



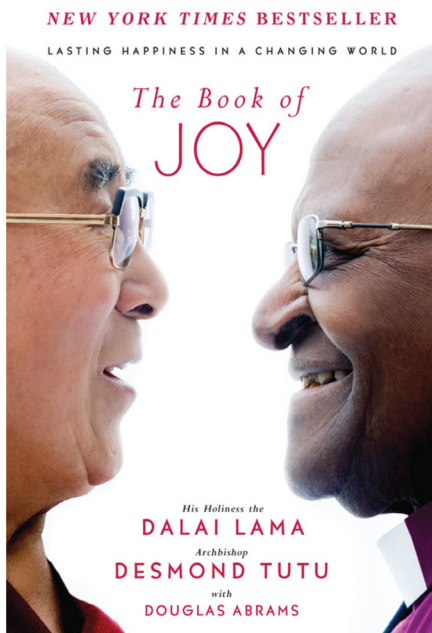
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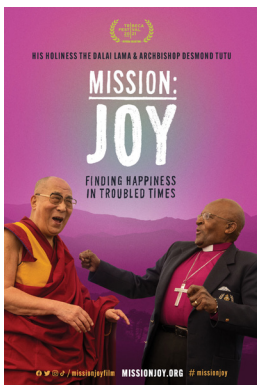
DISCUSSION GUIDE



“THE BOOK OF JOY: LASTING HAPPINESS IN A CHANGING WORLD”

Authors: Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Douglas Carlton Abrams

AUTHORS



Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, is the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people. His tireless efforts on behalf of human rights and world peace have brought him international recognition. He is a recipient of the Wallenberg Award (conferred by the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Foundation), the Albert Schweitzer Award, the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal and the Nobel Peace Prize. Desmond Mpilo Tutu was Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, head of the Anglican Church in southern Africa, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his non-violence human rights campaign and chair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He was active as a lecturer throughout the world before passing away in 2021. Douglas Carlton Abrams is a former editor at the University of California Press and Harper San Francisco. He is the coauthor of books on love, sexuality and spirituality, including books written with Archbishop Tutu, Yogacharya B.K.S. Iyengar, and Taoist Master Mantak Chia.

SUMMARY

Two spiritual giants. Five days. One timeless question. Nobel Peace Prize Laureates His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu survived more than fifty years of exile and the soul-crushing violence of oppression. Despite their hardships—or, as they would say, because of them—they are two of the most joyful people on the planet.

In April 2015, Archbishop Tutu traveled to the Dalai Lama's home in Dharamsala, India, to celebrate His Holiness's eightieth birthday and to create what they hoped would be a gift for others. They looked back on their long lives to answer a single burning question: How do we find joy in the face of life's inevitable suffering?

They traded intimate stories, teased each other continually and shared their spiritual practices. By the end of a week filled with laughter and punctuated with tears, these two global heroes had stared into the abyss and despair of our time and revealed how to live a life brimming with joy.

This book offers us a rare opportunity to experience their astonishing and unprecedented week together, from the first embrace to the final good-bye. We get to listen as they explore the Nature of True Joy and confront each of the Obstacles of Joy—from fear, stress and anger to grief, illness and death. They then offer us the Eight Pillars of Joy, which provide the foundation for lasting happiness. Throughout, they include stories, wisdom, and science. Finally, they share the daily Joy Practices that anchor their own emotional and spiritual lives.

The Archbishop never claimed sainthood, and the Dalai Lama considers himself a simple monk. In this unique collaboration, they offer us the reflection of real lives filled with pain and turmoil in the midst of which they have been able to discover a level of peace, courage, and joy to which we can all aspire.



THE BOOK OF JOY BOOK CIRCLE

The Dalai Lama and the Archbishop have been two of the great spiritual leaders of our time, but they've also been moral leaders who transcend their own traditions and speak always with a concern for all of humanity. Their joy is clearly not easy or superficial but one burnished by the fire of adversity, oppression and struggle. "Joy," as the Archbishop said during the week recounted in the book, "is much bigger than happiness. While happiness is often seen as being dependent on external circumstances, joy is not."

One Book One Boulder's book circles are designed to use "The Book of Joy" as a jumping-off point to allow local groups to engage with our program, to talk about the book's conception of joy—and to find their own joy as individuals, as groups, and as members of the greater Boulder community.

What is a Circle?

Each Circle is a self-organized small group committed to reading "The Book of Joy" together. The aim is to foster meaningful conversation and allow every voice to be heard. A Circle can be as small as 3-4 people, but 6-10 people is probably the sweet spot. If you want to go bigger, do it! Your Circle is your oyster.

What does it mean to lead a Circle?


Circle leaders are the connective tissue. You'll invite friends, family, and colleagues to be part of a Circle; coordinate when your Circle will meet; and lightly facilitate each session (more on that below). If leading solo seems daunting, invite someone to co-lead with you. If you'd rather not facilitate all Circle sessions, you can rotate the facilitator role among your group.

How often do Circles meet?

We suggest that Circles meet once a week over 12 weeks (for a more immersive experience) or once every other week over 24 weeks (to allow more time for reading and reflection), following the guide to the book below. However, Circles can meet more or less frequently, picking and choosing among the sessions described here. Circles can elect to meet in person or online (or a combo). You'll likely want 60-90 minutes together for each session, depending on the size of your group. These are just recommendations, so do what works best for your Circle!

Each session ends with a journal prompt and a "Joy Practice." What are those?

The optional journal prompt is there to guide and enrich the reading experience for anyone in your circle who would like to keep a reading journal. Meanwhile, at the end of "The Book of Joy" on pages 307-348, the authors offer a section of practices related to their major themes that they themselves have used "to cultivate and sustain their joy." Optionally and depending on your group's comfort level/preferences, you can try these (or the others in that section not called out in this guide) together as a group or at home individually in private.



DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION

Pre-reading: pages 1-8

Introductions: Starting with the leader, share your name and your definitions of joy vs. happiness. Then pass to someone else.

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- In thinking about reading “The Book of Joy” and being part of this book circle, in which areas of your life do you hope this experience will help you grow?
- What do you think makes these men unique teachers on the topic of joy? Do you think the trials they have undergone gives them a special perspective?
- The Dalai Lama says he finds the scientific research into meditation a compelling reason to practice. Did you find that learning about the neuroscience helped ground the spiritual teachings for you? Or did you prefer one or the other of the spiritual vs. scientific reasons to meditate?
- The teachings state that how we respond to suffering is our choice, no matter our physical circumstances. Was this a radical idea for you? Do you agree with it?

- What kinds of daily suffering do you create for yourself? Do you also manage to find joy? Are these moments intentional or accidental?
- Though from different traditions, how do the teachings of the two leaders blend and complement each other?

Journal Prompt: Do the friendships in your life inspire moments of great joy? In what ways? Write about specific friends who make your life more joyful.

Joy Practice: Morning Intention Setting (p. 311)

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 2: THE NATURE OF TRUE JOY: WE ARE FRAGILE CREATURES AND WHY ARE YOU NOT MOROSE?

Pre-reading: pages 10-41

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- *“We are fragile creatures, and it is from this weakness, not despite it, that we discover the possibility of true joy.”* (p. 11) The reality of the authors’ age and precarious health haunts the pages of the book and adds urgency to their friendship, meeting, and the sharing of their wisdom. Do you think health issues impact how we seek joy? Should it lend urgency?
- Do you find you have new strategies after reading “We Are Fragile Creatures” to help you confront the “daily disasters”?
- Have you confused the happiness of external factors with the true joy that comes from within? Do you think this idea is a challenging one to implement? Is it easier to experience joy when things are good?
- What words would you use to describe the feeling of joy? (See the suggested list on page 33.) Are there any you would add?
- What gave you joy when you were 10 years old?

- *“I was struck by the simplicity and profundity of what the Dalai Lama was saying. This was far from “don’t worry, be happy”... This was not a denial of pain and suffering, but a shift in perspective—from oneself and toward others, from anguish to compassion.”* (37) Have you encountered an approach like this before? Moving from oneself to others as a way to experience joy?
- Even though the Dalai Lama has lived for decades in exile as a refugee, he finds immense joy in his surroundings and opportunities. Are there ways in which suffering has helped you find joy?

Journal Prompt: Share one thing in your life bringing you joy right now.

Joy Practice: Suffering, Adversity, and Illness—A Lojong Practice (p. 323)

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 3: THE NATURE OF TRUE JOY: NOTHING BEAUTIFUL COMES WITHOUT SOME SUFFERING AND HAVE YOU RENOUNCED PLEASURE?

Pre-reading: pages 43-56

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- *“When I spoke about mothers and childbirth, it seems to be a wonderful metaphor, actually, that nothing beautiful in the end comes without a measure of some pain, some frustration, some suffering. This is the nature of things.”* (45) Do you find this an apt metaphor? If you are a parent, how does the experience of parenting prepare you for your spiritual work?
- *“Too much self-centered thinking is the source of suffering. A compassionate concern for others’ well-being is the source of happiness.”* (47) Have you had personal experience with this idea? When you have placed another person’s wellbeing before your own, did you feel as if you were making a great effort, or did you feel liberated?
- What is your “set point” for happiness?

- *“I always say to people, you have to pay more attention to the mental level of joy and happiness. Not just physical pleasure, but satisfaction at the level of the mind. This is true joyfulness.”* (54) What is happiness at the physical level and what is happiness at the mental level?
- Do you find knowing the brain science (our built in “circuitry”) that underpins how we experience joy motivates you to behave in a more loving and generous way?

Journal Prompt: The three central pillars for creating joy that are discussed in “Nothing Beautiful” are reframing our situation more positively; experiencing gratitude; and choosing kindness and generosity. How will you go about activating each in your life?

Joy Practice: Suffering, Adversity, and Illness of Others—A Tonglen Practice (p. 324)



DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 4: THE NATURE OF TRUE JOY: OUR GREATEST JOY AND THE MEETING OF TWO MISCHIEVOUS PEOPLE

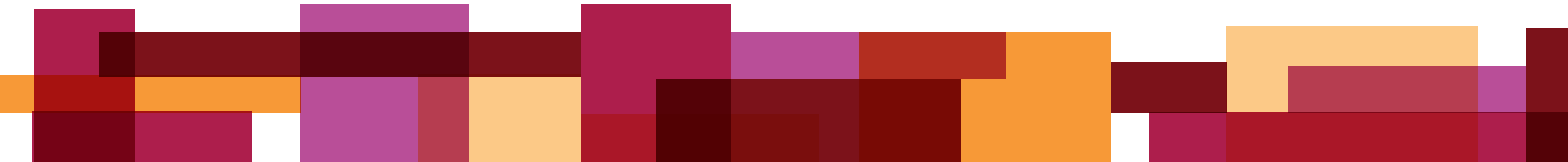
Pre-reading: pages 59-78

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- *“Many people are waiting for happiness or joy. When they get a job, when they fall in love, when they get rich, then they will be happy, then they will have joy.”* (59) Do you find yourself falling into this trap of waiting vs. finding joy in the now?
- When our days are focused on just getting through, how do we make room for the spiritual pursuit of joy? What stands in our way?
- *“In short, the more we heal our own pain, the more we can turn to the pain of others... The way we heal our own pain is actually by turning to the pain of others. It is a virtuous cycle. The more we turn toward others, the more joy we experience, and the more we can bring joy to others.”* (63) Are you surprised by the level of connectedness and commitment we are advised to show to other people and the importance of building friendships?
- What is interdependence? How do we experience it on a personal and also a more public level?

Journal Prompt: Who do you think of as your community? How are you enriched by them? How do you show your commitment in return?

Joy Practice: Loneliness: A Common Humanity Practice (p. 320)



DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 5: THE OBSTACLES TO JOY: YOU ARE A MASTERPIECE IN THE MAKING; FEAR, STRESS, AND ANXIETY; AND FRUSTRATION AND ANGER

Pre-reading: pages 83-108

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- *“Mental immunity,” the Dalai Lama explained, “is just learning to avoid the destructive emotions and to develop the positive ones. First we must understand the mind—there are so many different states of mind—the diverse thoughts and emotions we experience on a daily basis. Some of these thoughts and emotions are harmful, even toxic, while others are healthy and healing.” (83)* Are you able to differentiate between healthy thoughts and the harmful ones when you are actually in the middle of doing something?
- *“I think we’ve got to accept ourselves as we are. And then hope to grow in much the way the Dalai Lama described. I mean getting to know what the things are that trigger us. These are the things that you can train, you can change, but we ought not to be ashamed of ourselves.” (85)* Do you think you are too hard on yourself for the thoughts that arise? How do you think you might be able to change your reaction?
- *“Stress and anxiety often come from too much expectation and too much ambition,” the Dalai Lama said. “Then when we don’t fulfill that expectation or achieve that ambition, we experience frustration.” (96)* How would you describe too much ambition? Do you find you put that pressure on yourself to achieve certain goals? Do you find that pressure helpful or hurtful? How?
- What is the difference between “threat stress” and “challenge stress”? Can you give examples of each? How have you experienced them?
- *Typically frustration and anger come from being hurt. . . In addition to physical pain, we can also experience emotional pain, which may be even more common. We want something that we did not get, like respect or kindness, or we get something we did not want, like disrespect or criticism. Underlying this anger, the Dalai Lama was saying, is a fear that we will not get what we need, that we are not loved, that we are not respected, that we will not be included. (104)* Do you think of anger and frustration as separate emotions? How are the two related? How do you experience these states of mind?

Journal Prompt: *You are made for perfection, but you are not yet perfect. You are a masterpiece in the making. (92)* What does he mean by a “masterpiece?” What strategies could you use to get closer to perfection even knowing you can’t reach it?

Joy Practice: Frustration and Anger: A Prayer (p. 319)



DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 6: THE OBSTACLES TO JOY: SADNESS AND GRIEF; DESPAIR; AND LONELINESS

Pre-reading: pages 109-133

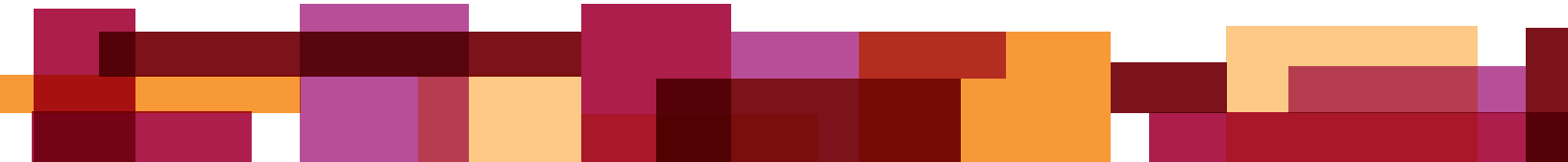
Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- *“The world is in such turmoil—war, starvation, terrorism, pollution, genocide. My heart hurts for these issues. How do I find joy in the midst of such large world problems?”* (115) Do you find it hard to attempt to live in joy in our turbulent times? What do the spiritual leaders advise? Do you think they are right?
- Is our world really getting better when we reflect on history and progress? Do you think people “are good, they were made good, and they really want to be good”? (120)
- *“When someone is warmhearted, they are always completely relaxed. If you live with fear and consider yourself as something special, then automatically, emotionally, you are distanced from others... This excessive self-focus is also bad for your health.”* (130) Aside from draining our energy and making us sick, how does self-focus distract us from finding true joy?

- Has your opinion on the importance of having compassion for all those we encounter changed? What doors do you think it will open for you?

Journal Prompt: *Grief is the reminder of the depth of our love.* (113) Has sadness or loss brought a new kind of meaning into your life? Has it brought you closer to friends or family?

Joy Practice: Fear, Anger and Sadness: An Analytic Meditation (p. 315)



DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 7: THE OBSTACLES TO JOY: ENVY; SUFFERING AND ADVERSITY; ILLNESS AND FEAR OF DEATH; AND MEDITATION: NOW I'LL TELL YOU A SECRET THING

Pre-reading: pages 135-188

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- *According to the happiness research, “upward comparisons” are particularly corrosive to our well-being. Envy doesn’t leave room for joy. The Tibetan word for envy is trakdok, which means “heavy or constricted shoulders,” and indeed the feeling of envy leaves one with a pinched feelings of discontent and resentment, tinged with guilt.” (137) What does envy feel and look like for you? How is jealousy corrosive?*
- What steps can we take to cultivate *mudita* (sympathetic joy) for friends/family as well as strangers?
- *Without meaning, when suffering seems senseless, we can easily become embittered. But when we can find a shred of meaning or redemption in our suffering, it can ennoble us, as it did for Nelson Mandela. (153) How does suffering grow our spiritual muscles? From the most profound suffering rooted in political strife or violence to our lesser discomforts, what important lessons do you think suffering can teach us?*

- Have you seen someone without fear and full acceptance when facing death? What was it like to bear witness to that?

Journal Prompt: *The true measure of spiritual development is how one confronts one’s own mortality. The best way is when one is able to approach death with joy; the next best way is without fear; third best way is at least not to have regrets. (166) Do you think about your own mortality? How can we reach each of the three levels described above? Do you think you have the capacity to get to these stages? If not, what holds you back?*

Joy Practice: Envy: A Mudita Practice (p. 322)



DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 8: THE EIGHT PILLARS OF JOY: PERSPECTIVE AND HUMILITY

Pre-reading: pages 193-213

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- How could taking a “God’s-eye perspective” (199) allow you the mental room to deal with frustrating situations?
- *“When we have humility, we can laugh at ourselves. It was surprising to hear the Archbishop and the Dalai Lama describe the importance of a proper sense of humor, and especially the ability to laugh at our own foibles, as essential to the cultivation of joy.”* (213) Do you find humility effective when encountering obstacles? How?
- How do humility and perspective strengthen our “stress resilience” and keep us healthy?

Journal Prompt: *“For every event in life,” the Dalai Lama said, “there are many different angles. When you look at the same event from a wider perspective, your sense of worry and anxiety reduces, and you have greater joy.”* (194-195) When have you looked at a life event (major or minor) with this kind of open perspective? Did “reframing it more positively” (195) lead to new understanding?

Joy Practice: Perspective: A Self-Distancing Practice (p. 329)





DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 9: THE EIGHT PILLARS OF JOY: HUMOR AND ACCEPTANCE

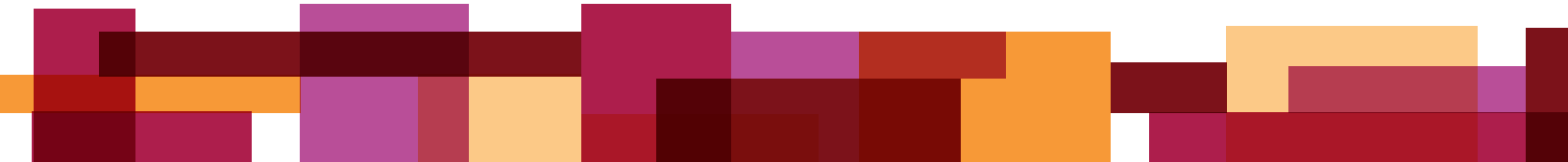
Pre-reading: pages 215-228

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- *“Laugh at yourself and don’t be so pompous and serious. If you start looking for the humor in life, you will find it. You will stop asking, Why me? and start recognizing that life happens to all of us.”* (222) Is having a sense of humor a gift? How?
- How have you seen humor favorably influence the outcome of a troublesome situation?
- *Acceptance, it must be pointed out, is the opposite of resignation and defeat.* (223) Did you hold these terms in your mind as equivalent? What defines each state for you?
- Why is acceptance a “Pillar of Joy”? Why do you think a seemingly simple concept carries so much influence?

Journal Prompt: Acceptance—whether we believe in God or not—allows us to move into the fullness of joy. It allows us to engage with life on its own terms rather than rail against the fact that life is not as we would wish. (225) Do you find it easy to practice acceptance? For certain things, and not others?

Joy Practice: Laughing at Ourselves to Develop Humor (p. 331)



DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 10: THE EIGHT PILLARS OF JOY: FORGIVENESS AND GRATITUDE

Pre-reading: pages 229-249

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- *“Forgiveness,” the Dalai Lama continued, “does not mean we forget. You should remember the negative thing, but because there is a possibility to develop hatred, we mustn’t allow ourselves to be led in that direction—we choose forgiveness.”* (233) Were you surprised by this explanation of forgiveness? Does it run contrary to how you thought of it in the past, or how you practice it currently?
- Do you struggle with the act of forgiving? How?
- Do you agree that *“the power of forgiveness lies [in] not losing sight of the humanity of the person while responding to the wrong with clarity and firmness”*? (234) What would make that element so critical to the process?
- *Gratitude is the recognition of all that holds us in the web of life and all that has made it possible to have the life we have and the moment that we are experiencing.* (242) Have you been able to acknowledge moments of this nature in the past? What do they feel like? When have they been easiest to access?

- How do you practice gratitude presently? Who or what are you grateful for right now?
- What can gratitude be an antidote for?

Journal Prompt: *Impermanence, the Dalai Lama reminds us, is the nature of life. . . . Gratitude helps us catalog, celebrate, and rejoice in each day and each moment before they slip through the vanishing hourglass of experience.”* (249) Are you more thankful for new experiences now after reading this book? Do you think you will have great appreciation for the things you love? Are you more grateful even for your suffering?

Joy Practice: The Fourfold Path of Forgiveness (p. 334)

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 11: THE EIGHT PILLARS OF JOY: COMPASSION AND GENEROSITY

Pre-reading: pages 251-275

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- *“It probably takes many years of monastic practice to equal the spiritual growth generated by one sleepless night with a sick child.”* (253) If you are a parent or caregiver, do you find this idea to ring true? In what ways? If you are not a parent/caregiver, have you had a similar experience with a person or animal you love dearly? What was it like?
- How does the experience of raising children inspire, test, and grow our compassion?
- Can compassion be contagious? In what ways?
- *Modern culture makes it hard for us to have compassion for ourselves. We spend so much of our lives climbing a pyramid of achievement where we are constantly being evaluated and judged, and often found to be not making the grade.* (260) How does our lack of self-compassion manifest?
- What could the benefits be of embracing a healthier relationship with our physical and emotional needs? For ourselves and for society?
- *Generosity is so important in all of the world’s religions because it no doubt expresses a fundamental aspect of our interdependence and our need for one another. Generosity was so important for our survival that the reward centers of our brain light up as strongly when we give as when we receive, sometimes even more so.* (264) How does it feel to be generous? Have you ever stopped to examine the physical sensations of being generous?
- Do you think it is true that “it is better to give than to receive”?
- *Start where you are, and realize that you are not meant on your own to resolve all of these massive problems. Do what you can.* (273) Is this guidance helpful to you when feeling overwhelmed by the suffering and needs in the world?
- *Give the world your love, your service, your healing, but you can also give it your joy.* (274) Were you surprised by this teaching—that the expression of our personal joy could be transformative?

Continued on next page



DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 11: THE EIGHT PILLARS OF JOY: COMPASSION AND GENEROSITY

Pre-reading: pages 251-275

Discussion Questions continued

(feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- Why do you think we are skeptical that one person's actions are not enough to make a difference? How can they be?
- What are you doing to take of yourself? What are you doing to take care of others?

Journal Prompt: *The modern world is suspicious of compassion because we have accepted the belief that nature is “red in tooth and claw” and that we are fundamentally competing against everyone and everything. . . Yet evolutionary science has come to see cooperation, and its core emotions of empathy, compassion, and generosity, as fundamental to our species’ survival. (257-258) Do you find it a challenge in your daily life to act with compassion for all those you meet? Is it more challenging in different arenas—work, home, community? Why do you think that might be the case?*

Joy Practice: Generosity Practices (p. 341)





DISCUSSION GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

SESSION 12: MEDITATION, CELEBRATION, AND DEPARTURE

Pre-reading: pages 277-305

Discussion Questions (feel free to address only the ones that inspire your circle):

- Were you moved by the stories and the backgrounds of the Tibetan children? Could you imagine the hardship and suffering that accompanied them as they left their families and sought refuge at the school?
- After reading this book, has your concept of joy changed and how?
- Which of the Eight Pillars is a strength of yours? Which would you like to improve and how will you go about that?
- What new habits have you learned during this experience that you want to begin practicing?
- Do you have new answers to the question of how can you give your gifts and your joy to support our larger community?

Journal Prompt: *The two leaders had told us over the course of the week that there is no joy without sorrow, that in fact it is the pain, the suffering that allows us to experience and appreciate the joy. Indeed, the more we turn to the suffering, our own and others, the more we can turn toward the joy. (303)* After reading this book, what practices are you most excited to integrate into your life? What tools do you have in your possession? What circumstances do you imagine will test you the most?

Joy Practice: Joy Meditation: The Eight Pillars (p. 342)





APPENDIX: FURTHER READING ON JOY

(all titles are available in the Boulder Public Library catalog)

In English:

Blackall, Sophie. *Things to Look Forward To: 52 Large and Small Joys for Today and Every Day.*

Chopra, Deepak. *Why is God Laughing? The Path to Joy and Spiritual Optimism.*

Dalai Lama. *The Library of Wisdom and Compassion* (7-volume series).

Doughty, Todd. *Little Pieces of Hope: Happy-Making Things in a Difficult World.*

Gay, Ross. *The Book of Delights: Essays.*

Gay, Ross. *Inciting Joy: Essays.*

Gilbert, Jack. *Collected Poems.*

Lamott, Anne. *Small Victories: Spotting Improbable Moments of Grace.*

Ngomane, Mungi. *Everyday Ubuntu: Living Better Together, The African Way.*

Oliver, Mary. *Felicity: Poems.*

Oliver, Mary. *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver.*

Parkinson, Hannah Jane. *The Joy of Small Things.*

Tutu, Desmond. *Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference.*

En Español:

Chopra, Deepak. *De que se rie Dios?: el sendero hacia el gozo y el optimismo espiritual.*

O'Leary, John. *Vivir en el asombro: vuelve a descubrir la capacidad de asombrarte que tenías de niño, libera toda tu alegría e inspiración y reconecta con el sentido de la vida.*





SOURCES:

Dalai Lama [Tenzin Gyatso] and Desmond Tutu. 2016. “The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World.” With Douglas Abrams. New York: Avery.

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