



A Bright Golden Thread

BY NELL NEWTON, COMMUNITY MINISTER, AUSTIN, TEXAS

When a weaver starts a new piece, she first must tie the warp strings on her loom to form an underlying base of the fabric she will create. Warp strings are the long strings that are fixed in place, while the *woof* or *wef* threads will be the ones she sends back and forth to create the body, texture, and design of the fabric. As she weaves, she might cut the woof threads, add in new ones, or change colors or textures. But she won't cut the warp strings until she removes the fabric from the loom. Warp strings remain constant.

Musician Carol King gave us an analogy I love: "My life is like a tapestry of rich and royal hue." I like to look back and see the patterns that have emerged across my life. There are patches where the woof threads are thin or frayed by sadness, poverty, loneliness, and disconnection, but those are also the very places where warp threads show more clearly. For me, one of those warp threads is joy.

Now, before we go further, let's review the difference between *joy* and *happiness*. Happiness is a feeling, external and temporary. It comes from something outside of the self—a purchase, an encounter, etc. It's what I call the "sparkly pony" emotion. It's fun. It feels good. And it's over pretty quickly.

Joy, on the other hand, is internal and it lasts. And it can coincide with other feelings, like grief. Joy can be present in the middle of a life storm, whereas happiness can't survive the tempest. And while happiness can increase over a person's life span, it is also strongly determined by genetics and personality. Joy is more of a constant, and people can strengthen it by learning to recognize its nuances.

So, to recap: Happiness: external, temporary. Joy: internal, constant.

Dennis Prager, in his book called *Happiness is a Big Problem: A Human Nature Repair Manual*, makes the argument that happiness is a *moral imperative*. He claims that as members of society, we should strive to be happy not solely for personal improvement, but also as an altruistic endeavor to improve the larger society. According to Prager, we have an obligation to at least *act* as happy as possible, because it affects others. He likens it to a form of hygiene. And he contends that everyone is capable of it. Yes, we have problems, which we share with our close friends, but we shouldn't inflict a bad mood upon anyone. He insists that happy people make the world better and unhappy people make the world worse.

I heard an interview with him and found his message stirring. It made me say "Yeah!" But something in the back of my brain was not agreeing so easily. I hushed it down for a few years, but finally went back and took a more critical look at his work, and things got a lot less simple.

Prager is a conservative commentator, and when I went poking through more of his arguments, I found some real problems with other things he says. But let's just stick with his "happiness is a moral obligation" statement. Why was I so ready to swallow that one? What made it so compelling to me? Prager is Jewish, but his message is strongly consistent with modern Christians who would link an individual's faith with their cheerful countenance. And, it's awfully consistent with messages from the New Age movement that if we can control our words, we can control our perception of reality. And because we're so powerful, we should choose to be happy. If we're not happy, it's our own fault because we're not trying hard enough.

And at that point it is as if expressing anything but happiness is somehow being disloyal or inobservant of the grandeur of one's God. So this whole happiness thing becomes a theological statement as well as a moral imperative.

Quest

Vol. LXXI, No 7

July/August 2016

A flower blossoms for its own joy

—Oscar Wilde

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT JOY

- A BRIGHT GOLDEN THREAD
Nell Newton
- WE NEED JOY
Peggy Clarke
- MISSING MUDITA
Karen G. Johnston
- JOY IN ORDINARY TIME
Meg Barnhouse
- FROM YOUR MINISTER
Meg Riley
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING
Lynn Ungar
- AT THE HEART OF ALL CREATION
Carl Scovel

But where does this leave people who are genetically or neurologically predisposed to depression or unhappiness? What are we to do with ourselves if we are simply unable to plaster an artificial smile over our sadness or despair? Are we failing when we fall into a funk? Are we being selfish if we get stressed? Are we disconnected from the God of our understanding if we're overwhelmed? Does it mean that we are denying the presence of grace? What are we to make of this?

I wasn't particularly in the mood for joy, but I put it on my to-do list.

What if joy might be an antidote to this heavy-handed insistence on happiness?

As part of my wrestling with these ideas, I sat down with a man I know who is living with depression and bi-polar disease. He's funny and lovely, and rather like Eeyore. This is nice, because often I feel like Piglet. I enjoy being with him even if he's not enjoying being anywhere. I asked him about joy, happiness, moral imperatives—the whole mess.

As I suspected, due to the neurochemistry in his brain, he's not happy most of the time, and he has difficulty recognizing joy when it shows up. I think he appreciates the way that joy can accommodate other emotions, like grief. He's seen grieving families have joyful memories even amidst their tears. But when he is in a depressed state, he's just not going to recognize joy even if it perches on his bedpost and sings him awake each morning. He's too occupied carrying around the heavy gray stone of depression.

Our theologies are very similar—variations on panentheism, which sees everything as a part of God, and variations on Process Theology, which recognizes that we are co-creators with God. When you go around saying that, it can sound all sparkly and mystical,

until you get down to the fact that if everything is a part of God, that includes *everything*. Even bad smells and shin splints. Even the heavy gray stone that he's carrying around.

So, even though it's not particularly uplifting, my friend's depression brings him painfully close to understanding his God. And he has discovered that if it comes down to being right or being kind, he's choosing to be kind. He can't do happiness, but he can do kindness. And the choosing is what allows him to feel that he is participating, not just surviving. Because kindness creates connectedness, it brings him about as close to recognizing joy as he can manage. His moral imperative is to be kind. (Maybe that is why it feels good to be a Piglet to his Eeyore.)

In the warp strings of his life, joy doesn't flash as brightly, but the many strands of kindness are creating a steady pattern of beauty and satisfaction.

Sometimes even I get a bit Eeyore-ish. I'm generally a person of cheerful disposition, but recently, due to pressures of family and school, I was growing a bit testy, a bit snappish. Peevish, even. Family members began saying things like, "What's up with you?" and "I'll leave you alone now..."

It took a person outside our family to listen to my snarlings and snappings and point out the obvious: "Nell, you seem to have lost sight of the excitement of all the cool things you're doing. Where is the joy?"

Joy? Arrgh!

Yes, I agreed, I had lost sight of any joy that might be attending the work of ministry, and parenting teenagers, and working on a good marriage. I was too distracted by the sticky bits of deadlines and a stupid cold and general fears to see the joy underneath everything. It happens.

I grumped away from that conversation with a grim determination to go find some joy, dammit.

I wasn't particularly in the mood for joy, but I put it on my to-do list. Because I can do that sort of thing. There is nothing preventing me from paying attention to the joy that is a constant—a bright golden thread that is woven throughout my days on this planet.

An hour later I was buying groceries. That was also on my to-do list and higher up the list than "Find joy." I got everything on my list, and easily had enough money to pay. I had remembered to bring reusable bags. And then, as I always do, I wheeled my full cart out of the store, quickly scanned the area, stuck my tongue out just *so*, pushed off, hopped on, and rode the cart clattering down the ramp into the parking lot. Eight feet away from a parked car I jumped off and took control of the cart. It is a little ritual I have.

At my car I loaded up the groceries and then spotted a brilliant crimson ladybug on the door. No black spots, just solid bright red. "Well, what are you doing here? There's nothing but asphalt and cars around here." I scooped it up and set it down on the dashboard of my car. I drove home while the bug marched around in front of me, a glowing red dot of independence. At home I coaxed it onto my hand and stepped out of the car. When I opened my hand, the tiny red beetle bug opened its wings and flew straight over to my favorite rosebush to find a lurch of aphids amid the roses.

And just like that, I saw joy in the middle of my life storm, in the middle of my anxiety and peevishness: the beauty of a beetle and roses, the deep satisfaction of bringing home food for my family, the silliness of riding on a grocery cart. Some of these joys were external, but they shone light upon the deep everyday gleam of these bright places in the tapestry of my life.

And then I gave thanks again that I can recognize joy so easily, pivoting in an afternoon. Maybe not all the way to sparkly pony happiness, but definitely at least to joy. ■

We Need Joy



BY PEGGY CLARKE,
MINISTER, FIRST
UNITARIAN CHURCH OF
WESTCHESTER,
HASTINGS ON HUDSON,
NEW YORK

After college, my best friend and I drove from her home in Texas through the Southwest. We put a cab on the back of her old Ford Step-side pick-up truck so we could sleep in the back, and we toured the country, talking to truckers on the CB radio and meeting fellow travelers along the way.

We spent about a week in the canyons of Utah after befriending the staff at a hotel at Bryce National Park, thereby avoiding paying for a room. One night, deep in the dark, we sat on the edge of the canyon talking about the world and the beauty that abounds. I didn't know what time it was, but I knew morning had to be nearby. One of the guys we were with asked if we could be quiet for a bit, so we sat, feet hanging over the edge, in complete silence.

And as we sat, the most magnificent, most glorious thing happened. The sun rose. It broke through the darkness in such a grand display of power and grace I would not have been surprised had the rocks and trees



started to sing *Alleluia*. We sat awestruck until we spontaneously broke out in applause, hollering and cheering in gratitude.

Joy is not in the circumstance, but in the response. The sun rises every day, like it or not. Being entranced by it is a choice.

I've been an activist my entire adult life. I've fought and struggled and disputed and attacked and argued with the

best of them. I've drawn lines and crossed lines. I've lived with and cried with the poorest of the poor. The well-spring from which this work is fed is an abiding hope and an experience of joy. Were this not true in my life, my first night with a broken child would have been my last. I have never been charged by my anger. I know it exists and I confront it each time I look into the face of suffering, but it is not what propels me forward.

When I was deepest in that work, I put a sign on my door with a sketch of two women frolicking on the beach and a quote from Emma Goldman which said: "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." Pollyanna, I am not. But if the work for peace isn't sourced by joy, the world we dream

Joy is not in the
circumstance,
but in the response.

about
will
never
be made
mani-
fest.

Take a moment to remember. Remember the first time you spoke your truth. Remember the rest you took in the garden. Remember the conversation that went deep into the night. Remember the meal you shared with people you love. Remember the birth of your child. Remember the silence of a morning or the laughter of an evening. Those moments are the wellspring of our work.

There is much work ahead. Rights to fight for and wrongs to protest. A planet to protect and people to value. There's a margin that needs to be made center and a center that needs to be made whole. So we need joy.

We need to remember that grace abounds and the sun rises in magnificence every day. We need to celebrate the tiny gifts we are given as if the universe shines her great fortune upon us, and we need to celebrate the tiny gifts we give as if we ourselves are the universe. We need to applaud the sunrise until we are propelled back into the world filled with joy. ■

The CLF would like to thank the following congregations who, between March 2015 and March 2016 have taken up collections to support our ministries. These contributions from congregations are helping Carry the Flame of Unitarian Universalism across the globe. We are grateful and couldn't do it without their support! Thank you.

UU Church at

Shelter Rock, New York
Chalice Light UU,

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

First Unitarian Society of

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

UU Congregation of Lake County,

Eustis, Florida

First Universalist Church of

Minneapolis, Minnesota

UU Fellowship of

West Plains, Missouri

First Unitarian Church of

Rochester, New York

All Souls UU Church,

Colorado Springs, Colorado

UUs of Clearwater, Florida

First Universalist Society of

Hartland, Vermont

Unitarian Church of

Underwood, Minnesota

Kitsap UU Fellowship,

Bremerton, Washington

First Unitarian Church of

Dallas, Texas

Universalist Society of

West Burke, Vermont

Eliot Unitarian Chapel,

Kirkwood, Missouri

UU Women of Greater Lynn,

Swampscott, Massachusetts

Chalice UU Congregation,

Escondido, California

Sacred Path Church UU,

Indianapolis, Indiana

Champlain Valley UU Society,

Middlebury, Vermont

Unity Church—Unitarian,

St. Paul, Minnesota



Missing Mudita

BY KAREN G. JOHNSTON,
INTERN MINISTER, FIRST PARISH CHURCH
OF GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS

I was looking for the missing
brahmavihara.

While walking around the beautiful grounds of the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts, where I was spending three days in a self-directed silent retreat, I happened upon many outdoor benches. All are simple; most are unadorned. But a few of them—three to be exact—have one of the *brahmaviharas*, the “super virtues,” carved into them.

Just what is *mudita*? Sympathetic joy.

I first found *upekkha*: equanimity.

Then I happened upon *karuna*:
compassion.

I went looking and found *metta*:
lovingkindness.

And I kept looking, for I knew there are four *brahmaviharas*, also known as the four abodes, or four boundless states. But the missing bench was nowhere to be found. As I was getting ready to leave IMS, with my three days of focus and centering about to end, I asked a woman in the office where I might find the fourth. She didn't know. She thought it might have been damaged in one of the ice storms and turned into kindling. Oh. A chance to meditate on the impermanence of things, but not so much a chance to explore these super virtues.

I never did find *mudita*. At least not on a bench at IMS.

No worries. I am used to looking for it, something I must do regularly, for it is not well taught in our competitive and individualistic society. Temperamentally, it is not my natural state. In some circumstances, the exact opposite of *mudita* arises within me: jealousy;



Photo by Steve Lieman

self-interested, competitive impulses; even the rather uninspirational state of *schadenfreude*—pleasure in the misfortunes of

others. It takes intention and effort, sometimes a mighty effort, to cultivate this quality of *mudita* within myself, and to renew an authentic commitment to it.

Just what is *mudita*? Sympathetic joy. Sharing in the joy of others—their accomplishments, their good fortune, their well-being, their existence. Sharing not just in the joy of those close to us, but in that of others. *All* others. Even the guy who just cut you off in traffic and made it through the light, while you are waiting at the longest. red. traffic. light. ever. It is moving away from any sense that the happiness of others might in some way threaten or impinge upon one's own happiness or success. That, my friends, is not what they taught me in high school.

It wasn't even something I had mastered by the time I arrived in seminary. I mean, I knew that one is supposed to be happy for others. I wasn't raised in the wild. I had manners. Yet, I found I was sometimes...often...*more than I care to admit* feeling competitive towards and threatened by my peers. As if I were sure that someone else's achievement or victory would diminish my own. I mean, weren't we all competing, more or less, for the same finite jobs? I was definitely missing *mudita* as a spiritual guide!

But coming into real relationship with my peers and colleagues—both in person and virtually—knowing their stories, their gifts and their challenges, accepting their feedback (both the gentle and the painful) has multiplied my capacity for *mudita*. It comes now with more ease, like a seed that was planted and later takes root and grows. As Nyanaponika Thera writes:

The seed of mudita can grow into a strong plant which will blossom forth and find fruition in many other virtues, as a kind of beneficial “chain reaction”: magnanimity, tolerance, generosity (of both heart and purse), friendliness, and compassion. When unselfish joy grows, many noxious weeds in the human heart will die a natural death (or will, at least, shrink): jealousy and envy, ill will in various degrees and manifestations, cold-heartedness, miserliness (also in one's concern for others), and so forth. Unselfish joy can, indeed, act as a powerful agent in releasing dormant forces of the Good in the human heart.

With practice, it has sometimes come as my first reaction. (Though, I confess, not always. But I can laugh at myself when I see jealousy or competition rising within me.) It seems to me that the practice of *mudita* is a way to live the affirmation of the interdependent web of all existence, to live into the truth (not the belief, not the thought) that there is No Separation. Because if your happiness is a source of my happiness, your success is a source of my joy, then we are bound to one another in deep ways.

What is it the great Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hahn has said about our purpose here? “We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.”

Mudita affirms and grows our natural bent towards mutual aid and cooperative action. It is the very renunciation of competition, of aggression, of jealousy and envy—all of which are also natural and exist within us, yet are best skillfully left to their own impermanence, rather than unskillfully practicing them until they become ruts in our brains and tendencies in our habits. With my Unitarian Universalist eyes, I see *mudita* as a relational, covenantal version of humility. I am not the center of the universe—not simply because I am in relationship with you, but also because I experience joy centered not on my fortunes, but rather on yours. ■



Joy in Ordinary Time

BY MEG
BARNHOUSE,
SENIOR MINISTER,
FIRST UNITARIAN

UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF AUSTIN, TEXAS

My Mama was a second grade teacher at the Gladwyne Elementary School in the rich suburbs of Philadelphia. She loved the children, but she was shy with the parents, who were financiers, pro ball players and attorneys, members of the Junior League, cricket clubs, fox-hunting clubs. For Christmas she would get amazing presents. One year she got a bottle of Joy perfume, then \$150 an ounce. I don't know that she ever wore it. She was keeping it for a special occasion. She kept it so long that it finally evaporated.

About other things she was more openhanded. We had grandfather's china and silver, which she often used. "That's what they are meant for, to be used," she said. "No sense in saving them. You'd never see them at all that way."

That openhandedness didn't extend to her own person. She wore sensible clothes, comfortable shoes, white cotton underwear. She had grown up the child of missionaries, and, whether she wanted it or not, that background was deep in her. She looked respectable and kind. She was cute and cheerful and funny.

Joy perfume didn't fit who she seemed to be. A daughter never sees all the sides of her mother, though. It makes me smile to think that she harbored a hope that there would come an occasion where it *could* be her, where she might walk into a room smelling rich and sophisticated, cherished and valued, where it would be just the thing for her to wear. She let my sister and me smell it whenever we wanted to.

The bottle sat like an honored but intimidating guest on her dresser. Whenever we smelled it we marveled at how much it had cost.

I don't remember it ever occurring to me to wear it.

I want to let this lesson deep into me. Celebrate the body, the trooper of a body, that carries you through life, that pleasures you and lets you dance. Celebrate your body now, before you have lost the weight, before you get your muscle definition, before you feel justified by the harsh eyes of your expectations.

Life is mostly ordinary time. Ordinary time, shot through with light and pain and love. Lavish joy on ordinary time.

Celebrate being alive, drawing breath; celebrate that you are achingly sad today and that it will pass. It is good to be able to feel feelings. Celebrate that there was a love so big and good that it hurts to lose it. That there was a time so sweet that you ache, remembering. Celebrate those things. Honor the



flowering of the tomato plants, the opening of the day lilies, the lemon smell of magnolias. Honor the ache of your heart and the tears falling.

Life is mostly ordinary time. Ordinary time, shot through with light and pain and love. Lavish joy on ordinary time. Hope is a wonderful thing, but not if it makes you put off splashing yourself with Joy.

From Waking Up the Karma Fairy: Life Lessons and Other Holy Adventures, by Meg Barnhouse, published by Skinner House in 2004, and available through inSpirit, a UU Book and Gift Shop (www.uubookstore.org). ■

Simple Joy

by JOHN S., CLF PRISONER MEMBER

Shortly after I watched the full moon slide behind the trees on the ridge outside my cell window, Dusty, a young orange mackerel tabby tomcat, made his morning round meowing to everyone he met what sounded to me a lot like "Good Morning." That was a great start to a day that got even better.

As I walked to the mess hall for breakfast, I spotted two killdeer on the ground apparently hunting for bugs before the sun came up. Instead of flying, as I expected, they continued on their mission, ignoring my presence. I've never been that close to killdeer before. Classy elegance.

Later, while gazing out my window, I spotted our neighborhood peregrine falcon cruising over the field that lies between the fence near my building and the ridge. Effortlessly, he glided gracefully; then, in a blur, he dove to the ground. Streamlined power.

To crown an already wonderful day, my favorite red-tailed hawk appeared, alighting atop one of his favorite perches, a utility pole near the ridge. He stretched his wings wide, holding them at their limit momentarily, as if he knew I was watching and wanted to acknowledge my presence. Feathered majesty.

It is hard to believe that anyone had a more joyous day than I. ■

"When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy." —Rumi

Every day we seek to build joy through our CLF ministries. Please make your gift of \$100 and help sustain the CLF and our ability to help spread joy in the world! You can give by going online at www.clfuu.org/give or by calling 1-800-231-3027. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I was blessed with an optimistic, joyful disposition, which I inherited from my mother. I say this with gratitude, and with no more pride about it than I have about inheriting white privilege. A disposition towards joy is largely genetic. Even though everyone's feelings are certainly affected by circumstances, some people just have an easier time experiencing joy than others, just like some people can see fine distinctions of colors and others can't tell the difference between red and green.

The more I live, the more I see that it is not helpful when fundamentally joyful people share their "Tips for Joyful Living" with people of other dispositions. It's like when thin people give me, overweight from earliest memory, tips about maintaining a healthy weight. "Eat less, exercise more!" they say, one way or another, as if I have never thought of that before.

So I'm not going to write a column about how to be more joyful. Other pieces in this issue speak eloquently to the practice of joy. Instead, I want to take a moment to congratulate the people who have more sensitive, troubled souls for making it through another day, another week, another year.

Late in life, my mother had a stroke. Though she recovered speech and movement, she never again had a sense of taste, and she couldn't carry a tune anymore. She also became depressed. During that time, she told me, "You know, having experienced depression now, I feel I should have congratulated your father every day simply for getting out of bed. It is incredibly hard!"

I am grateful to say that I have never suffered from debilitating depression, though I have been knocked off my

game by circumstances a number of times. Little things in life have always been able to delight or amuse me, even when I've seen them through a haze. But I have learned from many of you that my experience is not the same as yours.

350 million people in the world suffer from depression, and about 20 million Americans do. That is a very large number of people who are carrying extra burdens as they move through the already difficult business of being alive. And while medicine can help some people (I have known folks for whom anti-depressants created hope and joy where they had never known it before), drugs don't always work.

To all of the readers of
this column who suffer
from depression:
I see you. I believe you.
I respect you.

So, to all of the readers of this column who suffer from depression: I see you. I believe you. I respect you. I know that, for you, an article on how to live with more joy could become one more reason to feel despair about something you can't do right. And I do not want to add to your already large burden.

Instead, I want to thank you. Thank you for holding pain in a world that tells you, one way or another, that the pain is your fault. *The pain is not your fault.* There is a great deal of pain in the world, and there are a large number of people who refuse to hold any of it. *Thank you for holding it.* I would wish for you moments of ease and full breath as you do.

I want to tell you that you are loved, just as you are. People you don't even know love you. I imagine you can't feel that love right now, and you have said that you feel burdened when people want you to feel something you can't. But could you lean into believing it, even when you can't feel it, the way

we can believe that the earth is moving us 1200 miles an hour even when we feel like we're perfectly still? Can you entertain it as an idea, even if it finds no home in your body or emotions?

I want to express my gratitude for the work you do even though you are depressed. A huge number of writers and artists, ranging from Beyoncé to Henry James, have lived with depression. Some, like Parker Palmer, have written at length about it. People who are depressed—artists, teachers, parents, workers—continue to give amazing gifts to the world, despite the extra labor involved in these acts of generosity. I am tremendously grateful to you for all that you give.

I want to say that you are an important part of our community here on this planet. When such large numbers of people are struggling with depression, clearly something is going on that is not only about individuals, but about our collective well-being. If you are depressed, you may feel that the world would be a better place without you—but in fact the world would be much lonelier. Of course those of us who are not depressed wish that you did not have to carry this pain, or to feel alone as you carry it. Tell us how to help you carry it, or at least not to burden you further with our own ignorance.



And finally, I want to express my hope that you will feel better. That you will find some ease, some relief from the pressure, some place of rest. I hope that our community of bold, honest, sojourners

might provide some of that ease for you. I hope that one day soon a sunbeam will fall across your face and awaken a sparkle in your eye and joy in your heart. Whether that does or does not happen, I hope you can feel my respect and appreciation that you made it through one more day. ■

REsources for Living

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



Unitarian Universalist minister Bill Clark tells a story about being at the beach after a long, hard day. And by long, hard day, I mean that Bill was then doing AIDS ministry in a time and a place (Provincetown, Massachusetts) in which the people he was working with were dying on pretty much a daily basis. It hadn't just been a long, hard day; it had been month after month of walking people through the valley of death, and Bill was exhausted and sad and wondering how he could possibly find the strength to go on.

Then, across what he thought was an empty beach, Bill heard something—a woman shouting. But it quickly became clear that she wasn't in trouble. In fact, what she was shouting, over and over again, was "Joy! Joy!" All of a sudden, something shifted in Bill's heart, almost a revelation. It was possible to choose joy, even in the midst of tragedy. It was possible to be so committed to joy, so overwhelmed by joy, that you would need to shout it to the very wind and waves.

Touched as he was by this stranger's declaration of joy, Bill decided to join in. "Joy!" he called to the woman. "Joy!" he called to the seagulls. "Joy!" he cried to the sand and the sea and the invisible horizon. "JOY!!" And each time he called out, he felt his heart lifting. Each time he called out he felt more connection with this stranger, and through her to the whole world of people trying to find their own joy.

And then a damp and sandy Golden Retriever came running from behind a sand dune and dashed up to the woman. "Joy! There you are!" she said. "Time to go home." And with that, the woman leashed up her dog Joy, and headed off.

There are a lot of reasons why I love this story, and not just because it has a dog in it. Although it's about a kind of mistaken

identity, I think it really has a lot to say about finding Joy.

For one thing, Joy doesn't always come when it's called. There are lots of reasons, many much smaller than Bill's, that make us feel as if Joy has fled the scene. Illness, whether temporary or chronic; injury; lost friendships or lost loves; boring work or no work at all; teachers or bosses who don't understand or appreciate us—the list of things that can rob us of joy is pretty much endless.

Gratitude often hangs out with Joy, and if you can find your way to Gratitude you will often find Joy hanging out at the same café.

And when we've lost our sense of joy, it doesn't necessarily come rushing back the instant we notice it's gone. And it certainly doesn't help for other people to tell us to smile, or that we should just get over whatever is bothering us, or that our problems are small compared with what Syrian refugees are facing. You can't be bullied or argued into feeling joy, and sometimes it just doesn't respond when you call.

But maybe calling makes a difference. Believing that Joy is out there, knowing that you want to walk together, finding a way to let Joy know that you're available, might just eventually work. Maybe not by hollering "Joy!" at random strangers, but by remembering and turning toward the things that have given you joy in the past. You can actually make a list of ways that calling for Joy has worked for you, and just try those things.

For me, that list would have dancing and singing along with my ukulele and training my dogs and going for a walk

and reading a good book and talking with friends either live or on Facebook and eating chocolate. Everyone's list is different, but all that matters is that you know what's on your list. And that you take the time to call out to Joy by doing some of those things. Joy doesn't always come when you call, but it comes sooner if you let it know where to find you.

And if you can't find Joy, you could maybe start by looking for some of its friends and relatives. For instance, Gratitude often hangs out with Joy, and if you can find your way to Gratitude you will often find Joy hanging out at the same café. Also Wonder, and Amazement. If you go out for a walk and meet up with Wonder on the trail, you will likely find that Joy appears and starts walking with you.

Surprisingly, Detachment, while not a relative of Joy, lives in the same house. You will not be able to get through the door unless you leave behind a whole bunch of expectations about how things need to be. The house of Detachment has a very narrow front entry hall, with no room to bring your baggage about how the world needs to follow your rules. But if you can leave that baggage at the doorstep, you will not only find that the house is, like Dr. Who's Tardis, "bigger on the inside," you might also discover that Joy is drinking tea in the kitchen.

I can't guarantee that any of these suggestions will lead you straight to joy. There are times you might very well feel as if joy has run off entirely, and moved in with someone else. But generally speaking, if you are willing to call to Joy long enough, eventually it will show up, wet and sandy, tongue hanging out of the side of its mouth, ready to romp with you all the way home.



drawing by Janet Lane



Church of the Larger Fellowship
Unitarian Universalist

24 Farnsworth Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02210-1409 USA

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOSTON, MA
PERMIT NO. 55362

Did You Know

that CLF has a web page just for kids, parents and religious educators, tied to our monthly theme? See www.questformeaning.org/programs/family-quest/

Quest Editorial Team: Meg Riley; Janet Lane; Jordinn Nelson Long; Kat Liu; Jody Malloy; Beth Murray; Cindy Salloway; Jaco ten Hove; Arliss Ungar; Lynn Ungar, editor

Copyright 2016 Church of the Larger Fellowship. Generally, permission to reproduce items from *Quest* is granted, provided credit is given to the author and the CLF. **ISSN 1070-244X**

CLF Staff: Meg Riley, senior minister; Jody Malloy, executive director; Lynn Ungar, minister for lifespan learning and *Quest* editor; Jorge Espinel, Latino ministries; Danny Givens, prison chaplain; Mandy Goheen, director of prison ministries; Lena K. Gardner, director of membership & development; Lori Stone Sirtosky, director of technology; Beth Murray, program administrator; Cindy Salloway, fiscal administrator; Hannah Eller-Isaacs, social media coordinator and administrative assistant; Andrea Fiore, webmaster; **Learning Fellows:** Kevin W. Jagoe, Bob LaVallee, Slim Moon, Sarah Prickett, Lauren Way, Amanda Weatherspoon

Web Site www.clfuu.org — Email clf@clfuu.org — Toll-Free Line 800-231-3027 or 617-948-6150
CLF Jewelry at inSpirit, a UU Book and Gift Shop 800-215-9076
CLF Unitarian Universalist, 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston MA 02210-1409 USA



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.

by **Rev. Carl Scovel**



Photo by Becky Keefe