

Turning Toward Joy

*We cannot cure the world of sorrows
but we can choose to live in joy.*

Joseph Campbell

Gloria and I have just returned from running a week's retreat in Assisi which was incredibly joyful and uplifting. However I have noticed that since we got home it is more difficult to keep that deep feeling of joy going through all the ups and downs of daily life. So in this October message, I want to emphasise the importance of seeking out joy every day of our lives and then doing our very best to share that joy with others.

I have recently come to believe that joy is a massively underrated characteristic of highly evolved spiritual leaders. I am thinking for example of His Holiness the Dalai Lama joking and laughing with Desmond Tutu or Pope John Paul II playing so joyfully with little children on one of his world tours. Being with someone who has such a powerfully joyful presence is incredibly inspiring and uplifting. So this month, let us now explore how we can live in joy day in and day out despite our whole world being so chaotic and troubling at the moment.

There are at least two key aspects to living joyfully in our everyday lives.

First, we need to find a deep meaning or purpose to our little life here on earth that will always uplift our spirits when we are down and motivate us to greater heights when we are up. When I am down, I now take inspiration from the hymn 'It is Well with My Soul' that was written by Horatio Stafford in 1873. He had just lost all four of his young daughters in a shipwreck. But whilst he was grieving terribly, his faith in Jesus lifted him up enough to write this wonderfully optimistic hymn.

When what you do in life has a deeper purpose to it, you can definitely find an underlying deep joy even in the more challenging aspects of your chosen work or practices. I for one am always blown away by hospice staff talking about the joy they find in working with the terminally ill. Of course, the dying process can be incredibly scary and painful, but hospice workers also talk about the deep joy they experience in helping someone to have a 'good death'. They also find great satisfaction in assisting the families of the dying ones to accept what is going to happen as their loved ones pass over to the other side.

Gloria and I both experience great joy when we lead spiritual retreats in Assisi. Is this work financially rewarding? Not at all! Do we usually feel drained and even exhausted at the end of our retreats? Well yes, because holding high energy for the retreat group for 5 days and ensuring that every participant gets the most possible benefits from being on retreat with us can be energetically challenging at times - and neither of us is a spring chicken anymore! However, the deep joy we experience when running retreats together is so precious that we hope and pray we can continue to run them for several more years to come.

The second key way to turn toward joy is to make joy our compass as we plan our activities for the month or even the year ahead. So many lovely individuals I know don't really do this. They tell me something like, 'Oh I would absolutely love to go to Assisi in September, but my granddaughter is having a big party for her 18th birthday and just I have to go to it, even though I hate big parties. Really? I don't say anything in response, but I do think to myself. 'You really think your granddaughter is going to miss terribly someone over 70 attending her 18th birthday party? I don't think so!'

Alan Cohen, one of my favourite spiritually inspiring authors, has written a lovely book entitled *Joy is My Compass*. The title came from a friend of his who was a Unity Minister. Alan once asked this friend, 'How do you make your important decisions? His friend replied *Joy is my compass. Whenever I have a choice to make, I ask myself, 'Which alternative makes me feel the most joyful?' Then I try each of the choices on for size. Usually there is one that feels lighter, freer, more like the real me. It feels like coming home. Then I know that is the direction that God wants me to go.*

Have you made joy your compass yet? I suspect that if you have been imprinted with the belief that life is meant to be a struggle and that you have to strive and strive to make your dreams come true, making joy your compass may not yet come totally naturally to you. But maybe it is now time to change the programme? Maybe this month, you would like to replace any notion that you have to work hard and long to manifest your highest dreams down here with the mantra 'God's Will for Me is Perfect Happiness'.

Please never underestimate the power of your own mind. Keep telling yourself that something you want to achieve in life is going to be difficult to manifest and it probably will be. Keep telling yourself that you can manifest your highest dreams easily and joyfully and, sooner or later, you will.

If you are doing anything regularly in your life that does not bring you happiness or a deep, joyous satisfaction, why not ask yourself this month, 'What would I do if I were willing to be true to myself?' Don't over analyse this important piece of self-enquiry. Let the question sink down into your wise heart like a pebble sinking to the bottom of a beautiful pool of water and then wait patiently for your heart to communicate your deepest desire to you.

From now on, please listen far more to the wisdom of your own heart than the loud noises that constantly come from your egoic mind. Your ego never has your best interests at heart and it can pull you off the path home to love over and over again by luxuriating in so much fear, anger or even hatred on a regular basis. Your ego's basic maxim is 'Seek but never find.' Your ego will probably go on insisting until the day you die that you have to change or the whole world has to change before you can live a life full of joy. But your wise heart knows otherwise.

If you long to live in a more peaceful, loving and joyous world, please vow this month be the change you want to see. Focus every day on pausing to really take in a little joy - a smile from a friend, a tree turning golden in the autumn sunlight, a child skipping down the street. Model living joyfully and lovingly day by day whatever life brings you and others will follow. Please

don't wait for someone to smile at you, smile warmly to them in order to spread just a drop of joy out into the world around you. Don't wait for someone to bring you tidings of comfort and joy. Commit to telling someone every day something uplifting and notice how that practice makes you feel.

Last week in Assisi I stumbled across a song on You Tube entitled *Cultivate Joy* by The Three Birds and so I will conclude this message by sharing with you the uplifting lyrics of the first verse: (But please do listen to the whole song on You Tube – it is so catchy and sweet!)

Cultivate joy hour by hour,

Smile by smile, flower by flower.

Sow seeds of joy among gloom and despair

Cultivate joy and joy will be there.

Peggy Foster
October 2025