



JOY

BY MARY KATHERINE MORN, PARISH MINISTER,
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

I once traveled to a conference for Unitarian Universalist ministers that was held in Ottawa. For various reasons I decided to take the train. That meant leaving early and arriving in Ottawa sometime around 10:00 p.m. It was a long day. Nonetheless, my trip was such a delight. My first train went to Penn Station in NYC. Then I caught a second train to Montreal. That one traveled along the Hudson River for a couple of hours and then it seemed as if the rest of New York was one beautiful lake after another. Many of the small train stations looked like movie sets. Several industrial areas were marked by colorful and creative graffiti. So much to see. I took a book to read for work and a book for pleasure. I didn't touch either of them. I didn't do anything. Well, I smiled a lot.

For several days after the trip, in the midst of the business of the conference, I felt the positive impact of traveling in such a slow and mindful way. It brought me as much joy as I've experienced in some time. I felt a little like I had been transported to a slower time, to a place where the beauty around me could not be escaped, to a kind of attentiveness that my average day does not often hold.

This is what sometimes happens. We find ourselves with a keener than usual sense of the beauty and goodness of Life. At a recent lunch meeting I asked members of my congregation to describe a time when they had known joy. Several people spoke of being in the beauty of nature. Others about connections with loved ones. Some described a kind of affirmation that comes from service, or new learning, or challenging oneself. Even those who described the ordinary moments were talking about this kind of keen sense of the beauty and goodness of life.

I'm intentionally using the word "joy" rather than happiness or contentment. I'm using joy to describe what I believe is a characteristic of a life of faith—in the countless expressions that may take. I consider joy a universal attribute of full, rich, meaningful living. Different from happiness, pleasure, or fun. It can be present in spite of circumstance. In fact, some suggest that joy in the face of dire circumstance is the only way to judge true joy. I would say it is not an emotional quality, but a spiritual one. Like many other spiritual qualities, it is never fully realized, yet always promised. A keen sense of the beauty and goodness of life.

Unitarian Universalist minister Carl Scovel, minister emeritus at the historic King's Chapel in Boston, Massachusetts, describes joy as the aim of our faith in his Berry Street Essay to the 1994 UUA General Assembly in Fort Worth, Texas:

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, and to which we shall at last return.... Our work on earth is to explore, enjoy, and share this goodness. Neither duty nor suffering nor progress nor conflict—not even survival—is the aim of life, but joy. Deep, abiding, uncompromised joy. (See page five for a fuller version of this quote.)

There is a lot packed into Carl Scovel's concise definition of the heart of our faith. It begins with a simple statement about the nature of creation. At the heart of all that is there is goodness. This is a statement of faith. We don't know it. We can't know it. But we can live it. And Scovel says the way we live it is "to explore, enjoy, and share this goodness." To make deep, abiding, uncompromised joy our aim.

There are two things we must attend to in order to live this faith. First, we must be mindful of the world so we will experience, again and again, that abiding

Quest for meaning

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From joy springs
all creation,
By joy it is sustained,
Towards joy
it proceeds,
And unto joy
it returns.
—The Upanishads

A monthly for religious liberals

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goodness. This is how we cultivate that keen sense of life's beauty and goodness. We cannot bless something we do not see. We cannot offer a blessing if we are not open to the Life around us. We cannot bless the world if we do not attend to it.

As Anne Sexton writes in her poem "Welcome Morning":

*So while I think of it,
let me paint a thank-you on my
palm
for this God, this laughter of the
morning,
lest it go unspoken.
The joy that isn't shared, I've heard,
dies young.*

The second thing we must attend to is our own part of the goodness at the heart of all that is. We are not separate from this thing in which we place our faith. The power of goodness at the heart of things, whatever we call it, is not remote, untouchable, unmoved. The power of goodness at the heart of things, on the contrary, is as close as a lover's touch, the wind on our face, the song that rises up from us. It is not only beyond us, but also between us, and even within us. As the ancient Hindus wrote:

Do you sense the vast creative power of the universe? The power that creates all things, sustains all things, and claims them all in the end? Well, you don't have to bow down or feel insignificant, because you are part of that power. You are part of the infinite and the eternal, just as you are.

If this is so, that we are part of that power, that goodness, then we must attend to our part. Albert Schweitzer says it simply: "The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who have sought and found a way to serve." Service to the good at the heart of Creation is how we sustain joy in our lives, how we are faithful to that deep, abiding, uncompromising joy.

Two things: mindfulness of the world around us in order to cultivate a keen

sense of the goodness at the heart of things. (Gratitude is a part of this—but I think once that keen sense is cultivated, gratitude follows without any effort on our part.) And secondly, attention to our own part in creating and maintaining the goodness at the heart of things. Living in alignment with our faith—that is, answering goodness with goodness.

There are at least a couple of significant challenges to this idea that we can cultivate joy. Sometimes we cannot see the goodness around us. And, sometimes we cannot see the goodness in us. Both these challenges call us to practice.

To be faithful is to seek, again and again, to find joy.

In Tibetan Buddhism there is a practice called Tonglen. Roughly, it means "sending and taking." In her book, *The Places that Scare You*, Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön describes how using this practice can help us in our ability to rejoice, or find joy:

When we encounter pain in our life we breathe into our heart with the recognition that others also feel this. It's a way of acknowledging when we are closing down and of training to open up. When we encounter any pleasure or tenderness in our life, we cherish that and rejoice. Then we make the wish that others could also experience this delight.... In a nutshell, when life is pleasant, think of others. When life is a burden, think of others.

Practicing joy does not mean we never feel pain or fear or frustration. Faithfulness is not about believing that everything will always turn out okay. Carl Scovel's "Great Surmise" does not say that everything will always turn out fine. Sometimes things go terribly wrong. Always, we bear the knowledge that we will lose people we love. My

faith is not predicated on never feeling terrible grief. (Good thing.) My faith is that even with all the terrible grief we must bear, even in a world where war is too often thought to be the answer, even in a world where some people believe it is okay to torture and abuse other people, even in this world, an eternal goodness lies deep at the heart of Creation. And this goodness makes love possible.

If this is our faith, our responsibility is great. If we believe this, we are called to attend to the beauty and goodness. That means slowing down sometimes. It means looking deeply and compassionately. It means finding the courage to keep our hearts open. Painting thank-you on our palms for the laughter of the morning. Or singing a song of praise. In these ways we attend to the goodness at the heart of things.

And then, we must attend to our part in this goodness. That means making more of it. It means not being tempted by violence. It means helping people who need help. Serving something beyond ourselves. Sharing what we have. Protecting things that matter. Transforming the world through our own acts of love and justice. In these ways we answer beauty and goodness with beauty and goodness.

We do not attend to any of these things perfectly. Sometimes we are distracted by the wrong things. We are afraid to open ourselves to the fullness of Life. We move too fast, thinking maybe that will save us from some anticipated pain or grief. There are many reasons we let joy slip away. This is what it is to be human.

To be faithful is to seek, again and again, to find joy. Deep, abiding, uncompromising joy. This takes discipline. A keen sense that the beauty and goodness of Life is fleeting. So we must practice attending to the goodness and to our part of the goodness.

*The joy that isn't shared, I've heard,
dies young. ■*

Rational Exuberance

BY AMANDA L. AIKMAN,
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When I started my training for spiritual direction, I figured that it would involve a lot of reading the classics of spirituality—all those Desert Fathers and Mothers and Saints—and a lot of sitting still, contemplating God’s emptiness or something. I may have also thought it would be a pretty serious business. Well, it was a pretty serious business. But it was not at all solemn.

Sister Pat, our teacher, frequently giggled with delight, and reminded us all the time how delightful and fun spiritual life is supposed to be. The guest speakers that Sister Pat brought in to work with us were an assortment of personalities, but they all seemed to have this joyfulness about them, a bubbling-over sort of quiet exuberance.

Somehow, we have gained a notion that spirituality, spiritual practice, is a matter of being quiet and sitting still and attempting to quiet the mind. Certainly, many spiritual practices are like that. In fact, one of my pet theories is that introverts seem to have written all the great spiritual classics, so the quiet, inward-looking path is the dominant strain. Why haven’t more noisy extroverts written great spiritual classics? Probably because they are too busy out having fun—or, even more likely, because they are regarded as lightweights.

The fact is, each person truly has her or his own spiritual path. You can start out on one of the familiar and well-trodden paths—zazen meditation, for instance, or walking meditation or prayer or chanting—and then follow what is calling to you, blazing your own trail into the wilderness, inventing

your own spiritual practice. Do whatever seems fun and real to you, whatever fills your heart with a feeling of true connection and satisfaction.

Two poles of human experience are depression and exuberance. Depression is believed to be an undesirable state, so far more psychological literature has been devoted to this pole than to its opposite. In her book, *Exuberance*, psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison tries to correct this imbalance, and to pay loving attention to the joyful energy of exuberance.

Why do we so often ignore this side of existence? Why do we have so few times of exuberance?

We have our good old Puritan ancestors to blame, I suppose, as usual, given their deep suspicion of pleasure. But also, the line between exuberance and mania is a very ill-defined one. We are afraid of mental illness, and so we are suspicious of overtly exuberant behavior. Perhaps we fear getting too happy, in case we can’t stop. And some of these fears are actually grounded in reality. A University of Maryland research project studied epidemics of uncontrollable laughter.

One...started in 1962 in Tanganyika, in a boarding school for teenage girls. Three girls started laughing. Uncontrollable laughter, crying, and agitation quickly spread to 95 of the 159 students (no teacher was affected). The school was forced to close a month and a half later; it reopened, briefly, but then had to close again after 57 girls were stricken. Before finally abating two and a half years later, this plague of laughter had spread through villages like a prairie fire, forcing the temporary closing of more than 14 schools and affecting about 1,000 people....Quarantine of infected villages was the only means of blocking the epidemic’s advance.

So it is natural that we are a little wary of those with a propensity towards over-the-top hilarity and exuberance.

But this type of disposition, this type of mind, may be crucial to our survival as a species. James Watson, the co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, was asked why the genes for manic-depressive illness survive in the gene pool. He responded:

Survival might often depend on not if we think two and two is four, but on being slightly wild. Because life is just much more complicated than when we try to organize it. And so a brain which is slightly disconnected from reality might be a good thing. I think when we do science we see that a little madness does help, and you propose bizarre things which everyone says can’t be true.

Why do we so often ignore this side of existence? Why do we have so few times of exuberance?

One of the reasons exuberance is frowned upon in our society is that those who are exuberant are generally regarded as lightweight, lacking in *gravitas*, somehow childlike.

Because of the suspicious attitude towards exuberance that we have inherited, because of the grownup attitude that we have adopted, or because of sadnesses in our lives, or social pressures, we may not be able to become exuberant as *ourselves*. We may need to step entirely out of our usual persona to let ourselves be exuberant.

One great depiction of this is the wonderful Japanese movie, “Shall We Dance?” in which a dour salaryman gets a little glimpse into a ballroom dance studio every day on his commute. As his train passes the dance studio, he glances in for a moment and sees a beautiful dance instructor and her students, whirling around in a flash of brightness and color that contrasts dramatically with the grayness of his

train and his tightly constricted life. Day after day, he gazes longingly into the dance studio as his train tears past. And one day he steps off his train and enters the dance studio and signs up for lessons. His wife becomes so suspicious at his new joyfulness that she suspects he's having an affair, and hires a detective to see what he's up to. But all he's doing is dancing.

Is there anything like that in your life? Something you get glimpses of and yearn to try—but somehow you don't, because it's sort of, well, undignified, or scary, or not in character for you? I have a long list of such things—juggling, hot air ballooning, rollerblading, to name just a few. Perhaps the only thing to do is to adopt a new persona, and temporarily become someone who dares to try that new path, that possibly dangerous, possibly life-changing new journey into exuberance. What change might you make?

So here's a story about a guy I knew who made a huge change in his life, a change of his whole persona. He was a Mormon in his mid-forties, a married guy with four kids, a church organist, who got divorced and decided he wanted to explore all the things he had not been able to experience in his previously upright, straight and narrow, teetotaling, caffeine-free life.

One of those things he had not fully explored was his sexuality. This guy—I'll call him Jim—had long wondered if he was bisexual. The minute his divorce was final, he dove into the gay lifestyle. He moved away from his small town and into the gay neighborhood in Seattle. His job took him all over the U.S., and now whenever he went out of town he started checking out the gay bars and meeting guys and having a high old time. This all happened within just a few months. So, he gets back from one of his trips and wants to see me to update me about his exciting new life. We're walking along in his new neighborhood and he's telling me about his new life and I'm

astounded. He's making the kind of radical change in his life that many people dream of but few actually dare to do. He's having an absolute blast for the first time in his adult life.

So we're walking along and my mouth is just hanging open as Jim is telling me these hair-raising stories about his romantic adventures. And then he pauses. Hems and haws. Looks over his shoulder. Whispers, "Say, Amanda, can I ask you something? I've been embarrassed to ask anybody about this." I'm wildly curious to learn what merits the lowered voice in light of all the extraordinary stories he's been very freely telling me, so I whisper back, "Sure. Go ahead."

I believe that that desire to embrace life is a divine gift.

He looks around warily and asks, dead serious, "What's the difference between a latte and a cappuccino?"

These are hard times in the world, and certainly we must find our way through much more dangerous and perplexing problems than you will ever find in line at Starbucks. Economic woes, wars and rapidly escalating climate change are only a few of our seemingly insurmountable problems. It can be hard to find hope at such times. And it can be very hard to cut loose and enjoy ourselves. But being unhappy because of feelings of guilt doesn't help the general situation. In fact, there is a good case to be made that exuberance and delight are worthy pursuits at all times.

If you feel like doing a little Bible study, I recommend the book of Ecclesiastes, which is part of the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. The writer of the book, known as the Preacher, is an old man who has observed life carefully and experienced much. Like many Unitarian Universalists, he is not content with easy pat

answers, such as declaring that virtue leads to rewards. Instead, says the Preacher, there are no guarantees of justice in life:

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent...but time and chance happen to them all.

So what is the meaning of life? he asks. And he concludes that while people should live with virtue for its own sake, they should also relish the duties and pleasures of life as much as they possibly can, giving life their full attention and effort and enjoyment:

Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart.... Enjoy life with the wife whom you love.... Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might....

In the Jewish tradition, there is a teaching that on judgment day, each person will be asked why she did not enjoy life's pleasures more.

Kay Redfield Jamison warns, "Exuberance and joy are fragile matters. Bubbles burst; a wince of disapproval can cut dead a whistle or abort a cartwheel." Let us resolve not to wince at exuberance, not to cast disapproval at those who are harmlessly cavorting and rejoicing. Let's practice exuberance, and support it wherever we may find it.

Sisters and brothers, I believe that God loves you very much. I believe that you have within you a beautiful wild woman or man who wants to embrace life in all its fullness. I believe that that desire to embrace life is a divine gift. That longing to connect, that longing to give your gifts to a hurting world, that longing to kick up your heels and laugh till you cry, or even infect your whole village with laughter—give in to it.

May you be blessed with exuberance and joy, so as to make the world a brighter place. ■

Happy Bird

by **John Sanger**, CLF member incarcerated in Oklahoma

I saw a meadowlark today, sitting atop the razor wire on the north fence. It's been many months since meadowlarks were here last. Many months. I've missed seeing their bright yellow bellies and hearing their shrill cries that seem to say, "Happy bird."

Three notes: hap-PEE-bird.

Hearing those notes makes me happy, too. Indeed, it makes me joyful, because recognizing and celebrating the meadowlark's seeming happiness makes me realize that joy can be found everywhere, even here, inside the razor wire that he's sitting on. ■

The Great Surmise

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.

This goodness is ultimate—not fate nor freedom, not mystery, energy, order nor finitude, but this good intent in creation is our source, our center, and our destiny. And with everything else we know in life, the strategies and schedules, the technology and tasks, with all we must know of freedom, fate and finitude, of energy and order and mystery, we must know this, first of all, the love from which we were born, which bears us now, and which will receive us at the end. Our work on earth is to explore, enjoy, and share this goodness, to know it without reserve or hesitation. "Too much of a good thing," said Mae West "is wonderful." Sound doctrine.

Do you see how the Great Surmise stands all our logic and morality on its ear? Neither duty nor suffering nor progress nor conflict—not even survival—is the aim of life, but joy. Deep abiding, uncompromised joy.

Excerpt from the Berry Street Essay, 1994, by Carl Scovel, minister emeritus, King's Chapel, Boston, Massachusetts ■

Happiness

There's just no accounting for happiness, or the way it runs up like a prodigal who comes back to the dust at your feet having squandered a fortune far away.

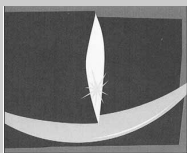
And how can you not forgive?
You make a feast in honor of what was lost, and take from its place the finest garment, which you saved for an occasion you could not imagine, and you weep night and day to know that you were not abandoned, that happiness saved its most extreme form for you alone.

No, happiness is the uncle you never knew about, who flies a single-engine plane onto the grassy landing strip, hitchhikes into town, and inquires at every door until he finds you asleep midafternoon as you so often are during the unmerciful hours of your despair.

It comes to the monk in his cell.
It comes to the woman sweeping the street with a birch broom, to the child whose mother has passed out from drink. It comes to the lover, to the dog chewing a sock, to the pusher, to the basket maker, and to the clerk stacking cans of carrots in the night.

It even comes to the boulder in the perpetual shade of pine barrens, to rain falling on the open sea, to the wineglass, weary of holding wine.

by **Jane Kenyon**, from *Collected Poems*. Copyright © 2005 by *The Estate of Jane Kenyon*. Reprinted with the permission of *The Permissions Company, Inc.* on behalf of *Graywolf Press*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, www.graywolfpress.org ■



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From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

As I began my monthly rituals of circling around writing my *Quest* column—rituals which generally include brooding, conversations, naps, internet searches, leafing through poetry books, walking the dogs, cleaning the kitchen, reading friends' updates on Facebook, casting about in my mind for something wise I read or heard long ago that I can share—rituals of circling similar to my dogs' as they prepare to lie down, following some cellular memory for creating a nesting spot—as I did all of this, something shocking emerged in my awareness: I have never preached or written, explicitly, about joy!

I'm not saying that joy hasn't been part of many other things I've reflected about—celebration, sexuality, justice, love, grief—it's just that I have never taken the time to reflect specifically and explicitly on joy.

I am a joyful person. I make games out of things I find tedious. I depend on joy daily to make my days interesting and meaningful, to bring me to life. So what's with that? I asked myself. Here are the three responses that came to me—see if any of them resonates with you.

First of all, there is a part of me—a part, I am sad to report, that seems to hold considerable sway despite the fact that I don't actually believe it—that thinks joy isn't as “smart” or as “deep” as, say, grief or fear or anxiety. Kierkegaard wrote *Fear and Trembling*, and *A Sickness Unto Death*, so he must be really smart! Books with joy in their title all too often seem (at least in my mind) to feature badly drawn pictures of unicorns and rainbows.

Second, there is a superstitious part of me that believes talking about joy

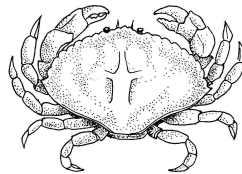
could bring sorrow right to my door. “How ironic,” I imagine the preacher intoning at my funeral, “That someone who devoted her life to sharing joy led such a horrific life and died such a hideous and tragically early death!”

And third, there is a part of me—and I really hate this one, but there it is—that still buys the Puritan belief that in some way joy is sinful, wrong. How can I be happy, I find myself wondering, when so many people are living in war zones, droughts or famines, living with grief and illness and poverty? How is it fair or considerate for me to not only be happy but then to inflict my happiness on the poor sorrowful world?

Grounded joy is about knowing that your experience and who you are is OK.

As I stared these beliefs in their smug little faces, I thought to myself, “I need help.” Rev. Amanda Aikman, who wrote one of this month's sermons, identifies herself on her website as a “Unitarian Universalist Minister and Joyfulness Consultant.” Clearly, she was the person to call.

I told Amanda about my rainbows and unicorns skepticism. I told her that, earlier that very day, in the airport, I had passed a New Age bookstore where every title seemed to include the word joy. In fairness, not a single rainbow nor unicorn was to be seen. Still, it wore me out just looking at the titles—actually made me feel a little crabby if truth be told. I began to feel as if I was supposed to add a joyfulness plan to all the other plans I already don't do very well with every day—work plans, food plans, exercise



plans, meditation plans, budget plans—all told, a nap was beginning to sound pretty good.

Predictably enough, Amanda had me guffawing in no time. It's not about forcing yourself to adopt a particular worldview about joy, she said. Joy has to be grounded, authentic. Grounded joy is about knowing that your experience and who you are is OK. It's not about taking one more class, reading one more book, doing one more thing in order to make yourself joyful. It's about loving what you love.

We hung up, and I sat with that for a while and felt, well, grounded. And joyful. Joyful in a plain, simple kind of way. Joyful in a way that made me remember an email from Lorraine Dennis, CLF's Executive Director, after a conversation about joy. Lorraine wrote:

I started thinking about joy a few years ago when I decided that New Year's resolutions are stupid, but resolving to do more of something simple was smart. That first year, I chose to find joy wherever I could see it. We had gotten SO much joy on our sabbatical trip by just looking at beautiful places that I wanted to duplicate it. That's when I fell in love with the 30-second glimpse of the lake I get each morning on the train to Boston. It's like a little happy pill every morning—and when I see the swans on the lake, it's amazing. It's a silly thing that really feeds me. Same thing with hyacinths on Hancock Street, or a glimpse of the Boston skyline.

So, where do you get glimpses of joy? For me, it's the simple things: brooding, conversations, naps, internet searches, leafing through poetry books, walking the dogs, cleaning the kitchen, reading friends' updates on Facebook, casting about in my mind for something wise I read or heard long ago that I can share...and yes, writing another *Quest* column. So, enjoy the summer, OK? See you in September! ■

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR
LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF
THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I figured that in exploring the topic of joy it would be good to ask an expert for some input. So I decided to interview my dog, Piper, who is pretty much the most ridiculously joyful being I have ever encountered. We say of Piper that her emotions run the gamut from cheerful to ecstatic (with exceptions for baths and/or our other dog getting treats which "rightfully" belong to her). Here's how the conversation went:

Lynn: So, Piper, can you share with us the secret to finding so much joy in your life?

Piper: What's not to be happy about? I'm here. You're here.

Lynn: Good point. One of the greatest sources of joy is the companionship of those we love. The experience of unconditional love, of just being in the presence of someone who knows you and loves you just as you are has to be one of the greatest joys in the world. What would you say are other important sources of joy?

Piper: Snake! I kill it! Ha ha!
(*Pounces on favorite squeaky snake toy.*)

Lynn: Oh, I see. What you're saying is that in order to be truly joyful, everyone needs a sense of purpose, a mission in life to accomplish.

Piper: Snake! (*Shakes snake toy vigorously*)

Lynn: Um, you get that that isn't a *real* snake, right?

Piper: Piper is queen of the snakes. I kill it. I kill them all!



Lynn: So what you're saying is that other people's perceptions of our

activities shouldn't make a difference in the joy we find in life. I might think that what you have in your mouth is just a raggedy stuffed toy, but if killing it is meaningful to you, then it doesn't much matter if it's meaningful to me. Don't let other people rain on your parade, right?

Piper: Parade?

Lynn: No, not at the moment. But I'm sure you'd enjoy marching in a parade.

Piper: I could dance!

Lynn: Yes, you could. And I'm sure people would enjoy seeing a dancing dog. I suppose that another path to joyfulness is being ready to share your unique gifts with the world, to be able to feel like your own particular ministry makes life better in some way for the people around you. The truly joyful don't hide their light under a bushel.

Piper: What's a bushel?
Can I eat it?

Lynn: No, sorry.

Piper: It would be better if I could eat it. How about a snack?

Lynn: I see what you mean. People tend to want to make joy into something abstract, something that we'll find some time in the future when we're older or thinner or done with the project or more enlightened or whatever. But most often joy comes to us in the small things that are close to hand, in our pure animal pleasure in the moment.

Piper: So now would be a good moment for cheese, yeah?

Lynn: It could be. But here's what I'm wondering. How do you make joy stay, in a world where

pleasures are so fleeting? If I give you a piece of cheese, it will be gone in an instant. The way you eat, maybe half an instant. And then the cheese will be gone. Doesn't that make you sad?

Piper: We could get *more* cheese.

Lynn: True. But think about it. Life is like that piece of cheese. No matter how much you enjoy it, it's going to be over way too soon. So how do we find joy, knowing that life is short and death is just around the corner?

Piper: Around the corner? Are we going for a walk? (*Bounces up and down*) Let's go!

Lynn: Hmm.... So you're saying that we never know what's around the corner. Life as we know it has to end, but who can say what happens after that? All of us are on a journey, and maybe death is just another part of the journey, so why not be open to finding joy at all points along the path. Is that it?

Piper: I love the path! Can we go now? Can we bring cheese?

Lynn: Sure, why not? Thanks for sharing all your insights. ■





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From Blossoms

From blossoms comes
this brown paper bag of peaches
we bought 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 to joy, from wing to wing,
from blossom to blossom to
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.



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