



Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

December 2022

Joy



Introduction to the Theme

According to Miroslav Volf, Professor of Theology at Yale University Divinity School, no serious discussion of human flourishing is possible without a consideration of the nature of joy and its place in the good life.

We certainly know joy when we feel it, but it is challenging to capture its essence in words. Joy and happiness are often considered as synonyms in popular culture and literature, which adds to the confusion. America's *Declaration of Independence* enshrined the inalienable rights of "life liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in the imagination. This idea, however, of happiness as a pursuit accords with Psychologist Ben Fletcher's assertion that, "Happiness is the consequence of what we do and how we behave." As he asserts, "Happiness is not a feeling — it is doing." This means that

happiness is an outcome based on what we do, not a goal or an emotion.

The roots of the words joy and happiness also suggest a difference. The *Old French* root of joy is *joie*. It goes back to the 1200s and conveys pleasure, sensual enjoyment, delight, and bliss. The origin of happiness dates to the 1520s and meant "good fortune." In the 1590s, it was used to convey a "pleasant and contented mental state." The root of the word happy comes from the late 1400s, meaning "lucky, favored by fortune, being in advantageous circumstances, and prosperous," as well as events "turning out well."

In psychologist Robert Plutchik's eight-point wheel of emotion, joy, one of his eight basic emotions, is situated between ecstasy (more intense) and serenity (less intense). Joy is the opposite of sadness, which falls between grief and pensiveness.

Chris Meadows writes that joy is related to a sense of harmony within and with other people; an increase in vitality that makes us feel more alive; an experience of transcendence in which we

(Continued on page 6)

Joy & Regeneration

Joy is the canary in the coal mine. As joy is squeezed out of people, their lives are threatened as if the air had become poisonous. It is impossible to thrive on the bread of despair, the gruel of joylessness, the struggle just to breathe. Joy is a lifeline to hope, to the conviction that tomorrow can be better than today, and to the belief that the struggle is worth it. The rebirth of joy is a process that often begins where evidence of possibility is not obvious. Yet the winds of change signal a change in direction, breathing new life, and nurturing unexpected regeneration. They usher in a new dawn, enlivening the spirit, with an ode to joy that is soul-full.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

This project is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Wisdom Story

Clowning for Joy in Haiti

Sarah Liane Foster

August 21, 2009, journal entry

[I am Sarah Foster and I am a lifelong Unitarian Universalist. I believe that,] Laughter is a critical way to heal trauma.... Kids need to laugh and play. And all kids deserve joy. All kids. Everywhere. [And that is our job as Clowns Without Borders.]



To get to our first show of the day, we are to parade for half an hour up an enormous hill. When we climb out of the car and into the heat of the sun at the bottom of the hill, a group of kids starts to form around us. I look at them, look away, and quickly look back again with wide eyes. They smile. I do it again and they laugh. I walk with a funny walk around to the back of the car and the women across the street laugh. They watch me put together my trombone, piece by piece. Tim hangs his battered bucket drum around his neck. Suzanne has the bubble-making bear. ...

Today, we are going into Martissant, one of the most dangerous areas of Port-au-Prince.... Over 100,000 people live in houses made of cement blocks, tarps and rusty tin stacked up the hill as high as we can see.

...The high levels of poverty and violence here make it feel more important than ever that we do a fantastic show today....

Kids pile around us as we parade up the hill. They pop out of doorways and join the crowd. Some women dance to

(Continued on page 2)

Regeneration

All Kids Deserve Joy

(Continued from page 1) **Clowning for Joy** the music as we go by. When I dance, they laugh. ...I feel like I am half pulling a pile of kids up a giant hill, half being supported up the hill by them.

"*Ou bouke?* (oo boo-kay)" says the girl who has attached herself to my right elbow. I just learned this creole word yesterday. One of the most common graffiti phrases on the walls of Port-au-Prince is "*Nou bouke* (new boo-kay)." It means "we are exhausted," or "we are fed up." When the words are spray-painted on walls it means that Haitian people are fed up with the way things are, with their ineffective government, with the lack of food and water. When this girl says "*ou bouke?* (oo boo-kay)" she is asking me if I am tired from the climb. "Mwen bouke! (mwe-ge, like the end of gara-ge, boo-kay)" I say, wiping the sweat from my face and pretending to lean on a little boy's head for support. Then I take a deep breath and look around. "No, *m'pa bouke* (mmpah boo-kay)" (I am not tired), I say. "*Nou bouke?* (new boo-kay)" (are you all tired?) "No!" they say. ...

...One of brightest rays of hope that I see in this country where so much is wrong is the way that people are so ready to laugh and to play. ...The joy is ...right under the surface. The smallest hint of a game becomes a massive game. Three clowns and a bucket drum and bubbles and a trombone becomes a parade. Women dance in the street.

Maybe a lot of people in Haiti are *bouke* a lot of the time. But right now, we are on our way up a hill to a show, and despite all odds we are not *bouke* at all.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/call/workshop10/173071.shtml>

Sarah Liane Foster, a lifelong UU based now in Seattle, served with *Clowns Without Borders* for 13 years (2007-2020). (<https://clownswithoutborders.org/>). She performed in Haiti, Turkey, Colombia, Swaziland, and South Africa. See her *Clowns Without Borders* interview (5:52) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSUrMuli6MU&t=4s> and performance at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATemRv60-Y&t=43s>. Her website is <https://www.sarahlianefoster.com/>

Joy is a Mystery

Touched By Joy

Frederick Buechner

We need to be reminded ...that joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness is ...made—a happy home, a happy marriage, a happy relationship with our friends and within our jobs. We work for these things, and if we are careful and wise and lucky, we can usually achieve them. Happiness is one of the highest achievements of which we are capable, and when it is ours, we take credit for it, and properly so.



But we never take credit for our moments of joy because ...they come when they come. They are always sudden and quick and unrepeatable. The unspeakable joy sometimes of just being alive. The miracle sometimes of being just who we are with the blue sky and the green grass, the faces of our friends and the waves of the ocean, being just what they are. The joy of release, of being suddenly well when before we were sick, of being forgiven when before we were ashamed and afraid, of finding ourselves loved when we were lost and alone. The joy of love, which is the joy of the flesh as well as the spirit.

But each of us can supply our own moments, so just two more things. One is that joy is always all-encompassing; there is nothing of us left over to hate with or to be afraid with, to feel guilty with or to be selfish about. Joy is where the whole being is pointed in one direction, and it is something that by its nature ...never hoards but always wants to share. The second thing is that joy is a mystery because it can happen anywhere, anytime, even under the most unpromising circumstances, even in the midst of suffering, with tears in its eyes.

Source: *The Hungering Dark* by Frederick Buechner

Being a Joyologist

Radiating Joy

Mary Pipher

Moments bring great joy. My friend Margie ...is gifted at being present for what most of us would see as ordinary minutes.

Oliver Sacks wrote of a woman who after her brain surgery was greatly changed. She became continually positive and upbeat. The woman called herself a "joyologist." ...

When we radiate joy, we attract it. On my best days, when I am out running errands, I try to really look into the faces of the people I encounter. That involves making eye contact and, in my heart, wishing them well. I'll try to beam happiness their way. When I am capable of this, people often respond by beaming back. Their facial muscles will soften and their voices will be lighter and warmer. This meeting can be a matter of milliseconds, but it turns an interaction into a moment.



Of course, I don't walk around joy-filled every day. I am still impatient and easily rattled by stress. I have days when I am lost in a fog of self-pity or soul-draining misery. Many mornings I still wake up in a sour mood, and I can ruminate over a casual remark to the point of absurdity. Even now, my fallback expression is a deep and furrowed frown. I continue to hold my rank as the worst Buddhist in the world. But I am more capable of inviting joy into my life.

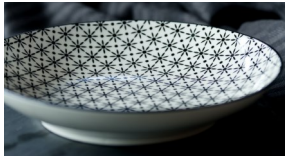
We all underestimate our need for joy. If we are not careful, we live as if our schedules are our lives. We cross one thing after another off the list. At the end of the day, we have completed our chores, but we haven't necessarily been present for our own experiences.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/18887>

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: “Many people lose the small joys in the hope for the big happiness.”

Pearl S. Buck



Day 2: “I want to know if you can be with joy, mine or your own, if you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful, to be realistic, to remember the limitations of being human.” Oriah Mountain Dreamer

Day 3: “I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.” Rabindranath Tagore

Day 4: “In fact, no one recognizes the happiest moment of their lives as they are living it. It may well be that, in a moment of joy, one might sincerely believe that they are living that golden instant “now,” even having lived such a moment before, but whatever they say, in one part of their hearts they still believe in the certainty of a happier moment to come.” Orhan Pamuk

Day 5: “Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy.” Leo Buscaglia

Day 6: “Compassion is the sometimes-fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else’s skin. It’s the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.” Frederick Buechner

Day 7: “Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.” Karl Barth

Day 8: “People from a planet without flowers would think we must be mad with joy the whole time to have such things about us.” Iris Murdoch

Day 9: “No one’s life should be rooted in fear. We are born for wonder, for joy, for hope, for love, to marvel at the mystery of existence, to be ravished by the beauty of the world, to seek truth and meaning, to acquire wisdom, and, by our treatment of others, to brighten the corner where we are.” Dean R. Koontz

Day 10: “Too much joy, I swear, is lost in our desperation to keep it.” Ocean Vuong

Day 11: “I do not miss childhood, but I miss the way I took pleasure in small things, even as greater things crumbled. I could not control the world I was in, could not walk away from things or people or moments that hurt, but I took joy in the things that made me happy.” Neil Gaiman

Day 12: “The soul is here for its own joy.” Rumi

Day 13: “Set your heart on doing good. Do it over and over again, and you will be filled with joy.” Buddha

Day 14: “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: / Its loveliness increases; it will never / Pass into nothingness; but still will keep / A bower quiet for us, and a sleep / Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.” John Keats



Day 15: “Our joy does not have to be based on our circumstances.” Joyce Meyer

Day 16: “True teachers are those who use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross; then, having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create their own.” Nikos Kazantzakis

Day 17: “Pleasure is always derived from something outside you, whereas joy arises from within.” Eckhart Tolle

Day 18: “Joy is the goal of existence, and joy is not to be stumbled upon, but to be achieved....” Ayn Rand

Day 19: “The source of love is deep in us and we can help others realize a lot of happiness. One word, one action, one thought can reduce another person’s suffering and bring that person joy.” Thích Nhất Hạnh

Day 20: “May your heart always be joyful. May your song always be sung.” Bob Dylan

Day 21: “Because you are defined not by life’s imperfect moments, but by your reaction to them. And because there is joy in embracing—rather than running from—the utter absurdity of life.” Jenny Lawson

Day 22: “Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day.” Henri J.M. Nouwen

Day 23: “If your joy is derived from what society thinks of you, you’re always going to be disappointed.” Madonna

Day 24: “Passion is a feeling that tells you: this is the right thing to do. Nothing can stand in my way. It doesn’t matter what anyone else says. This feeling is so good that it cannot be ignored. I’m going to follow my bliss and act upon this glorious sensation of joy.” Wayne W. Dyer

Day 25: “Don’t surrender all your joy for an idea you used to have about yourself that isn’t true anymore.” Cheryl Strayed

Day 26: “Whatever may be the tensions and the stresses of a particular day, there is always lurking close at hand the trailing beauty of forgotten joy or unremembered peace.” Howard Thurman

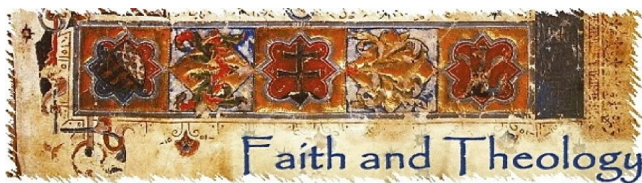
Day 27: “Sometimes the best and worst times of your life can coincide. It is a talent of the soul to discover the joy in pain—thinking of moments you long for, and knowing you’ll never have them again.” Shannon L. Alder

Day 28: “Life offers up these moments of joy despite everything.” Sally Rooney

Day 29: “I give you this to take with you: Nothing remains as it was. If you know this, you can begin again, with pure joy in the uprooting.” Judith Minty

Day 30: “A flower blossoms for its own joy.” Oscar Wilde

Day 31: “Ignore any loss of nerve, ignore any loss of self-confidence, ignore any doubt or confusion. Move on believing in love, in peace, and harmony, and in great accomplishment. Remember joy isn’t a stranger to you. You are winning and you are strong. Love. Love first, love always, love forever.” Anne Rice



Faith and Theology

A Practical Theology of Joy

The 13th century Persian poet Rumi wrote, “The Soul is here for its own joy.” UU minister Carl Scovel arrived at a similar conclusion in his 1994 Berry Street Lecture, *Beyond Spirituality*. For him, “the aim of moving beyond spirituality, is transformation,” adding, “Beyond spirituality lies the Great Surmise, a life lived in witness to the inherent love at the heart of all creation.”

Scovel explains that, “The Great Surmise says simply this: At the heart of all creation lies a good intent, a purposeful goodness, from which we come, by which we live our fullest, to which we shall at last return. And this is the supreme reality of our lives.” He continues, “...the Great Surmise stands all our logic and morality on its ear.... Neither duty nor suffering nor conflict—not even survival—is the aim of life, but joy. Deep, abiding, uncompromised joy.”

Is joy the aim of life? Jigme Singye Wangchuck who ruled Bhutan from 1972 to 2006 coined the phrase *Gross National Happiness*, believing that it was more important than Gross Domestic Product. Bhutan, a Mahayana Buddhist country, has emphasized happiness since 1619. In 2008, Bhutan conducted its first survey of happiness. In 2011, the UN unanimously adopted a General Assembly resolution, introduced by Bhutan, calling for a “holistic approach to development” aimed at promoting sustainable happiness and wellbeing. In 2022, the *World Happiness Report*, begun in 2012, ranked countries based on a survey of adults by Gallup with Canada ranked 15th and the U.S., 16th. This does not capture the wellbeing of adolescents whose struggles increased because of the pandemic.

A concern that joy has not received adequate attention prompted the John Templeton Foundation to provide grants in 2014 to focus on joy. The foundation noted, “Joy is increasingly vanishing from people’s experience in contemporary societies. Although poets, sages, and saints, ...have celebrated joy for centuries as an essential dimension of

well-being, joy has dropped out of our cultural vocabulary.... The purpose of this project is to develop a theology of joy...” a reference to the *Theology of Joy & the Good Life* project at Yale Divinity School. Notably, *The Journal of Positive Psychology* devoted an entire issue on joy in 2020.

A theology of joy cannot ignore sorrow or despair. Is life a tragedy punctuated by joy, or a joy punctuated by tragedy? There is no easy answer. *Ecclesiastes* (aka *Kōheleth*) deemed life a “vanity of vanities,” writing there is “a time to weep and a time to laugh, / a time to mourn and a time to dance.” Still, the author concluded, “I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live.”

William Blake wrote that we are made for joy and woe, joy and woe woven fine in his 1803 poem, *Auguries of Innocence*. It begins: “To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour.” What joy if this was possible! Yet, Blake knew that joy and woe do not fall equally on all. He wrote, “*Every Night & every Morn / Some to Misery are Born / Every Morn and every Night / Some are Born to sweet delight / Some are Born to sweet delight / Some are Born to Endless Night.*”

The Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, two joyful people despite enduring significant adversity, met in April 2015 to consider the question, “How do we find joy in the face of life’s inevitable suffering?” Their answers are in *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, published in 2016. In addition to sharing their daily “joy practices,” they outline eight pillars that they believe form the foundation for joy: Perspective, Humility, Humor, Acceptance, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Compassion, and Generosity. They also explore obstacles that block joy: fear, stress, anxiety, frustration, anger, sadness, grief, despair, loneliness, envy, suffering, adversity, illness, and the fear of death.

The 2007 movie, *The Bucket List*, starred Jack Nicholson as Billionaire Edward Cole and Morgan Freeman as Carter Chambers, a car mechanic. Complete strangers, they meet in a hospital

room, both terminally ill. Despite their many differences, they had two things in common: a desire to come to terms with life, both who they are and what they have done, and a desire to complete their bucket list, things they want to see and



do before they die. One trip takes them to the Pyramids, where they discuss joy. Gazing at a pyramid, Freeman says, “The Egyptians had a beautiful belief about death. When their souls got to the entrance to heaven, the gods asked them two questions. Their answers determined whether they were admitted or not.” Nicholson takes the bait and asks what they were. Freeman replies, “Have you found joy in your life,” and insists that Nicholson answer. His answer is, “Yes.” Freeman then shares the second question, “Has your life brought joy to others?” Nicholson’s answer reveals just how challenging that question can be. (See the scene, *The Two Questions*, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utAOfNfi_vE / 4:50.)

The point of the exchange is that experiencing joy is not enough. We must also bring joy to others. The eight pillars above are instructive in this regard. The first four, **Perspective, Humility, Humor, and Acceptance**, can enhance our ability to respond to life with joy, while the last four, **Forgiveness, Gratitude, Compassion, and Generosity**, help us bring joy to others. Another way of thinking about this came from UU Barbara Rohde, who wrote, “Gifts that are not received die. Gifts that we try to hoard die. Gifts that we cannot or do not hand to another die.”

These 8 pillars supporting joy are significant, but 6 others deserve consideration in a practical theology of joy.

Joy, like grace, is a gift that comes to us

(Continued on page 5)

How to Awaken Joy in Kids

James Baraz and Michele Lilyanna

Can joy be cultivated? And, if so, can we teach our kids how to be more joyful in their lives?

In our experience, the answer to both of these questions is yes. But it takes knowing what kinds of practices bring true happiness....

...We suggest helping kids to set intentions for happiness because paying attention to the good things that happen in life rather than focusing only on the bad can help rewire their brains for happiness.

...Gratitude has been found to increase happiness and social support in kids, both crucial for long-term well-being.

To help instill gratitude in your own children, try starting a gratitude practice at the dinner hour. ...It can be something as simple as noticing a flower or the kindness of a friend. Just sharing in this way helps parents and their kids to get a better idea of what's happening in each other's lives and is a simple way to build deeper family bonds.

...But that doesn't mean that life is always joyful.... One of the great truths is that life also brings challenges. It's important for us to breed joy in our lives not to avoid the inevitable difficulties, but to meet them with strength and compassion.

...Whenever we teach our children ... to shine a light on the good and ... uplifting moments, we are strengthening the ability to empathize with others, feel more connected, build resilience, and be inspired to make this a better world. And that makes for a more joyful life for all!

Source: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_awaken_joy_in_kids

Family Activity: Reframing

"One exercise involves giving children a sheet of paper that has been divided in two. On one side, the children write down one or more of their own negative thoughts—the kind that tends to run around in their heads, like 'I'm not good at math' or 'No one likes me.' On the other side, they write down the opposite

or the antidote to those negative thoughts, like 'I find math challenging, but I'm taking on that challenge and it's OK if I don't get every answer right; I'm learning,' or 'Just because one person was mean to me doesn't mean I'm not likable; I can keep being open and kind to others, because that helps me connect and be a good friend.'"

Source: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_awaken_joy_in_kids

Family Activity:

Filling the Joy Tank

Joe Van Brussel writes about the need to fill the "joy tank" for both parents and children (See <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/refill-kids-joy-tanks>) Introduce your children to the idea of a joy tank, a container for joy that we can fill with by thinking about what brings us joy. Ask, what color is your joy tank when its empty? What color is it when its full? Invite them to draw a picture of their joy tank, and then to make a list of the things that they can fill it with. The point is to make the causes of joy more concrete: a

puppy, ice cream, playing with a friend, looking up at the clouds, and on and on. Also consider what kinds of self-care bring joy.



Family Activity: Bringing Joy

An effective way of bringing joy to other is through acts of kindness. Watch the video *One Day* by Life Vest Inside that shows how kindness can boomerang at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwAYpLVyeFU> (5:44). Invite your children to create a list of acts of kindness that they can consider doing. A helpful resource in this regard is *60 Acts of Kindness for Kids to Do to Make the World a Better Place* at <https://www.rd.com/article/acts-of-kindness-for-kids/>. In this regard, for each act of kindness considered, discuss how it might bring joy. Then select one or two things to do individually or as a family.

(Continued from page 4) Faith & Theology

unbidden and unexpected, however, we must be attentive lest we miss those occasions that evoke joy. *Mindfulness* is the pillar to help us attend to experiences, both dramatic and subtle, that elicit joy.



How do we bring joy to others? First by sharing our experiences of joy with others. This is especially important with children because it helps them identify and name joy in their own lives. We can also bring joy to others by "being joy." Scott Tusa, a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, asserts that joy is both an emotional response and an innate capacity that we can cultivate. By cultivating innate joy, we turn the scarcity of joy into abundance, which undermines the traditional economy of joy. Tusa concludes, "...Radical [joy] ...denies the basic idea that happiness is a zero-sum game. Instead of joy being fleeting and dependent, it is revealed to be ever-present and unconditional."

Embodiment is a pillar that allows us to bring joy to others by "being joy."

The next pillar involves Rabindranath Tagore, a polymath who was a writer, philosopher, social reformer, and much more. His family helped create and lead the Brahmo Samaj, a liberal Hindu reformation movement that challenged caste distinctions in the 19th century, which had connections with Unitarianism. Tagore visited the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana in 1912 where his son, Rathindranath, was a graduate student. While there, he gave his first public address in the U.S. at the Unitarian Church of Urbana. Tagore, the first non-European to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature (1913), famously wrote, "I slept and dreamt that life

(Continued on page 7)

Joy Unspeakable erupts when you least expect it

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

move beyond personal ego boundaries; and, finally, a sense of physical freedom, as well as freedom of thought. These all suggest why joy is so valued.

All emotions, including joy, are complex. Physiologically, joy involves the release of dopamine and serotonin in brain. Physically, we may communicate joy in a variety of ways—tearfully, euphorically, with a smile, even “jumping for joy,” and more. Our appraisal of the experience of joy, that is, the meaning that we make of it, often involves gratitude, well-being, and a sense that we have been blessed. In response to the experience of joy, we may be more highly motivated to pursue a project or certain life goals.

Connections between awe and joy are instructive. They include the fact that both are unexpected, neither can be manufactured, both are a response to something external to the self, and each is momentary.



Richard Rohr writes, “awe is not always inspired by beauty and goodness. Truth sometimes comes in hard packages. It takes both great love and great suffering to stun us and bring us to our knees. ... Barbara Holmes, President Emerita of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities writes, ‘We are not headed toward a single goal: we are on a pilgrimage toward the center of our hearts. It is in this place of prayerful repose that... *Joy Unspeakable / erupts when you least expect it, / when the burden is greatest, / when the hope is gone / after bullets fly. / It rises / on the crest of impossibility, / it sways to the rhythm / of steadfast hearts, / and celebrates / what we cannot see.*’” This perspective is important.

6 As Tracy Ochester observes, “Joy is

different from happiness in that it can coexist with difficult emotions, such as grief or pain.”

“Joy unspeakable” can also describe peak experiences, which for Edward Hoffman are a path to joy. He writes, “What can you do if you’re 30 and, turning the corner of your own street, you are overcome, suddenly, by a feeling of bliss—absolute bliss—as though you’d suddenly swallowed a bright piece of that late afternoon?” asked Katherine Mansfield in a celebrated short story, *Bliss*. Hardly coincidentally, the early 20th-century British writer was herself 30 years old at the time—and though she lived only four more years due to chronic illness, her life was vibrant with dazzling moments.” Hoffman continues, “Maslow called these peak-experiences.... In interviewing high achievers, Maslow discovered that they reported frequent moments of great joy and fulfillment in everyday life.” Joy is well-acquainted with the exhilaration of reaching the mountaintop, but as theologian Willie James Jennings knows, joy is also “an act of resistance against despair.”

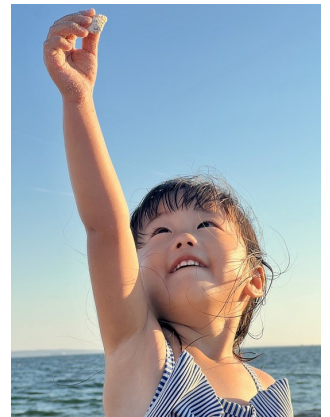
Patty Van Cappellen, a social psychologist doing research on joy at Duke University, suggests “that joy connects us to our core identity, values, and priorities.” Adding, “It is the emotion that makes life worth living in the moment.” For her, happiness involves a general sense of well-being based on an evaluation of one’s life as a whole, while joy is a momentary emotion.

Van Cappellen writes, “joy arises from realizing how circumstances align perfectly and just make sense: things are exactly how they ought to be at that moment. Joy is elicited by the appraisal that an event aligns with who we truly are, with what we value, what we strive for, what we live for. Joy is the emotion that makes life worth living in the moment because it resonates with our core identity. It is associated with feelings of ease, appreciation, and meaning. According to this definition, the opposite extreme of joy would be despair ...” and not just sadness. She quotes moral philosopher Dr. Matthew Kuan Johnson who wrote, “In joy, one becomes more truly oneself.”

Van Cappellen’s work is relevant be-

cause she also explores the intersection of religion and spirituality with joy. Her questions for consideration include: “When and to what extent is joy interpreted as sacred or divine? What implications do these spiritually infused interpretations hold compared to secular versions of joy? What difference does it make when religious practices are infused with joy? Given that religious practices provide a context for the shared experience of joy, what are the implications of communal joy for the nature of joy itself and for its social effects? Does this shared experience of joy create greater social connectedness and spirituality?” As an example, sustained congregational work to create Beloved Community can lead to joy, as can collectively working to bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice. Worship, rites of passage, and communal rituals, like a water communion or flower communion, can also be occasions for joy.

Cara Barker writes, “There she stood. Strands of ...hair flying in the summer breeze, arms outstretched to the heavens, a symphony of giggles, a dance of delight. Beside the sparking water, she claps her ...hands as each successive wave arrives, and kisses the shoreline. A vision of pure love of life, this child could not help but remind the ‘big people’ of what matters most. Her glee would melt the most hardened heart, a contagion from which our world might benefit. In her ...abandon, we cannot help but smile. We nod in appreciation, and recollection. She demonstrates the truth of our old friend Rumi’s words: “The Soul is here for its own joy.”



Our task is not to cultivate joy, but to cultivate life in such a way that joy abounds. Perhaps this is the answer to Mary Oliver’s haunting question: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?”

Freude Schöner / Joy More Beautiful

To Joy

The Enlightenment challenged many long-held beliefs including that earthly existence was a vale of tears and that true happiness could only be found in heaven. Ritchie Robertson, a British academic, is the author of *The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness, 1680-1790* (2021). For him, the Enlightenment was “a conscious and deliberate attempt by thinkers ...to understand humanity ...in order to promote happiness.” Robertson is concerned “that the slogan ‘the age of reason’ obscures ...that the Enlightenment was also the age of feeling, sympathy, and sensibility.” He concludes, “the pursuit of happiness, long before Thomas Jefferson used the phrase in drafting the American Declaration of Independence, was the overriding purpose of enlightened thought and activity.”

While the word joy wasn't used much, Friedrich Schiller wrote the poem, *To Joy*, in the autumn of 1785 that began, “Freude Schöner Götterfunken,” literally meaning, “Joy more beautiful, spark of the Gods.” It was first published in the magazine, *Thalia* in 1786, which Schiller had started in 1784, and which operated until 1791. Though not certain, Schiller likely published it in an anthology, as he did with many of his poems. It was written for some friends as a drinking song. Originally titled, *To Freedom*, he renamed it *To Joy*, since joy seemed more expansive. It was grounded in Enlightenment ideals celebrating freedom and the “brotherhood” of all people.

The song was set to music by many composers, first by Schiller's close friend Christian Gottfried Körner, and, in 1815, by a young Franz Schubert. Schiller, however, always remain unsatisfied with the poem, revising it in 1803, before his death in 1805.

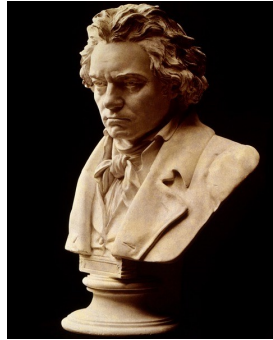
By 1792, at the age of 22, Beethoven had discovered Schiller's poem and expressed his desire to put it to music. By then, the French Revolution was already underway, along with its Reign of Terror. It would last a decade until 1799. It also brought Napoleon to power, who then waged war in Europe from 1803 to 1815, collapsing Enlightenment idealism.

Beethoven also suffered. He wrote in July 1808, “The existence I had built up only a short time ago rests on shaky foundations. What a destructive, disorderly life I see and hear around me: nothing but drums, cannons, and human misery in every form.” Beethoven first noticed problems with his hearing in 1798, and by 1814 or 1815 he was totally deaf. His brother, Carl, died in the fall of 1815, then, a year later, he experienced a lengthy illness that he called “inflammatory fever,” keeping him mostly bedridden for more than a year. Despite all of this, he kept composing.

Remarkably in 1817, Beethoven entered an extraordinary period of creativity during which he would compose four piano sonatas, as well as the *Missa solemnis*, the *Diabelli Variations*, and more.

In 1823, Beethoven began fulfilling his

dream that began some 30 years earlier, setting Schiller's poem to music. While he used some of Schiller's text from 1803, rearranging it in parts, it served as a muse, inspiring Beethoven's own words and music to create a masterpiece for the ages. Schiller would have approved, once writing, “Music must never ... surrender itself to petty game-playing, but rather, it must follow the spirit of the poetry in its entirety!” The spirit of Schiller's poem was reborn in the lyrics and music of the fourth movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, the first symphony ever to include choral music. Despite being deaf, Beethoven conducted the premier at Vienna's *Theater am Kärntnertor* on May 7, 1824. Those in attendance went wild with appreciation as the symphony ended. Being deaf and facing the orchestra, Beethoven was oblivious until soloist Karoline Unger gently turned him around. And then he saw Joy Incarnate in their response to his symphony, including the fourth movement, his *Ode to Joy*. Source: Touchstones



Holy Discontent

(Continued from page 5) **Faith & Theology**

was joy. I woke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold! Service was joy.” *Service* is a pillar that encourages us to hand the gift of joy to others.

The obstacles to joy enumerated by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu are significant, but they are all personal. Beyond these are the systemic, societal obstacles to joy that include poverty, racism, domestic violence, homelessness, lack of access to health care, unsafe neighborhoods, and so much more.

Justice is the pillar that seeks to address societal conditions that result in too many who “to Misery are Born.” If the moral arc of the universe is bent toward justice, it will also be bent toward joy.

Robert Kennedy said during his 1968 campaign: “Some ...see things as they are and say, why; I dream things that never were and say, why not.” Individual joy is important given that “the soul is here for its own joy,” but the transformative power of joy requires a community motivated by the pillar of *Holy Discontent*.

Though holy discontent as rage can envision and make way for a better world, David Justice writes, “it is joy that stitches this new world together. And joy is found in community, specifically those communities that approximate the Beloved Community. Through the Spirit, prophetic joy enables the community to experience [the possibility of] ...the Beloved Community, before its full realization. So, ...to my ...question ‘What does prophetic joy

add to divine dissatisfaction that is not present in rage?’ I respond that joy adds the uniting of our bodies, the possibility of knitting all humanity together to form the *Beloved Community*,” which is the final pillar required to fulfill the promise of “Joy to the World.”

Source: Touchstones



Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion

Joy

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "Joy is a meeting place, of deep intentionality and of self-forgetting, the bodily alchemy of what lies inside us in communion with what formerly seemed outside, but is now neither, but become a living frontier, a voice speaking between us and the world: dance, laughter, affection, skin touching skin, singing in the car, music in the kitchen, the quiet irreplaceable and companionable presence of a daughter [or son]: the sheer intoxicating beauty of the world inhabited as an edge between what we previously thought was us and what we thought was other than us."

David Whyte

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "Joy is of many kinds. Sometimes it comes silently, opening all closed doors and making itself at home in the desolate heart. It has no forerunner save itself; it brings its own welcome and salutation. Sometimes joy is a compound of many elements: a touch of sadness, a whimper of pain, a harsh word tenderly held until all its arrogance dies, the casting of the eye into the face that understands, the clasp of a hand that holds, then releases, a murmur of tenderness where no word is spoken, the distilled moment or remembrance of day, a night, an hour, lived beyond the sweep of the daily round—joy is often compounded of many things." *Howard Turman*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What comes to mind when you think of the word "joy?"
2. What brought you joy as a child? As a teenager? What brings you joy now?
3. In experiencing joy, what stands out for you?
4. What constellation of feelings and action does joy evoke for you?
5. Have you known someone who radiated joy? How did they impact you?
6. Where and when are you most joyful? Why?
7. In bringing joy to others, what experiences have been most meaningful to you?
8. Why is joy important?
9. What obstacles to joy have you experienced? How did you address them?
10. How can a Unitarian Universalist congregation foster joy?

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words: Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Waking to Joy

Zen Joy

Jane Dobisz

...By making my focus smaller and smaller, everything is getting bigger and bigger. Just rinsing out the breakfast dishes, I am happy. There's a vast space around things in which anything is possible. A sense of rapture permeates even the smallest activities of the day.

This word "rapture" is not one we are accustomed to using because it typically is reserved for the most rarified of moments of pleasure like ...a gorgeous beach or a wonderful piece of music. Why not let that kind of joy into all the "little" things, like smelling the air, hearing the insects on a spring evening, washing the dishes, or seeing our family at the end of a day's work? Isn't that what our whole life is?

Joy comes from appreciation. Appreciation comes from paying attention. Paying attention is the practice of Zen. It's so simple, yet look how I have to strip away everything ...in order to discover it.

It's very humbling.

At the same time, it's inspiring, because it means I don't have to wait for rapture to come at only the "rarified" moments. It's possible to change my habit from dreaming to waking up. Then this rapturous joy will enter my life more regularly. What's going on "outside" will match the "inside." I won't just be going through the motions of living—I'll actually be alive.

Having the mind and the body in the same place at the same time solves about ninety-nine percent of the matter.

The other one percent, of course, is what you do with it.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14179>



Attribution for Images

- Page 2: Coyote, photo by Ray_Shrewsberry on Pixabay
- Page 2: Joy, photo by Fotorech on Pixabay
- Page 2: Joy, photo by Preslie Hirsch on Unsplash
- Page 3: Ceramic bowl, photo by Lidye on Unsplash
- Page 4: Bucket, photo by rgaudet17 on Pixabay
- Page 5: Meditation, photo by Conscious Design Unsplash
- Page 5: Joyful Girl, photo by Berzin on Pixabay
- Page 6: Mountaintop, photo by MiSebastian on Pixabay
- Page 6: Girl, photo by gaudiillen on Pixabay
- Page 7: Beethoven, photo by WikiImages on Pixabay
- Page 7 Earth ornament, image by geralt on Pixabay
- Page 8: Buddha, photo by 湘庭 許 on Pexels