

## Joy

Orgasm, ecstasy, enstasy and renunciation

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The immediate benefits of meditation, even a practice of mindfulness (such as the reflection of impermanence or sutta study), are **joy and happiness** (*pīti, sukha*). This pair is, in fact, 2 of the 5 dhyana-factors (*jhān'āṅga*) of the 1st dhyana: initial application, sustained application, joy, happiness, one-pointedness of the mind.

Joy and happiness often arise from a powerful experience of any kind of religious devotion. However, when we are deeply engrossed with any mundane activity that we enjoy doing, such as playing music, painting, hiking in nature, winning a game, or being in love, can invoke such a powerful burst of joy and happiness. However, in such cases, the experience is, as a rule, short-lived.

## Orgasm

For convenience, we can call dhyanic joy and happiness “**ecstasy**.” The closest we can compare to on a worldly level is sexual orgasm. However, they have very significant differences. Firstly, orgasm is body-based (a result of freeing oneself from the limits of the 5 physical senses); hence, the sense-functions immediately return and overwhelm us again after that.

Secondly, orgasm is never really satisfying: we keep wanting it again. In fact, we do not always get a good orgasm: we tend to have a feeling that we can feel a “bigger” burst or a more profound “death.” This is where we may get addicted to sex. The main reason is that we are unable to see the **impermanence** of this physical experience.

## The most selfish act

Orgasm issues forth from the most “selfish” of human experiences: sexuality. Only **we** can feel it for ourself. When we feel it, we often lose interest in the source of that bliss, whether it is a sensual object or a partner. We may even feel **guilty**. Often this guilt is unnatural: it arises from some cultural or religious conditioning that sex is “evil,” or socially delimited or disapproved of in some way. This leads to emotional repression which is often compensated as **violence**. It often brings on other personal and interpersonal issues.

## Ecstasy and enstasy

For our reflection, we shall use the word **ecstasy** as the experiential opposite of orgasm. Ecstasy, by definition, may be either physical or mental. When this powerful burst of profound joy arises from any of the 5 physical senses, we can say that it is a **physical** ecstasy or rapture. It is evoked by what we see, hear, smell, taste or touch, but which is non-sexual or non-biological.

When such an ecstasy arises purely from the mind—such as through sutta study, mindfulness practice or meditation—it is said to be a **mental** ecstasy. Sometimes the term **enstasy** is used for this kind of inner joy.

### **Nature of enstasy**

Enstasy, in this sense, comprises joy (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*), that is, in exuberant or active form (“ecstasy”), and in a passive and profoundly peaceful (or stilling) form. Using a simple metaphor, we can say that **joy** is like our being exploding nebula-like (steadily, pulsatingly, firework-like, wave-like, or upliftingly) in every direction.

**Happiness** rooted in joy (as a component of *pīti, sukha*) is calming, settling and profoundly spacious. Metaphorically, we feel spread thin, for example, like a thin film of soap across the whole universe. When we are experiencing such bliss, we would not be distinguishing them as such. We simply experience both joy and happiness in various degree and form, with either one dominating.

### **Understanding joy**

Only upon emerging from it, do we have some idea that it was a “powerful” experience. However, if we lack meditative training or sutta learning, we may lack the vocabulary or concepts to know, much less, understand this **joy** (that is, both joy and happiness).

If we are religiously conditioned and biased, we will probably wax lyrical and claim that it is an experience of God, and so on. It is simply an experience of the **mind** free of the physical senses. The mind is experiencing itself, like two huge clear mirrors facing each other, and we are able to see everything reflected.

### **Joy of renunciation**

The reflection, hopefully, gives us some useful idea of how meditative, even mental, **joy**, outlasts orgasm or sensual joy. **enstasy** (joy arising from meditation, mindfulness or sutta study) is always guilt-free and lasting (we do not forget it, or can easily recall it). It is also energizing, charging us with the effort and attention in the work we are doing (which is, as a rule, wholesome).

This is the kind of joy that keeps a **renunciant** happy just as he is, naturally, with no desire for “gain, honour, praise” (*lābha, sakkāra, siloka*), that is, without any thought for comfort, sex, money, power, or any kind of worldliness that would make him break the Vinaya rules or live falsely. In short, without **joy**, it would be difficult to truly keep a heart of renunciation. For this reason, monastics are exhorted by the Buddha to constantly keep up their meditation.

### **Dung of pleasure**

In **the (Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta** (A 5.30), when a group of noisy brahmins came to the forest entrance with various offerings of food, the Buddha declares to his greedy attendant, Nāgita:

“May I never meet with **fame**, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me!”

Then, the Buddha adds:

Let one who has difficulty meditating, who has no meditative joy, “enjoy for himself that dung of pleasure, that sloth of pleasure, those pleasures of gain, honour and praise!” (SD 55.12a)

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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