

# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

### **Invitation to Joy, Introduction & Arrival**

What is the difference between joy and happiness in your view?

What do you think about the statement “Lasting happiness ... resides only in the human mind and heart...” not in our income, achievements, accolades, events or other external circumstances?

The Dalai Lama gets up at 3 am to meditate for five hours. Archbishop Tutu gets up at 4 am and prays for 3-4 hours. What do you think is the relationship between prayer/meditation and joy?

Abrams describes the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu as having “dogged hope in humanity” and their refusal to give in to “fashionable cynicism.” How is “fashionable cynicism” shaping our society? How can we foster “dogged hope in humanity?”

### **Day 1: The Nature of True Joy**

#### **Why Are You Not Morose?**

Nobody wants to have problems or suffering but “many problems and much suffering is of our own creation” (p. 30). Why do we as individuals and a society find it difficult to accept responsibility for our problems and suffering?

This chapter includes a list of the states or feelings of joy (pp 33-34). What are examples from your life when you had feelings of joy or been in a state of joy?

Not all feelings of joy capture the essence of joy represented by the Dalai Lama & Desmond Tutu (p. 34). How does “lasting joy – joy as a state of being” differ?

The Archbishop asks “why are you not morose?” The Dalai Lama responds, when you experience some tragic situation, think about it. If there’s nothing to be done about it, there’s no reason to worry or be dejected. He recommends expanding our perspective (e.g., shifting from our own to others’ suffering, from anguish to compassion, comparing to uniting with others) (pp. 36-37). How is it possible to experience pain without suffering?

The Archbishop explains “The question is not – how do I escape [pain]? It is: how do I use this as something positive?” What’s a painful experience you’ve had that led you to something positive?

## **Nothing Beautiful Comes Without Some Suffering**

The Archbishop says if you set out to be joyful – you won't end up being joyful. What does that mean to you?

The Archbishop explains “it is how we face all of the things that seem to be negative in our lives that determines the kind of person we become. If we regard all of this as frustrating, we're going to come out ... angry and wishing to smash everything.... nothing beautiful ... comes out without a measure of some pain, some frustration, some suffering (pp. 44-45). What do you do inside yourself not to feel angry, fearful or self-pity or to complain?

The Archbishop and Dalai Lama disagree on how much control we have over our emotions. The Archbishop says we have very little while the Dalai Lama says we have more than we think (p. 46). What do you think?

Self-absorption leads to suffering. “Obsessing about getting what you want and avoiding what you don't want does not result in happiness” (p. 48). “We have to take care of ourselves without selfishly taking care of ourselves” (p. 47). How do you know when you've crossed the line?

Buddhism teaches joy is our natural state and that the ability to experience joy can be cultivated as a skill (p. 48). A study identifies three factors that seem to have the greatest influence on increasing happiness: our ability to reframe our situation more positively, our ability to experience gratitude and our choice to be kind & generous (p. 49). How have you used these three factors in your life?

## **Have You Renounced Pleasure?**

There is a difference between taking pleasure from external stimuli (e.g., music, sex, food, sports and entertainment) and pleasure from the mind. Physical pleasure is limited and brief and does not lead to happiness. Happiness from the mind, love, compassion, generosity, leads to more lasting fulfilment. It isn't that one is right and the other wrong; rather it's an issue of balance (pp. 52-54). How do you cultivate love, compassion, generosity, strength, peace and so on that lead to fulfilment?

“... the more we experience any pleasure, the more we become numb to its effects and take its pleasures for granted....it is like a drug that must be taken in ever-greater quantities to produce the same high (p. 55). What's your experience of this?

There are four “circuits” of the brain: the ability to maintain positive states, the ability to recover from negative states, our ability to focus and the ability to be generous. Which of these circuits are most developed in you? Which do you want to strengthen?

As humans, we have three often unconscious goals: to survive, reproduce and cooperate, especially with our caregivers. As a result of these unconscious goals, we are more wary of others who are different from us. Archbishop Tutu and the Dalai Lama constantly remind us that all humans are our brothers and sisters (p. 57). How can we as individuals and groups extend our need to cooperate to people who are different than us?

## **Our Greatest Joy**

We are wired to be compassionate, caring and generous to one another. “We shrivel when we are unable to interact....A person is a person through other persons.” This requires trust (pp. 59-62). How do you develop trust in others in today’s polarized environment?

If one of the foundations of joy is going beyond self-centeredness, then is it selfish and self-defeating to focus on our own joy and happiness?

What does cultivating our own joy have to do with addressing the suffering in the world?

How can you become “a reservoir of joy, a pool of serenity that can ripple out to all those around you?” (p. 63)

## **The Meeting of Two Mischievous People**

What does it mean to be fully present?

How do you make a gallon of ice cream last for months? In other words, why is humor important?

How do we show our love for those whose beliefs and understanding differ from ours without agreeing with them in today’s polarized environment?

## **Day 2 & 3: The Obstacles to Joy**

### **You Are a Masterpiece in the Making**

How can we differentiate harmful or toxic thoughts and emotions from healthy and healing thoughts and emotions?

What is mental immunity and how do we cultivate it?

Why is it important to accept ourselves as we are, to avoid feeling ashamed? How do we accept ourselves as we are in this moment while simultaneously training our minds to do better in the next moment?

In our first week, we talked about whether emotions are unavoidable or not? Since then, have your thoughts changed? If so, how?

Do you agree with the belief that life is inevitably filled with suffering? Suffering may be defined as the stress and anxiety of trying to control what is impermanent, uncertain and out of our control or as the stress and anxiety associated with life, illness and aging (p. 87)?

“We have perceptions about our experience, and we judge them: ‘This is good.’ This is bad.’ ‘This is neutral.’ Then we have responses: fear, frustration, anger. These are just aspects of mind. They are not the actual reality” (p. 88).. Why is it important to notice when we are judging experiences good or bad? To differentiate between a story explaining what is real from what is actual reality?

How does it change your interpretation of others' actions if you believe in your heart that basic human nature is good, compassionate and intends no harm toward you (p. 89)?

Many of us are perfectionists in some aspects of our lives. How does the need to be perfect affect our relationship with the divine (p 91)?

### **Fear, Stress & Anxiety: I Would Be Very Nervous**

Fear and anxiety are emotions that help us survive danger. "The problem is when fear is exaggerated, when it is provoked by something that is really quite insignificant" (p. 93). What do you think the Archbishop means?"

Nelson Mandela says courage is not the absence of fear but triumph over it. Desmond Tutu describes bravery not as the absence of fear but the ability to act despite it. Pema Chodron says bravery is not the absence of fear but intimacy with fear. Abrams writes courage is the triumph of our heart's love and commitment over our mind's reasonable murmurings to keep us safe. What do you think courage/bravery is?

Tutu differentiates "natural fear" and a general state of unease characterized by stress, worry and anxiety. He attributes the generalized anxiety to juggling too many things at once. Jinpa attributes it to trying to be too independent. Either way stress and anxiety are inevitable parts of modern life. (p. 96) How can we confront these ever-present irritants? How do we minimize our worry?

The Dalai Lama says stress and anxiety often come from too much expectation or ambition, too much getting and grasping? How do you manage your expectations and ambition?

Our bodies respond differently to stress when we shift perspectives, turning a threat into a challenge. What are some examples?

Stress is the brain's way of signaling something is important. Stress alone is not "the problem;" rather the problem is how we respond to stress. How do you manage your responses to stress?

Much of our stress is seeing ourselves as separate of communal connection, of Ubuntu. How do we strengthen our connections with other people in the midst of our busy lives?

"If we think we are something special or not special enough, then fear, nervousness, stress and anxiety arise. We are the same" (p. 99). This goes against the grain of American cultural expectations of independence and uniqueness. How would our culture and communities be different if we valued our sameness more?

"When we see others as separate, they become a threat. When we see others as part of us, as connected, as interdependent, then there are no challenges we cannot face – together (p. 100). How do we cultivate community with people across religion, political beliefs, race, culture and economic status?

### **Frustration & Anger: I Would Shout**

How do your spiritual practices and beliefs affect your day-to-day interactions, like driving in traffic?

The Dalai Lama posits fear underlies anger – 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” (p. 104). How does this play out as individuals and as a society? What is the antidote?

How does self-compassion and compassion for others defuse the fear associated with anger?

The Dalai Lama differentiates between what Palestinian youth had to do physically and what they could do mentally. What does that mean for us? Is there a place for righteous anger?

How can we develop the habit of avoiding “the rocky terrain of negative emotions” and find our way “more easily to the promised land of compassion and contentment?” (p. 107)

### **Sadness & Grief: The Hard Times Knit Us More Closely Together**

The Archbishop and Dalai Lama deal with sadness and grief slightly differently. However, both shift the focus away from themselves and how the loss affects them personally. How do you process sadness and grief?

Abrams talks about the benefits of sadness. What do you think?

“We try so hard to separate joy and sorrow into their own boxes ... but they are inevitably fastened together” (p. 111). What is the result when we only focus on happiness and avoid sadness on us as individuals and as a society?

If you focus on the loved one you lost, falling into despair is less likely. If you focus on yourself and how the loss affects you, despair and depression are more likely. As we grieve the many losses resulting from this pandemic, how might we use this insight to try to avoid despair and depression?

Abrams writes grief cannot exist if there is not love. Yet, we grieve not only the loss of loved ones but also the loss of a job, loss of a dream, loss of security and predictability and other kinds of losses. How do fear and expectations complicate our grief in these situations?

Many of us quickly delete the lost love and move on. Abrams writes “to linger in the longing, the loss, the yearning is a way of feeling the rich and embroidered texture of life, the torn cloth of our world that is endlessly being ripped and rewoven” (p. 113). At what point does healthy lingering end and unhealthy clinging begin? How do you know the difference?

### **Despair: The World is in Such Turmoil**

How can we find joy in the midst of such large world problems – pandemic, unemployment, hunger, poverty, climate change, rising despotism, endless conflict, militarism, concentration of wealth, discrimination, etc?

“It’s so wonderful that we can be distressed. That’s part of the greatness of who we are.” How can we translate this distress into doing what we can where we are without feeling we should be doing more?

Do you believe the arc of the moral universe is long but bends toward justice? Why or why not?

The Dalai Lama describes taking on the fear, anger and suspicion of the Chinese who brutally put down peaceful demonstrations in Tibet in 2008. He offered them his love and forgiveness. (p. 118) What might be the result if we applied this practice of tonglen to those whose values and beliefs are polar opposites from our own? Could compassion and forgiveness reduce polarization in the world?

“We’ve always got to be recognizing that despite the aberrations, the fundamental thing about humanity, about humankind, about people, is that they are good, they were made good and they really want to be good” (p. 120). How do you reconcile this belief with what’s happening in the world now?

What would compel the Archbishop to discourage people from being optimistic? How does optimism differ from the belief that people are inherently good? From hope?

The Archbishop says optimism is based on feelings and hope on actual reality. What does that mean?

### **Loneliness: No Need for Introduction**

People reporting fewer or no close friendships are increasing, particularly in urban centers. What’s behind this trend?

How can we be responsible for people we don’t know?

In our materialistic culture(s), we do not learn to nurture compassion so our human potential for compassion becomes dormant. What can we do to nurture our own compassion?

The Archbishop says “there are programs to break down that loneliness?” What programs do you know of that do this?

Loneliness can occur both when we are alone and in a room full of people. We can feel joy when we are alone but not when we feel lonely. How do you explain these statements?

“Much depends on your attitude. If you are filled with negative judgment and anger, then you will feel separate from other people. You will feel lonely. But if you have an open heart and are filled with trust and friendship, even if you are physically alone, even living a hermit’s life, you will never feel lonely” (p. 129) Do you agree?

What is the relationship between trust and loneliness? What is the relationship between the need to feel special (or unique) and loneliness?

What is the antidote to loneliness?

### **Envy: That Guy Goes Past Yet Again in His Mercedes-Benz**

Urges to compare are just human. They come unbidden. If we notice the urge, we can choose whether or not to go down the rabbit hole of comparing ourselves to others or some expectation of how things “should” be. The envy that follows comes to us unbidden. The only way to avoid envy is to not make comparisons. How much control do you think we have of our thoughts? What’s the difference between an urge to think about something (e.g., to compare) vs. our response to the urge?

How we relate to others can lead to joy or suffering. Envy of others leads to “competitiveness toward the equal and contempt toward the lower” (p. 135) What do you think?

The response of the capuchin monkey to perceived unfairness “poignantly revealed how our fundamental instincts for fairness work and why inequality is stressful and damaging to a society” (136). How can we strive toward increased fairness as individuals in relationship with other individuals, families, communities and nations?

As we strive for greater fairness, some unfairness will always exist. How do we also accept that there will always be people who have (or do) more than we do or who are more successful, or more talented, smarter or better-looking? How do we practice acceptance within our peer groups?

The Archbishop and Dalai Lama differ on how to respond to negative emotions. The Archbishop focuses on acceptance and self-forgiveness. He identifies gratitude, motivation and reframing as the antidotes. The Dalai Lama identifies “sympathetic joy” as the antidote. This focuses on our “shared humanity” with others rather than our separateness and the exaggerated differences that lead to competition. He also suggests preventive measures (e.g., developing a meditation practice to calm the mind). How might you weave their two approaches together to prevent envy as much as possible and to accept and forgive it when it inevitably arises?

### **Suffering and Adversity: Passing through Difficulties**

When things are going well, we take for granted what we have and who we are. Painful experiences shine light on the nature of happiness, bringing joyful experiences into sharp relief against the pain. What has been your experience of joy coexisting with suffering?

As parents, we try hard to protect our children from experiencing pain and suffering. By doing so, how have we robbed them of their ability to grow and learn from adversity? What is the antidote?

How are pain and suffering a “problem to be solved” versus an “opportunity to grow?”

Buddhism says three poisons are at the heart of much suffering: attachment, anger and delusion. What is your understanding of the three poisons and how do they lead to suffering?

Buddhism further says three types of relationships are the primary sources of the three poisons: family, teachers/mentors and adversaries. Why might this be?

By transforming our interactions with family, teachers/mentors and adversaries – we develop three roots of virtue: nonattachment, compassion and wisdom. What might these transformed interactions look like?

What qualities did survivors of Nazi death camps and the Gulag have in common that we might nurture in ourselves?

Love your neighbor as you love yourself, Jesus says. In other words, long for the best for others as you would want the best for yourself. We all know this verse well but what does it mean?

The path to joy does not avoid pain and suffering but goes through it. In what ways do you avoid pain and suffering? What does it mean to “go through it?”

The Archbishop says “Nothing beautiful comes without some suffering” (p. 150). The Dalai Lama goes further, saying “you actually feel more joy after you’ve succeeded in the face of opposition” (p.151) – not in spite of but because of adversity. Describe a situation when you ended up better off because of adversity.

As humans, we want control and certainty. We want to know in advance what is good and bad. But the Dalai Lama says “We can never know what, in the end, will come of our suffering and adversity, what is good and what is bad” (p. 151). How does our need for control and certainty lead to suffering? What can we do to avoid the urge to judge adversity as good or bad?

Whether someone can find meaning in the suffering determines whether it is embittering or ennobling. What meaning are you making out of the current health and economic crises?

We grow in kindness when our kindness is tested. The greatest danger is not to lose our lives but to lose compassion, to lose heart, to lose our humanity. How do we cultivate compassion for those whose beliefs are polar opposite to our own?

Most of us fear being engulfed by suffering. We wonder will the suffering ever end. Is this the way it will always be? We fear not knowing how long or how much we will suffer. These thoughts become self-fulfilling prophecies. What can we do with these fears?

Buddhists believe suffering has three virtues. The shock of suffering causes our arrogance to fall away. Suffering gives rise to compassion for all others who are suffering. And we avoid actions that will bring suffering to others. Some degree of tolerance and acceptance are needed as is recognition that all suffer. What practices cultivate these qualities?

### **Illness and Fear of Death: I Prefer to Go to Hell**

What comes to mind when you contemplate your own mortality? Maybe it's fear of oblivion, doubt that anything follows death, fear of suffering that might precede death, nostalgia for who and what you will miss, a sense of calm or peace, denial that death is certain, avoidance, acceptance, curiosity, certainty you will see loved ones again on the other side or some combination of feelings.

Desmond Tutu describes his vision of heaven (p. 162). What's yours?

Curing resolves the illness, which is not always possible. Healing involves coming to wholeness and can happen whether or not the illness is curable. Western medicine focuses on curing illness. What happens when an illness is cured but healing doesn't take place?

"It is the nature of all things that come into existence to have an end ... Life keeps changing and things cease to exist, including us. In every single moment everything is changing ... Our body is constantly changing, as is our mind" (p.165). In spite of this, we act as though many things are (or should be) permanent. What does being in a constant state of change mean for us in our daily lives?

Spiritual development can be measured in how we confront our own mortality. There is a continuum from joy to without fear to without regrets and so on. Where are you in this continuum?

"If there is a way to overcome the situation, then instead of feeling too much sadness, too much fear or too much anger, make an effort to change the situation. If there's nothing you can do to overcome the situation, then there is no need for fear, sadness or anger" (p. 167). The Dalai Lama then applies this to fear of death? What does he recommend?

### **Meditation: Now I'll Tell You a Secret Thing**

"The real secret of freedom may simply be extending the brief space between stimulus and response. Meditation seems to elongate this pause and help expand our ability to choose our response" (p. 179). In addition to meditation, what are some ways to extend this brief space?

Is there a difference between meditation and prayer? If so, how do you differentiate them?

Removing the distinctions between who we see as "us" and who we see as "other" is one of the greatest challenges humanity faces, including religious distinctions of us and them. Research suggests that we have a "rather binary" understanding of self and other. Our empathy circuits do not activate unless we see the other person as part of our own group. In what ways do we define our circle of concern?



