



Joseph Campbell encourages us to participate joyfully in the sorrows of the world. Living a spirit-centered life when we hear of other’s suffering, we are called to practice compassion. When suffering is inflicted upon us, we are called to practice forgiveness. When the mental world of humankind seems flipped up-side down and shaken sideways so that we seem to not even recognize our own reflection, we are called not to go down in the muck with the sensationalists, pundits, and cynics but to rise to the level of those who are most spiritually “*awake*” and refuse to live from anything but joy.

KEY POINTS:

- Even when challenged physical, emotionally, or spiritually, we can still choose to live in joy.
- Joy, born of the Spirit, cannot be destroyed by that of the “world.”
- There are particular ways in which we experience meaning. Suffering can be one of those.

The Shift to Experiencing Portals To Joy

By Dodi Jackson

There is a well-spring of joy in each of us. It rests as an undercurrent, a river of Love and inspiration flowing without end from Spirit. On the in-taking of our first breath in this human body, Joy was at the ready and eager to be present and brought into this new beingness. We never have to “create” this Joy; it is our Birthright. It simply resides within, our whole life through, waiting to be seen and known. This does not mean we are always feeling it. As we walk our human road, so many sensations flood us. We experience times of uncomfortableness in our bodies, situations that arise and pull us off center. We ride the roller coaster of thoughts and emotions. Certainly, this is the nature of us as Spiritual Beings having a human experience. Conditions come in waves, and we learn little by little how to navigate those waves. And yet the wise ones in every faith path speak of this Joy. They remind us of the power and the sweetness of it. They offer inspiration to lift us. They show us the stardust paths they have walked. So rather than needing to “create” joy in our lives, we need to punch holes in whatever barriers may exist that keep us from seeing and feeling it. The “portals of joy” are like windows and doors through which we can glimpse it, touch it, and allow it to touch us. We can walk through the invisible membranes that keep us from what we really want and need. It is for each of us as human beings to discover which ways work best for us to do this. This week, in our Adventures in Faith explorations, we seek to articulate for ourselves how to know that current of joy that lies beneath the surface of our lives. We do not seek to deny or turn away from the very real challenges in our lives. But we make the shift to trust the undercurrent and expand our repertoire in accessing it.

QUOTES FOR THE JOURNEY

I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, ‘Where’s the self-help section?’ She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.

~ Steven Wright

You are an eternal being now on the pathway of endless unfoldment, never less but always more yourself. Life is not static. It is forever dynamic, forever creating—not something done and finished, but something alive, awake and aware. There is something inside you that sings the song of eternity. Listen to it. There is an eternal springtime of your soul. Always rising but never setting is the sun of your destiny.

~ Ernest Holmes

Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

~ Psalm 16:11

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. What has been a key insight you have gathered in our time together?
2. Who is someone in our group who has inspired you?
3. What interfaith practice are you most likely to continue to practice and explore?



OPTIONAL PROCESSES

Process One: Frankl's Three Ways To Experience Meaning

Viktor Frankl talked about three ways to find meaning in life.

- By performing a deed or creating something-taking action.
- By coming into contact with someone or experiencing something.
- By experiencing unavoidable suffering, and the attitude we take toward it.

The first may be defined as living for a cause greater than one's self. This can be answering a calling to serve a community, or towards a career, or in service to others.

The second way may be defined as loving others, as putting others needs above your own.

The third is the transcendence we find when we cannot change a situation, but in turn change ourselves.

Frankl shares the following: *"Does this not bring to mind the story of Death in Teheran? A rich and mighty Persian once walked in his garden with one of his servants. The servant cried that he had just encountered Death, who had threatened him. He begged his master to give him his fastest horse so that he could make haste and flee to Teheran, which he could reach that same evening. The master consented and the servant galloped off on the horse. On returning to his house, the master*

himself met death, questioned him, "Why did you terrify and threaten my servant?" "I did not threaten him; I only showed surprise in still finding him here when I planned to meet him tonight in Teheran," said Death."

Do you agree with Frankl? Have you found meaning in these three areas?

How, if at all, can suffering teach us to live in joy?

Process Two: May I, May You

This beautiful practice comes to us from Alana Shaw, Founder and Artistic Director of "Turning the Wheel," an intergenerational dance theater company based in Boulder, Colorado.

For this exercise, we will work in pairs. So turn to a person sitting next to you. Find a place where the two of you can sit facing each other either on chairs or on the floor. Start by joining hands if this is comfortable for you. You may also just sit near each other. Spend a moment or two just breathing, allowing your breath to take you to a calm and centered place. Now you will take turns: Partner #1 begins by saying "May I" and follows that sentence stem with a statement of something she/he desires. (Example: "May I experience peace in my life.") The second person repeats the desire that has just been expressed, saying, "May you experience peace in your life." It is important to repeat the sentence exactly, if you can. Then partner #2 speaks a desire. (Example: "May I give and receive Love freely in my life.") Partner #1 repeats this wish. Take a breath or two

in between each new thought, giving it time to have weight and sink in. Now it is person #1's turn to voice a wish or desire. ("May I ...") And Person #2 will echo that, "May you..." Continue in this same way. You may be as global or as specific as you are led to be. (*May my hip heal rapidly and perfectly from the surgery, or, May I break the pattern of... or take action on...*) I have done this exercise many times with diverse groups of people. It has never failed to be a satisfying and moving experience. The whole atmosphere of the room often lifts as we offer our heartfelt affirmations to each other. People tend to allow themselves another layer of vulnerability—whatever that looks and feels like to them. This activity can easily serve as a culminating exercise which can bring a sense of closure to the group. When people slow down and eventually become silent, just breathing together, the facilitator will know it is complete. Sometimes people like to share how the process felt, or what it meant to them, or what they learned. Each group facilitator will "*read the group*" and choose a way to gently bring it to a close.

Process Three: Honoring Circle

This can be as simple as asking each participant to say something they honor about the person to their left, or as focused as highlighting one person at a time (possibly having them sit in the middle of the circle) and having each group member say something they honor about them.

This can be a meaningful closing process.





INTERFAITH PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

(Handout)

From the Hindu Tradition:

Create a Family Altar with Chanting Practice

“God is not in the mountain, nor even in the temple, holy as It may be. God is within me, now, today, this very moment, in this breath I draw, in the eternal now and the everlasting here.”

~ Ernest Holmes

Create a Hinduism-Inspired Altar

Having an altar in your home is one way in which you can connect to the sacred and your spirituality on a daily basis. Here are some ideas on how you can create a Hinduism-inspired altar at home:

- 1. Sacred Space:** Find a place in your home where the altar will not interrupt daily life, a corner with a space where you can sit or lie down peacefully without interruption. Place a small table or a blanket in order to differentiate the sacred space for your altar.
- 2. Sacred Items:** Gather some sacred items that have meaning and that bring you feelings of peace, love, inspiration, honoring, or celebration.
- 3. Murtis (Statues):** Place murtis or statues on your altar. In Hinduism, murtis or statues of deities are placed upon the altar in order to represent the qualities that you would like to draw forth in your life or within your own heart. These statues can come from any faith tradition or culture as long as they are meaningful to you and placed with reverence and intention.

Some popular suggestions from Hinduism are the elephant-headed *Ganesha* (the remover of obstacles), *Saraswati* (the Hindu Goddess of the arts and knowledge), and *Hanuman* for his devotion and love. In the Hindu philosophy, the deities aren't considered anything outside of you but represent aspects of your own human nature.

Quan Yin is the Buddhist Goddess of compassion, for example, and can help you manifest empathy and love within your own heart. Whatever calls to you is appropriate and meaningful.

- 4. Meaningful Photos:** Photographs of ascended masters, children, or relatives help to bring you into a state of oneness with those who inspire you and have helped you come to the current moment. By adding these photos to your altar, you are celebrating those who have supported your growth, perhaps even challenged you to support you in becoming who you are today.
- 5. Mala Beads:** The altar is an excellent space to place your mala or prayer beads when you are not using them and to hold them in sacred energy for when you are ready to use them next.
- 6. Sacred Texts:** An important part of the Hindu tradition is *svadhyaya*, or study of the Self through sacred texts, or *shastras*. Any text (like the *Bible*, *The Torah*, *The Qu'ran*, *Tao Te Ching*, *The Bhagavad Gita* or any other sacred text) could have a special home on or near your altar. Make them accessible so they can be a regular part of your spiritual rituals.

7. Journal: You may feel like placing your journal or special pens near your altar. If writing is a part of your practice, keep a special journal that holds within it your blessed energy.

Your altar can be used as an integral part of your spiritual practice. With intention, it becomes a sacred space that holds the energy of devotion and reverence for your sacred practices and personal growth rituals. Prayer, ceremony, meditation, chanting, and contemplation will infuse the items in your altar space with wonderful and powerful energy that supports your returning to that state of being each time you practice there.

And, as it is now part of your home, each time you are near it, you can feel the energy and can connect with all that you are cultivating as part of your own spiritual practice.

May the space around you reflect the sacred within you!

Mantra Spiritual Practice

The word mantra comes from two Sanskrit words/syllables:

Manas or “mind” and *Trai*, the syllable that means “to protect” or “to free from.”

Therefore, a mantra is a spiritual tool used by your mind in order to free yourself from the repetitive nature of the mind or unwanted thoughts.

This week, you have the opportunity to explore and to establish a daily chanting practice. Spend five minutes per day chanting with a Hindu mantra.

There are many ways to chant mantras. You can chant by simply speaking the words aloud over and over, or you can sing the mantra out loud to yourself by making up your own melody, or you can find a chant on YouTube or the Internet to chant along while you listen to someone else singing.

Begin by setting your intention, centering yourself by taking a few deep breaths and then begin to chant.

Sometimes it is supportive to hold a mala while you are chanting, hold a bead in your hand and chant the entire mantra upon finishing move to the next bead until you have completed 108 recitations.

If you are able to do this at an altar with an image of Hindu deities, a candle burning, and/or the “Om” symbol that is included here, that would support your practice by providing a sacred focal point for your attention.

Here are some Hindu Mantras you might try:

Om Namah Shivaya

“I bow to Shiva, removing all negative energy and attracting positive energy.”

Aham Prema

“I am Divine Love”

Ohm Shanti

“Peace be with you”





AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER

“I believe that the joy of the Lord is within me, and I saturate my thinking with it this day. I have happiness in my heart and joy in my soul. I laugh and live in peace. I give joy to all whom I meet. I speak only of those things which bring joy to my friends and happiness to myself. I see my present world as heaven. I see my present family, friends, and coworkers as spiritual beings. I see God everywhere, and my joy is full. I give thanks to the unfailing presence of God for this joy in my life.”

From Ernest Holmes and Raymond Charles Barker’s *“Richer Living”*

AFFIRMATION

From Boulder, Colorado poet Elizabeth Reninger, *“And Now the Story Lives Inside You”*

*Stars Branching to infinity
Your light is a boundless celebration holds within its rapture
A thousand galaxies naked beneath every heaven you compose
A melody so fine only children and angels can hear it
As when a rising receding tide whispers its secret to miles of white sand
Each grain a phrase or syllable awakened and you who’ve walked this beach forever
Where your footprints used to be now a reflected moon
Now your own voice singing.*