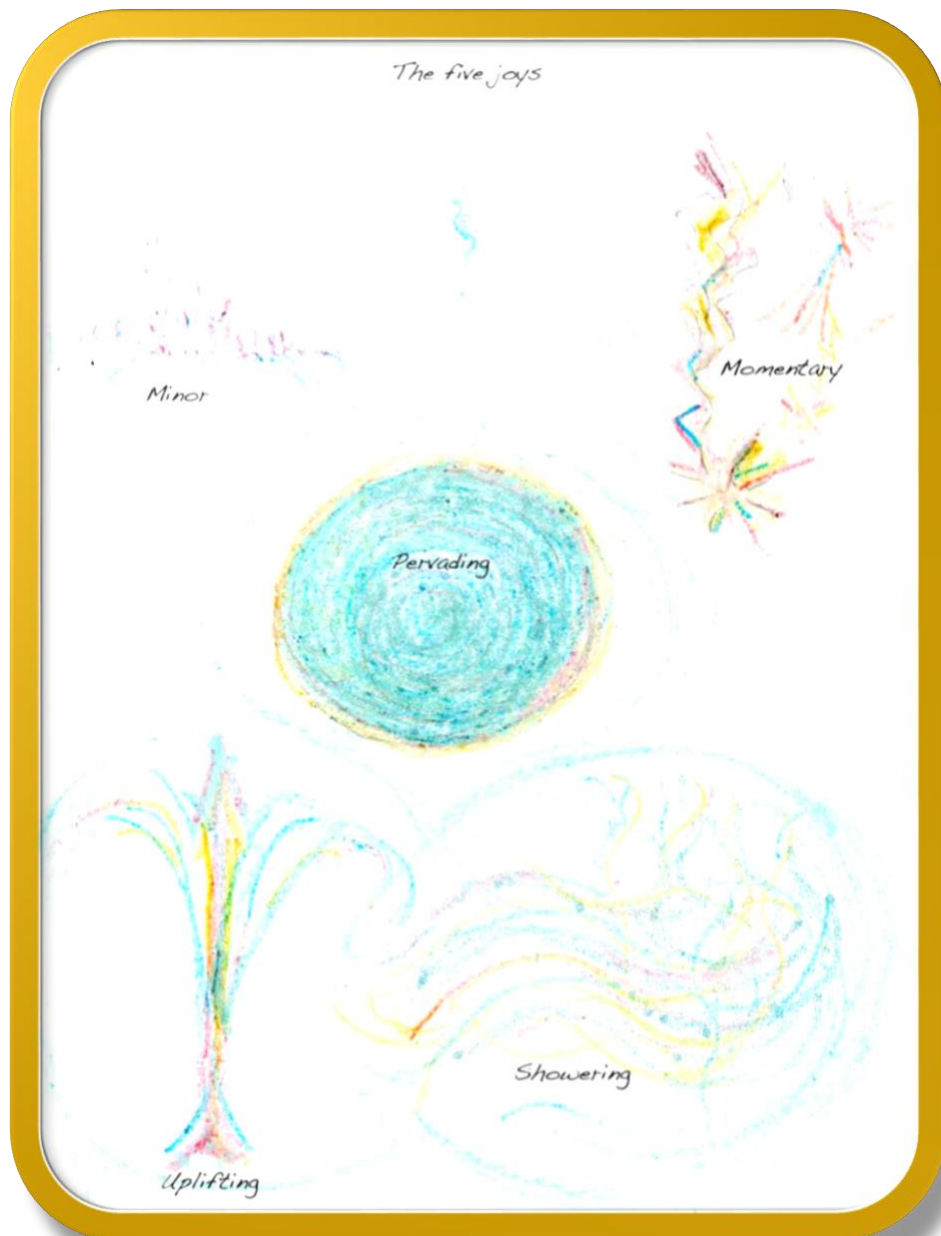
(*Vism.* IV 94-98 pp149-150).

Minor joy tends to be the first type to appear in the development of meditation and results in phenomena such as the raising of the hairs on the body, or a prickly sensation.

Momentary joy appears in flashes “like flashes of lightening” but is not sustained for long. This is followed by showering joy which “breaks over the body again and again like waves

on the sea shore". Again, although flowing through the body and producing a thrilling experience, it does not leave a lasting impact.

Uplifting joy is both a figurative and literal description of the nature of this level of joy. It can be developed in meditation practice but can also arise outside of the practice when joy arises in conjunction with great faith or confidence (*saddha*). The *Visuddhimagga* gives two examples of this type of joy being strong enough to levitate the body of a person who had the Buddha as the object of their consciousness (*Vism.* IV 95-97).



So, the first four types of joy can be experienced both in the practice of meditation and outside as well. They are stages in the development of the meditation factor of joy, but their nature tends to disrupt concentration, so it is necessary to move on to the final type of joy in order to develop meditation to the level of *jhāna*.

Pervading joy is the most stable type of joy and is the result of repeated meditation practice. It is the type of joy which is said to suffuse the whole body so that it becomes like a full bladder or like a mountain cavern inundated with a mighty flood of water. The quality of this type of joy is that of stability, it is sustained and calming, refreshing the whole mental and physical body.

So, the awakening factor of joy can be cultivated both inside and outside the practice. It becomes somewhat infectious too – a benign infectiousness that helps us and those around us to live happily and well.



Two short quarantine observations:

The rapture of recognizing and being recognized by trees...

I

Out for a saunter. I'm walking on trees, well, the shadows of the trees. Their trunks stretch across the road, wobble across the weedy bank on the other side, and up, up the crooked chain link fence where they disappear into the clear sky. Grey, calligraphic shadow branches capture the oblique angle of elbows and bony fingers, dangling from fists. Translucent clusters of ovate leaves bob on red clay. A gust of wind animates sweet gum satellites and they popcorn into the air. Tiny herds of oak leaves hurry across the road.

II

A good sit. The breath is following itself; I mean it is doing the work. Then it settles in front of me, breathing out there, me breathing back. InsightTimer's clear gong. I get up and walk outside. The tree trunks are eye level, canopy above. I am stopped by a white oak, "You pass me every day. Hello." And I am motionless, receiving a patch of sunlight on the softest silver, overlapping, raggedy shingles of bark. A patchwork of dark mossy fringe, looking dry and ancient, but alive. There for the long haul. A vertical field of tiny light green ferns sprout this way and that. "I see you. Come closer." Sunlight and leafy shadows drift over the trunk, the moss, lifting the field of tiny ferns with each soft breath of the breeze. "I've been waiting for you to stop."



***Iti pi so* with mindfulness of the longest breath**

In the *Visuddhimagga* (IV.56), it is said that recollection of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha helps the joy *bojjhaṅga* to develop. The *Suttas* say of the recollections:

When a noble disciple recollects thus, on that occasion his mind is not obsessed by attachment, hatred or delusion; the mind is straight (uju-gataṃ), with the Tathāgata (Thus-gone = Buddha), or Dhamma or Saṅgha as object. A noble disciple whose mind is straight gains inspiration of the meaning, the inspiration of the Dhamma, gains gladness (pāmujaṃ) connected with the Dhamma. When gladdened, joy (pīti) arises; for one uplifted by joy, the body becomes tranquil; one tranquil of body feels happy; for one who is happy, the mind becomes concentrated. This is called a noble disciple who dwells evenly amidst an uneven generation, who dwells unafflicted amidst an afflicted generation, who has entered the stream of the Dhamma and cultivates recollection of the Buddha ... of the Dhamma ... of the Saṅgha (AN.III.285).

In recent years, I have gradually come to develop a way of doing the *Iti pi so* chant which I find very empowering: generating much energy and joy, as well as tranquillity. It also focusses the mind well ready for breathing practice, and so it is very good for developing the *bojjhaṅgas*, the factors of awakening. If the *Iti pi so* chant is very familiar to you, especially if you know it by heart, you may find it useful to have a go at this manner of chanting, to see how you find it. I share it here as an offering to taste and try.

It involves breathing slowly with one's longest comfortable breath, and with the eyes closed. One does the first part of the chant, *Iti pi so bhagavā* but then stops to do the last part of one's slow out-breath, then breathes in a slow full breath, then does the next bit of the chant, judging how much to do by how one's out-breath feels, so that one can complete the out-breath without still chanting, in a relaxed way. And so on. I find that this helps me be very mindful of both breathing and the sound quality of the chant. One can feel the in-breath flowing into one through the nose, perhaps allied to a glow of light into the head from the recollected *nimitta*. This all can generate, on the in-breath, considerable joy and energy. The out-breath, while chanting, has a more tranquil effect. The chant can bring about a very devoutly concentrated, hindrance-free state that enables one to enter the following breathing practice in a very clean and direct way, after doing any further chanting in the normal way.

Of the other *bojjhaṅgas*: mindfulness of the breath and sound-quality is needed; gentle investigation is needed to see if the elements of the activity are harmonising well; and equanimity tends to arise during the remaining out-breath after each 'ti' at the end of the three chant sections. The silence when breathing in becomes a potent meaningful gap, an in between stillness that is enriched by, and enriching of, the chant sections. If the chanting is done so it reverberates around the body, it can be like singing or chanting reverberating around a church or Dhamma-hall that has good acoustics.

It is hard to effectively do this practice in a group, as people's longest breath differ in length. It is important not strain the breathing. You need to find your own rhythm, by

mindfully investigating how the chant is best split up to fit the length of your longest breath.

The more you get used to doing the chant in this way, as well as being mindful of the sound of the chant and one's breathing, you can also tune into the meaning of the sections of the chant:

'Thus he is the Blessed One, because he is (*iti pi so bhagavā*) an Arahāt, perfectly and completely Awakened, endowed with knowledge and good conduct, Well-gone, knower of worlds, an incomparable charioteer for the training of persons, teacher of gods and humans, Awakened One, Blessed One.'

- *araham*: an Arahāt – a 'worthy' or 'accomplished' one who is completely free of greed/attachment, hatred and delusion.
- *sammā-sambuddho*: 'perfectly and completely Awakened' to the nature of reality, as discovered by himself.
- *vijjā-caraṇa-sampanno*: 'endowed with (liberating) knowledge and (good) conduct'.
- *sugato*: 'Well-gone': practising well, rightly, so as to have gone to/experienced that which is excellent. This echoes the term *Tathāgata*, literally Thus-gone/Thus-come, i.e. One Who Moves in Reality.
- *loka-vidū*: 'knower of worlds' – of the various kinds of rebirths and parallel mind-states, and of the many physical worlds spread through the universe, and knower of the impermanent and conditioned nature of all worlds.
- *anuttaro purisa-damma-sāratthi*: 'an incomparable charioteer for the training of persons': a great guide for others.
- *satthā deva-manussānaṃ*: 'teacher of humans and gods (*devas*)': based on his understanding of the worlds of all beings, and what lies beyond these.
- *buddho*: 'Awakened One': awakened to or enlightened to the true nature of reality.
- *bhagavā ti*: 'Blessed One/Exalted One/Fortunate One/Lord': full of good qualities.

'Well explained (*svākkhāto*) by the Blessed One/Lord (*bhagavatā*) is *Dhamma*: it is visible here-now (*sandiṭṭhiko*), timeless/immediate (*akāliko*), come-see-ish/inviting investigation (*ehi-passiko*), worthy of being used/of bringing near (*opanayiko*), to be experienced (*veditabbo*) individually (*paccattam*) by the wise/discerning (*viññūhi ti*).

'Practising well is the Community of the Blessed One's disciples (*su-paṭipanno Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho*); practising straightly is the Community of the Blessed One's disciples (*uju-paṭipanno Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho*); practising with method is the Community of the Blessed One's disciples (*ñaya-paṭipanno Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho*); practising properly is the Community of the Blessed One's disciples (*sāmīci-paṭipanno Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho*); that is to say, the four pairs of persons (*yad idaṃ cattāri purisa-yugāni*), the eight types of individuals (*aṭṭha purisa-puggalā*); this Community of the Blessed One's disciples (*esa Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho*) is worthy of gifts, hospitality, offerings, and reverential salutation (*āhuneyyo pāhuneyyo dakkhiṇeyyo añjali-karaṇeyyo*), the unsurpassed field of karmic fruitfulness ('merit') for the world (*anuttaram puñña-khettaṃ lokassā ti*).

- The ‘four pairs of persons’ are Stream-enterers, Once-returners, Non-returners, and Arahats, and those practising intently towards each of these states. These ‘eight individuals’ are those truly established on the Path, having a taste of its goal, Nirvana.

You can experiment with how splitting up the chant works best for you. I now tend to do it as follows, by meanings of phrases, though previously, how I split up the phrases varied according to how the breathing felt that day. Below this indicates breathing: ... In the linked video, when my hands are slowly rising, I am breathing in. When falling, I am still breathing out. There are also some involuntary movements as a side-effect of joy.

To play the video, you can use this link – it has a password: Joy. (Case sensitive):

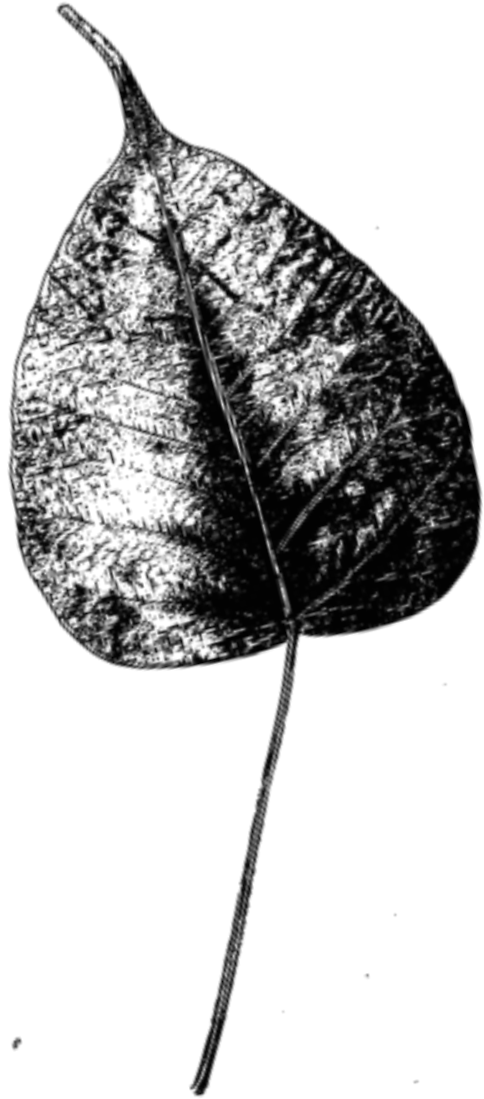
<https://player.vimeo.com/video/412414053>

If you prefer to download the video you can do so using this link:

<https://vimeo.com/silverbrookfilms/download/412414053/855a8de83c>

In-breath	Out breath
.....	<i>Iti pi so bhagavā</i>
.....	<i>araham, sammā-sambuddho</i>
.....	<i>vijjā-carāṇa-sampanno</i>
.....	<i>sugato, loka-vidū</i>
.....	<i>anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi</i>
.....	<i>satthā deva-manussānaṃ</i>
.....	<i>buddho, bhagavaaaaaa</i> <i>ti</i>
.....	<i>Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo</i>
.....	<i>sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko</i>
.....	<i>opanayiko</i>
.....	<i>paccattaṃ veditabbo</i>
.....	<i>viññūhiiiiiii</i> <i>ti</i>
.....	<i>Supaṭipanno Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho...</i>
.....	<i>ujupaṭipanno Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho...</i>
.....	<i>ñāyapaṭipanno Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho</i>
.....	<i>sāmicipaṭipanno Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho</i> ..
.....	<i>yad idaṃ cattāri purisa-yugāni</i>
.....	<i>aṭṭha purisa-puggalā</i>
.....	<i>esa Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho</i>
.....	<i>āhuneyyo pāhuneyyo dakkhiṇeyyo</i>
.....	<i>añjali-karaṇeyyo</i>
.....	<i>anuttaraṃ puñña-khettaṃ</i>
.....	<i>lokassaaaaa</i> <i>ti</i>

*This leaf that fell from the
right side of the Completed one,
in the hall that remains silent,
where the incense stays unlit,
and no candle flame flickers,
brings to mind the living, breathing
corpus, connected not only by
Mbps and pixels but woven, through
contact with the teaching, into a braid
of three strands, which crafts
a path, through time,
and space, to offer
refuge.*



An Explosion of Joy



an explosion of joy in the garden; In the midst of horror, so much beauty....