

Joy

The Feeling of Joy

Last night as I Was Sleeping

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that a spring was breaking
out in my heart.
I said: Along which secret aqueduct
are you coming to me,
water of a new life
that I have never drunk?

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that I had a beehive
here in my heart.
And the golden bees
were making white combs
and sweet honey
from my old failures.

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that a fiery sun
was giving light inside my heart.
It was fiery
because I felt
warmth as from a hearth,
and sun because it gave light
and brought tears to my eyes.

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that it was God I had
here inside my heart.

Antonio Machado, trans. Robert Bly

From Blossoms

From blossoms comes
this brown paper bag of peaches
we brought from the boy
at the bend in the road where we turned
toward
signs painted Peaches.

From laden boughs, from hands,
from sweet fellowship in the bins,
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,
comes the familiar dust of summer,
dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,
to carry within us an orchard,
to eat not only the skin, but the shade,
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
the fruit in our hands, adore it,
then bite into the round jubilation of peach.

There are days we live
as if death were nowhere in the background;
from joy to joy, from wing to wing,
from blossom to blossom from impossible
blossom, to sweet impossible blossom

Li-Young Lee

We Shake with Joy

We shake with joy, we shake with grief
What a time they have, these two
housed as they are in the same body.

Mary Oliver

Understanding and Cultivating Joy

Joy is an essential spiritual practice growing out of faith, grace, gratitude, hope, and love. It is the pure and simple delight in being alive.

Frederic Brussat

What a joy to travel the way of the heart.

Rumi

Since you get more joy out of giving joy to others, you should put a lot of thought into the happiness that you are able to give.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you.

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

Worry never robs tomorrow of its sadness; it only saps today of its joy.

Leo Buscaglia

Joy has an object and that object is God

In the popular imagination, joy is a kind of intensified happiness, a state of bliss. But in the religious imagination, joy is about a relationship. Joy has an object and that object is God. And so joy is really a little deeper than happiness. And that's why, you know, in difficult times people who are religious and who are believers can still be joyful, as odd as that may seem.

... You have a confidence and a faith in God. You know that suffering is not the last word if you're a Christian. We celebrate Easter tomorrow. We know about the resurrection. We know that, you know, there's always more with God.

So, for example, when my father died, during the funeral I was naturally very sad. But there was this sense of joy, of knowing that he was with God and that there's more to life than just the suffering. So you can be joyful even if you're not happy every single day.

Adapted from an NPR interview by Scott Simon for *Weekend Edition*

We are beings of joy

Collective creativity is a source of joy: something growing within a group that emerges as a new entity. Nature, beauty, and the process of becoming inspire joy. Culture is a source of joy. Joy derives from whatever one finds good or harmonious. We feel joy when body, psyche, and the world around us are in tune, when we can affirm existence, especially under the aspect of increase and intensification of being. We are joyful when something grows, when we have the feeling that

new areas of life are becoming available to us, when we become freer and more daring. We experience these situations as an intensification of being, but also as a surprising gift. The same joy can grip us when persons we are connected with or close to open new vistas and cover new ground on their path through life. There are lots of occasions for joy, but we can think of joy as a way of feeling, of being that underlies our particular responses and which we tap into when the occasion offers itself. I think it is important not only to recognize when we are in a joyful mood, but also to perceive that we are beings of joy. We can do this when we take continual notice of situations that stimulate joy, when we search for them as far as we are able. We experience ourselves most clearly as joyful beings when we construct our biographies of joy.

Verena Kast, *Joy, Inspiration and Hope*

With an undefended heart, we can fall in love with life over and over. . .

If our hearts are ready for anything, we are touched by the beauty and poetry and mystery that fill our world.

When Munindraji, a *vipassana* meditation teacher, was asked why he practiced, his response was, "So I will see the tiny purple flowers by the side of the road as I walk to town each day."

With an undefended heart, we can fall in love with life over and over every day. We can become children of wonder, grateful to be walking on earth, grateful to belong with each other and to all of creation. We can find our true refuge in every moment, in every breath.

(April 3, 2015 blog post by Tara Brach, adapted from *True Refuge—Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart*)

God works within lifted spirits

No one influenced my prayer and spirituality more than my mother and dad. My mother taught me to pray in a playful way. As a result I love to play with God, as if I were a child playing with my parents. I like going to a playground, getting in a swing and swinging high, because I believe God lives in us through the joy and power we sense when we swing high.

I like flying kites because it is such a wild, freeing thing, I think God works within lifted spirits. That is true, I think, of any kind of play — running, roller skating, rolling in the leaves, just kicking around and making noise, wasting time, having a party. I still believe God is present in those playful moments, just as my mother taught me.

Sister Jose Hobday, Franciscan nun and elder in the Seneca tribe, *Stories of Awe and Abundance*

An anecdote about Sister Jose. . .

I called her late last year [the year before her death in 2009] and found her busy with visitors. "I've been thinking of you," she said, "and I have something for you to do. About twenty times a day, I want you to stop what you're doing, and empty yourself completely. Let go of everything inside you that is not of God, that is not the Holy Spirit, that is not loving and peaceful. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you from head to toe. Do that twenty times a day and you will be filled with peace and joy. Gotta go."

Those were her last words to me. Not only did she offer typical helpful advice (try it!), she left a clue about her way toward freedom, peace and joy.

May we all catch her contagious spirit.

John Dear, in *The National Catholic Reporter*

We look for a never-ending diet of peak experiences. . .

Einstein said, "There are two ways to live your life: one is as though nothing is a miracle, the other is as though everything is a miracle." The wonder of life is everywhere, but in this culture of 30-second sound bites and blockbuster action movies, we rarely take in all the little miracles around us. We've been trained to assume that something needs to be pleasant or intense to warrant our attention. If it's not intense, we brand experience as boring and soon discard it for something more stimulating. And so we look for a never-ending diet of peak experiences. This is not only a futile endeavor; it's a set up for disappointment as we continually look for an antidote for potential tedium. And we lose an important source of well-being and joy: our ability to deeply appreciate life as it is in the here and now. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, a great 20th Century Indian sage, once chided a student who complained about the tediousness of life, "You've done the most amazing thing; you've made life boring!"

Joy as opposed to "peak experiences"

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James and Jane Baraz, from the description of their course,
Grateful Heart, Joyful Heart, offered at Spirit Rock

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Do you make a distinction between joy and happiness? What brings you joy?
2. What does joy feel like in your body? How do you express joy?
3. Do you have ideas about happiness or joy that get in the way of feeling joy?
4. What could you do to experience more joy in your life? How could you create a more joyful atmosphere at home or at work?
5. How does All Souls contribute to the joy that you feel?
6. Consider writing about your joy to see the role of this emotion in your experience of yourself and others.

Prepared for All Souls Covenant Groups by Mary Beth Hatem