

June's Theme for Spiritual Practice: *Celebration*
The Practice of Joy

This month's spiritual theme is Celebration, and the practice we've chosen to go with it is the practice of Joy. This is the last the last theme/practice write-up that the Worship Associates are doing this church year. We hope hearing that isn't a cause for either joy or celebration!

It seems to say a lot about our view of the world and of our faith as Unitarian/Universalists that celebration and joy seem to be a natural pairing. For ours is a happy church. And though we seek to combat the world's ills, we also see the good in the world, in others, and in ourselves.

But the pairing of joy and celebration is not necessarily automatically correct. To see why not, let's look at the derivation of the words. The history of joy is the simpler one. Though the spelling and pronunciation of the word have changed over the centuries, the meaning has not. Joy and its earlier variations have always been synonyms for happiness, elation or great pleasure.

The roots of celebration are quite different. The original meaning was to praise an act, a thing or a person openly by drawing the attention of others to it. Celebrity has exactly the same root. Over time the sense of praising came to be associated with solemnizing something or someone, usually in a formal or ritual setting. And though we have lost some of that sense of the meaning, still the definition of celebration as a social gathering or party is the last of four in the dictionary, while the first is a formal performance of a solemn rite.

So, despite our own first impulse, we're asking you to think about the idea of celebration as a public, or at least a group event. And to think about whether sharing that sort of experience can create or increase the joy that is felt when the event being celebrated is a positive one. And if that sharing can decrease the sadness of the celebration of a difficult, more formal nature. We hope, too, you'll think of looking to find joy on the celebration of our Sunday services, just as you do in celebrating a birth or birthday, an anniversary or another kind of accomplishment.

We'll also offer some suggestions for cultivating joy as both a component or complement to a celebration and in its own right.

Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, or with each other:

What does the word "joy" bring to mind?

What connections does the idea of joy have for you? Celebration

Joy is the answer. What is the question?

What is the relationship of being present to celebrating? to being joyful?

Is a celebration always joyful?

Describe a time when you felt a deep sense of joy.

How might a celebration be painful or difficult?

When do you choose to celebrate?

What do you choose to celebrate?

Do you find yourself celebrating spontaneously?

What brings you joy?

Practices to engage with self and others

Here's a recommendation from Rita Ghilani, Worship Associate "My suggestion for cultivating joy is to stop, breathe, and be present to what or who is directly in front of me. Whether I'm walking in the woods, singing, gardening, or talking with someone I love, I can truly count on this practice."

And here's an observation from Worship Associate, Peggy Homer "What springs to mind is the sensation I would get going at a full gallop on horseback as a child. A salient aspect of this experience was the simultaneous feeling of fear. The joy comes from the balance between abandonment and the control that a skilled rider develops in communication with the horse."

Here are several suggestions for both remembering and being able to celebrate joys. The first is to keep a gratitude journal. Here are some research based tips shared by Robert Emmons, a professor at the University of California, Davis, on the UC Berkley Great Good site -

Don't just go through the motions. Research by psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky and others suggests that journaling is more effective if you first make the conscious decision to become happier and more grateful. "Motivation to become happier plays a role in the efficacy of journaling," says Emmons. Go for depth over breadth. Elaborating in detail about a

particular thing for which you're grateful carries more benefits than a superficial list of many things. Get personal. Focusing on people to whom you are grateful has more of an impact than focusing on things for which you are grateful. Try subtraction, not just addition. One effective way of stimulating gratitude is to reflect on what your life would be like without certain blessings, rather than just tallying up all those good things. Savor surprises. Try to record events that were unexpected or surprising, as these tend to elicit stronger levels of gratitude. Don't overdo it. Writing occasionally (once or twice per week) is more beneficial than daily journaling. In fact, one study by Lyubomirsky and her colleagues found that people who wrote in their gratitude journals once a week for six weeks reported boosts in happiness afterward; people who wrote three times per week didn't. "We adapt to positive events quickly, especially if we constantly focus on them," says Emmons. "It seems counterintuitive, but it is how the mind works."

The second is to keep a pleasant events log. This is adapted from the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course taught at UMass Medical School -

After you've had a pleasant experience, write about it briefly. Put down what the experience was, how you felt during it, and what you think and how you feel about it as you write.

The third is idea to put "remember the joy" dates down on your calendar. These are days when you felt great joy, but that aren't the usual special occasions. It could be the day you and your family saw a spectacular sunset up in Maine. Or the day your grandmother finished chemo. Or the day the new dog arrived. Put the date down on the calendar and each year when it comes around, recall the event and the joy you felt.

Readings and Quotations

Celebration is an active state, an act of expressing reverence or appreciation.

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

Life is celebration, for those who know how to celebrate every moment.

- Bharat Zanvar

Oh frabjous day! Callooh. Callay! He chortled in his joy.

- Lewis Carroll

Sing out my soul, thy songs of joy;
Such as a happy bird will sing.

Beneath a rainbow's lovely arch,
In early spring.

- W. H. Davies

Joy, in Nature's wide dominion,
Mightiest cause of all is found;
And 'tis joy that moves the pinion
When the wheel of time goes round.
Friedrich Schiller

I wish you all the joy that you can wish.

- William Shakespeare

Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

I want a life that sizzles and pops and makes me laugh out loud. And I don't want to get to the end, or to tomorrow, even, and realize that my life is a collection of meetings and pop cans and errands and receipts and dirty dishes. I want to eat cold tangerines and sing out loud in the car with the windows open and wear pink shoes and stay up all night laughing and paint my walls the exact color of the sky right now. I want to sleep hard on clean white sheets and throw parties and eat ripe tomatoes and read books so good they make me jump up and down, and I want my everyday to make God belly laugh, glad that he gave life to someone who loves the gift.

- Shauna Niequist

According to Vedanta, there are only two symptoms of enlightenment, just two indications that a transformation is taking place within you toward a higher consciousness. The first symptom is that you stop worrying. Things don't bother you anymore. You become light-hearted and full of joy. The second symptom is that you encounter more and more meaningful coincidences in your life, more and more synchronicities. And this accelerates to the point where you actually experience the miraculous. (quoted by Carol Lynn Pearson in Consider the Butterfly)

- Deepak Chopra