

How Do I Find My Joy Again?

It has been said that joy comes in the morning. Morning follows night. It is dark at night. It is hard to see in the dark. It can be scary. We can get disoriented. We can lose hope. That is why our pupils become enlarged in the dark. It's as if they grow in size to seek out light.

I have been in the dark. Literally and metaphorically. It is scary. I have lost hope and I have lost my sight. Up becomes down and right becomes wrong. Lies seem like truth and joy is lost.

A global pandemic leaves us all disoriented. None of us are immune to the loss of normalcy that has arisen from the quarantine of COVID 19. Many of us have experienced the loss of our family, our jobs, our school and our friends. Some of us have lost health, money, peace. Some have lost their lives and those left behind have lost their loved one. Many have had their health compromised, even more have had their finances destroyed and even more have had their emotional state impaired. It is hard to keep our head above water, much less have any joy.

When personal health, loved one's health, finances and livelihood is dismantled, we can find ourselves utterly disoriented. It can feel like we are groping in darkness. It doesn't take long before a natural progression takes place and we find ourselves stuck.

I know I struggle to find the light on my own. Sometimes darkness blinds we need to borrow the eyes of someone of another to help find the light. You may need a safe place where you can speak about the disorientation of all the change, losses and fears. Connecting with someone about these intimate places can be freeing. Being free brings joy. The joy of connecting with another human is one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves.

Mister Roger's mother used to tell him that whenever there is something scary that has happened, look for the helpers. Those are the heroes. Who are your heroes? Can you name them? Finding who you look up to can lead you back to yourself. I sometimes imagine mine in a cloud of witnesses over me. I love knowing that people I admire have qualities to which I can aspire. I love knowing I can keep growing and becoming. The hope of changing and becoming more of who I long to be brings joy.

Sue Monk Kidd, award winning storyteller has said that we find ourselves in the stories of others. Whose stories do you know? Look for stories of others wherever you can find them. Watch or read or listen to a biography of someone you are interested in. Don't be surprised if you find yourself in someone's story and it leads you to know and love yourself a little more. You may see how fascinating and amazing you are and this can enliven your soul and bring you joy.

The Psalms are a place where you can read about darkness, suffering and loss . Except for Psalm 88, 149 Psalms end on a positive note. There is something transformational that happens when you write out your suffering. This practice can lead to hope. I have found that the more honest I am, the more truth I can find. Truth sets us free and this is inspiring! The practice of writing your laments is an exercise that can paradoxically and incredibly bring you feelings of freedom and joy.

Abraham Lincoln said "I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end ... I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me". Do you know that friend down inside of you? Are you a friend to her or him? Do you know that still, small voice inside you? Do you know that She or He will lead you to Love? President Lincoln's led him to fight for freedom. What might yours do? If you have ever trusted that sacred, secret voice that is you, then you know that joy that can come from being a friend with yourself.

"Do whatever brings you to life. Follow your own fascinations, obsessions and compulsions. Trust them. Create whatever causes a revolution in your heart" writes Elizabeth Gilbert in *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*. Being curious about life and people is one of the simplest things to bring joy. There is no pressure attached to following your curiosity. When you land in a place that is fascinating, see what you can create from that place. When you bring forth that creative energy, the result can be joy in the making, in the creating, in the learning and in the growing. Be curious and be creative and see what joys unfold.

St. Catherine of Siena said "if you are who you are meant to be, you will set the world on fire". Are you being exactly who you are? Or do you find yourself adjusting yourself? You have been fearfully and wonderfully made to be the exact person you are. You are unique. You are stamped with dignity. Living from the truth of exactly who you are is powerful. If you have had a glimmer of that person go on a quest to be that exact person. Find your uniqueness. Be true to that person. Joy comes from being exactly who we were meant to be and imagining all that could be.

So if you are like me, this is not the first time nor the last time that you will have to walk through some dark times to find your joy. But when you have seen light after darkness, you start to recognize the light. There is joy in this light. Orienting your heart to the things that are true and real and right for you will bring you to that place of true joy. Below are gentle reminders we have talked about that can remind you how to get back to you:

Connect with safe people about deep things - meaningful connections bring joy. Find and name your heroes - they will show you the joy of who you can become. Read or watch biographies - seeing yourself in others' stories will remind you of your own amazing story. Be a friend to yourself - there is no greater joy than being at home with yourself. Be creative. Be curious - there is joy in making beauty. Find your uniqueness and love your uniqueness - joy comes from knowing you can make a difference Be exactly who you are - in all situations with all people always be authentic.