

Joy: An Inside Job

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Once in awhile a book comes along that profoundly touches me and deepens my journey. “The Book of Joy” is such a book. The Dalai Lama and Bishop Tutu came together with writer Douglas Abrams in Daramsala to share what those two friends, from very different worlds, have witnessed and learned in their long lives. In sharing parts of it with you today I hope that you too, will be inspired to read it and be changed.

There are 3 parts to this book, first: What is the Nature of Joy?

When they speak of Joy, they are not talking about birthday party, ferris wheel or a first rate, gourmet meal joy- although they may be corollaries. They mean the joy that comes from having faced life head on, knowing sorrow and gratitude and discovering the long arc of justice within, the deep river of contentment, faith and clarity, the ability to find good -even from evil, and a oneness with humanity that makes judgment recede and compassion flourish. Lasting happiness cannot be found in the pursuit of any goal or achievement or in seeking joy for selfish reasons. It does not reside in fame or fortune. It resides only in the human mind and heart – a deep steady drumbeat in spite of the cacophony of the world.

These two great spiritual masters of our time, are also moral leaders who transcend their own traditions and speak always from a concern for humanity as a whole. Their joy- evident in the teasing and playfulness they both exhibited all week - is burnished by the fire of adversity, oppression and struggle. True joy is not dependent on external circumstances. It is what leads to a life of satisfaction and meaning in the midst of a world of so much suffering - not that it immunizes us to the inevitabilities of hardship and heartbreak.

Just as cells in utero need to be stressed to differentiate and become a complete new being, so we must exercise our spiritual muscles in the trials of life to become compassionate, thriving, loving, joyful beings. *The Dalai Lama, for example, speaks of leaving his “golden cage” in the Forbidden Kingdom and experiencing 5 decades of refugee life: He says: “It’s more useful, more opportunity to learn, to experience life - it gives me new opportunities. So, it’s wonderful.* The question is not How do I escape or avoid frustrations in life. It is: How can I use this a something positive?” Suffering – even intense suffering, is a necessary ingredient for life and for developing compassion. It makes us realize that we are only one cell in the body of humanity.

The Archbishop shared the example of Nelson Mandela, who had been the head of the armed wing of the African National Congress for which he spent 27 years in jail, but his suffering helped him to be willing to listen to the other side, to discover that the people he regarded as his enemies, were also human beings who had fears and expectations and had been molded by their society. He became, compassionate and magnanimous, able to put himself in the shoes of the other.

Both Bishop Tutu and the Dalai Lama agree that there are 3 factors that seem to have the greatest influence on increasing our joy:

1. the ability to reframe our situation more positively
2. the ability to experience gratitude
3. the choice to be kind and generous, rather than just looking out for number one.

Research shows that there is strong and compelling evidence that we come factory equipped for cooperation, compassion and generosity. Research also suggests that when we are able to move beyond our own pain and suffering and reach out to others, we cultivate our own joy and happiness.

In the second part of the book, they discuss: Obstacles to Joy:

They are: Fear, Stress, Anxiety, Frustration, Anger, Sadness and Grief, Despair, Loneliness, Envy, Suffering and Adversity, Illness and Fear of Death.

I'll address 3.

First let me speak to Fear

Fear and anxiety are mechanisms that have helped to keep us alive, but when the fear is exaggerated or provoked by something insignificant or imaginary, it becomes a problem, causing stress, worry and anxiety. *The archbishop explained in managing the fear during the dark days of apartheid when he received frequent death treats, he didn't do silly things like stand in front of a lit window at night, but he also told God - "If I'm doing your work, you better jolly well protect me." Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The Dalai Lama feels that the simple life he led when he was at home with his family had a daily rhythm and a close community, and thus was not as stressful as modern societies— even though 9 of the 16 children in his family died and sometimes there wasn't enough food.*

Both men felt that exaggerated ambition in modern life leads to chronic stress, feelings of fragmentation, being short of time and not being present. Their antidote to fear: – 1. seeing ourselves as connected and not above or below others, and 2. seeing the obstacle as challenge rather than something overwhelming.

Fear was a major part of my life into my mid-life. For example: I was afraid of what other people would think, and deathly afraid to speak in front of people. When I did my residency in Chaplaincy, I determined that I would take every opportunity to face and overcome my fears. On one occasion, I was asked to visit a patient who had been striking out at the staff. I entered his room and introduced myself and all of a sudden, there it was, a fast punch from the right hand. I simply grabbed his hand at the wrist, looked at him directly, and said with as much compassion as I could muster – you must be in a lot of pain. He began to cry. And then began the real pastoral conversation. Each time I visited with a difficult patient and could see a shift, my confidence rose.

Second: Sadness and Grief: The Hard Times Knit Us More Closely Together

In January, we held a memorial service for Jerry Brownfield. Jerry was helpful in many communities. He was generous, patient and very active. He was also a realist. After cancer, and 2 years later, a stroke he roared his frustrations with his deteriorating strength and health, recording it later in this poem:

"I am screaming over & over profanities and insanities until further screams won't help, until the power of my voice falters, until post stroke anger subsides to weary acceptance." And he asks:

"Can you imagine the balance it takes to play killer racquet ball?

Can you dance wildly and never be unsure?

I had more backpacking trips to make.

I had more songs to sing with full voice...

I can walk on most civilized paths but now people notice hesitance and hold doors, and drivers are more likely to give me right of way.

My thanks are genuine but I WAS NOT DONE YET AND NOW I may never be.

One can only keep loving and hoping for vast improvements with more time.”

There are two important points in this story.

1. Expressing our grief – in whatever way is meaningful to us- can bring us back to sanity.

Hiding it, isolates us from those who would walk the journey with us.

We are social beings, hardwired to be in community and to be compassionate with one another, so isolation only exacerbates our sadness.

2. Sadness and joy cannot be separated, for if we are unable or unwilling to fully engage in sadness, joy will remain out of reach.

These approaches lead to the kind of happiness often called *eudemonic happiness* - characterized by self-understanding, meaning, growth, and acceptance, including life's inevitable suffering, sadness and grief. This is authentic joy.

Third Barrier: **Despair: The World is in Such Turmoil**

Our private grief and our world despair are close cousins. It is essential to maintain our humanity in grieving both. We **must be appalled** as humans when children are killed, but we must not lose hope. The Archbishop points out that although we are capable of terrible atrocities, we also have a great capacity for goodness – Doctors without Borders put themselves at risk in situations like Ebola; people respond to natural disasters in a variety of ways; when there is a horrendous tragedy – like the school shootings in Florida last week, the community and in this case, the world responds. Can any good come out of such an atrocity? Yes, it can: Students are speaking out with strength, clarity and intentions to change their world– let us pray for them and support them in their righteous anger, to do what we, their elders could not – facing lawmakers and other forces resisting changes in gun laws. It's time for some unorthodox approaches. We have to start where we are and do what we can.

Recently, an old friend, Norm Thomas, shared about a time as a junior minister in a large, downtown church in Edmonton when a woman who lived nearby came to him and asked for his help for the young Aboriginal girls who came to the city to attend school, but had no homes. In his enthusiasm, Norm arranged a hootenanny to raise funds to buy a 7 bedroom house in the neighborhood. Just a few days before the concert, only a fraction of the tickets had been sold . Norm decided to go to 2 good men, to ask for help. They asked him to give them the unsold tickets, and to his amazement, on the evening of the concert, the 2700 seat auditorium was sold out, making enough money to buy the house. The woman who had initiated the concern, offered to go and live there as the house mother. Another congregation in town decided to do the same and now, 40 years later there are still 2 houses for young Aboriginal girls attending school in Edmonton. It took one compassionate woman, one unstoppable young minister, 2 philanthropists and some generous musicians to change the lives of over a thousand women.

In spite of all the bad news in our world today, Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama agree that as a people, we are evolving: we now have women's rights, slavery is no longer morally justified, human rights and the right of self-determination are universally recognized, if not always followed. This is not looking through rose-colored glasses. Both men are deeply steeped in the problems of the world and still they say we are growing and learning how to be compassionate, caring and human.

And now we get to the third section in the book is: The Eight Pillars of Joy

Just to give you a taste of what those 8 pillars are, they are:

Perspective, Humility, **Humor**, **Acceptance**, **Forgiveness**, Gratitude-, **Compassion**, and Generosity.

Again, I'll speak to 3.

1st. Humor- If you've ever seen these 2 spiritual giants together, you know that guffawing, teasing, chortling, giggling, and belly laughing is part of what makes their relationship so special, but the fact that it is spliced together with moments of profundity and sanctity, punctuates both in a startling way. In Seattle on his visit some years back, someone asked the Dalai Lama: what would you do to bring world peace? At first he did his funny little head wiggle and said: "I don't know." Then he said: "*I know – I'd ask all the world leaders and their partners and children to come to camp together for 3 weeks and play. Then when one of them had a problem, he could just call his friend and say – hey Justin – what can we do to fix this softwood lumber import problem?*"

Laughter and joking relaxes people and removes barriers. When we laugh at ourselves, we share our humility and our common humanity. It's a wonderful boost to our morale and good for our health in general. *The Archbishop was asked to go and speak to the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda shortly after the genocide. He began to speak of the big nosed people (of which he is one) and how they excluded the small nosed people. The people were laughing and soon began to realize what he was talking about – the ridiculousness of prejudice and hatred.* This is the kind of humor – coming from good-heartedness -that brings people together. It does not belittle either of us but uplifts us, allows us to recognize and laugh about our shared humanity, our shared vulnerabilities, our shared frailties. Laughter is how we come to terms with all the ironies, cruelties and uncertainties that we face."

2nd. Acceptance is one of the foundations of Buddhism. Succinctly put – Why be unhappy about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being unhappy if it cannot? This teaching is at the root of the Dalai Lama's stunning ability to accept the reality of his exile without unnecessary suffering. *When asked if he hated the Chinese people for what they had done to him and his people, the Dalai Lama responded: they took my country, they took my people – why would I give them my peace of mind?* But this is not resignation or defeat by any means. Neither leader denies the reality of their circumstances. Both are tireless activists for creating a better world for all – from a deep acceptance of what is.

If, instead of acceptance, we are reactive to a negative situation, we stay locked in judgment and criticism, anxiety and despair, even denial and addiction.

Acceptance is the sword that cuts through all resistance, to allow us to relax, be present, see clearly and respond appropriately. If we accept what is, do what we can to change it – without attachment to the outcome, we can be at peace if it doesn't change knowing we have tried our best; and we can feel the joy of change if it is successful. In fact, letting go of attachment to the outcome may open us to something that is even better than our goal was.

I experienced acceptance as a tool for non-violent protest in Starhawk's training for a G8 Economic Summit in Ottawa. She had us pair off and tell each other something that we truly disliked. Then it became the job of the other person to do a compelling sales job on whatever that was. The first person's job, while the other person was trying to sell them on what they hated, was to actively send them love and acceptance. The interesting thing was that the salesman pretty quickly ran out of steam, as there was no resistance.

And finally: Compassion

Although self-compassion is important so as not to compound our mistakes with shame and blame, too much self-centered thinking is the source of much suffering. The antidote is compassionate concern for another's well-being. It is this that is the source of happiness. Acts of kindness, generosity and other

expressions of altruistic tendencies are what move empathy into the realm of compassionate action. When someone is going through a difficult time, the first response for them is concern, then, if it's possible, the desire to help, and if it's not possible, to pray or wish them well. This is an urge present in all species. If a mouse is hurt, another mouse will come and lick it. When an elephant dies, the whole herd responds with caring.

When we ourselves are suffering, and are able to reach out to someone else, our own suffering is alleviated. We are really wired to be caring of the other and when we go against that fundamental law of our being, whether we like it or not, it is going to have negative consequences for us. When we reach out, even in our own deep anguish, it has an alchemy that transforms our pain. It may not take it away, but it makes it more bearable for we really are hardwired to be caring.

I had occasion to experience this when traveling a few days after a painful loss. In the morning I took the airporter to the airport, and was aware of a very annoying, (to me) chatty woman on the bus. When I got to the airport, I was dismayed to find her right behind me in the lineup for the same plane. In the departure lounge, I found a seat as far away from her as I could. Finally, the plane was loaded, but the airline stewardess came and asked me if I would mind moving to another seat, so the Korean lady beside me could have her friend, who spoke Korean, come and sit with her. I was not in the mood to accommodate others, I was nursing my own wounds. And then I thought, Oh Barbara – get over yourself. What does it matter where you sit? So I agreed to move and she escorted me to my new seat, beside – guess who? Miss chatty Kathy! Undone by fate, I decided to open myself to conversation with her. Very shortly it became a pastoral conversation. She was in a relationship with an abusive man. By coincidence, she lived in the same community as a couple who worked with women in such situations, whom I had met in a workshop a week earlier. I was able to give her their contact information. And – no surprise, I felt better because I'd been able to help someone else. It felt like a hug from the Universe.

We are meant to be in community -to give and receive compassion. The more we can be compassionate with ourselves, the bigger and warmer our hearts, the stronger our sense of aliveness and resilience will be, and thus our capacity for compassion for others.

Because.... We are hardwired for compassion,
....which is the pathway to Joy.

In fact.....We were made for JOY.

And in the opinion of these 2 great men, that's what life is all about.

Amen and blessed be.

Rev. Barbara Gilday