

## Joy Is a Radical Act

Real happiness can be a powerful force for change, but we have to look inside ourselves to find it.

Scott Tusa Mar 28, 2019

...As an inevitable consequence of developing innate joy, we realize that this feeling that resides inside us also resides inside every other sentient being. The cultivation of unconditional joy is inextricably tied to a capacity that we share with all other beings—our **buddhanature**. This nature is unconditioned and embodies our underlying capacity for freedom and interconnectedness. In other words, when we see the value in ourselves, it's easier to see the value in others, and vice versa. Realizing this, we might find ourselves less willing to view people within limited categories or to see the world as black and white. Our inner well-being and joy feeds our compassion and our sense of our interconnectivity, which in turn feeds our joy, creating in a positive feedback loop.

Here, the practice of cultivating joy moves into the other aspects of our daily life. Imagine standing on a crowded train, packed in with strangers all pushing past to get where they need to go. Immediately we may notice a doom falling over us as we begin dreading the rat race or dwelling on the stresses of the work day. This mood starts to pervade, and we feel physically squashed. Fortunately, we have created a habit of turning toward the feelings in the body. Drop into the body with kindness and feel what's arising. As we meet our experience, we learn to greet it with a smile rather than a scowl. We can then feel how we are connected with the other riders and that we are not alone in our suffering. The contraction turns outward. Rather than feeling isolated, there is the possibility to feel the community around us, and that feeling radiates outward as an infectious joy or through a number of subtle kindnesses—making space for other riders, letting go of an argument before it happens. Or the feeling can spread through more direct action, which now will be informed by a compassion that helps us discern whether that action is skillful or simply a knee-jerk reaction.

It may seem strange to turn inward when there are so many external problems, as though meditating in the mouth of a crocodile. But that is why joy is a radical act. In the face of increasing political and social polarization, connecting with and nurturing our inner joy is not just a matter of self-care but a matter of survival. We have to return to the root of the problem, which is the mistaken belief that joy can be hoarded, seized, or commodified when the fact is that real joy is contagious. If we see that truth inside ourselves, we see it reflected in the world and everyone who inhabits it. And when that happens, a common enemy is difficult to find...