



August 2009 Contemplation Theme

# Joy

by Swami Nirmalaananda Saraswati

Life is about joy. When you have no joy in your life, your face looks like a shriveled up prune. When you have no joy in your life, you look for a way to change things, because joy is an essential ingredient, as if it were a vitamin. You need more vitamin J (joy) than vitamin B or C or any others. Consider, are you getting enough vitamin J these days?

*Aananda* is the Sanskrit word for joy, and is even part of my name. Technically it means bliss, but I don't think anyone knows what that is, because no one is actually experiencing bliss. To experience joy is rare enough.

You know what pleasure is, but may have already noticed that pleasure is unfortunately not the same as joy. Sometimes pleasure prompts the experience of joy, but they are distinctly different experiences. You can chow down on your favorite snack without really enjoying it. Sometimes you revel in it and other times you merely consume the calories. You can jump into a pristine lake and experience great joy – or not. Sometimes it's just cold. You can soak in a hot bath, a wonderful pleasure, and feel relaxed afterward, but sometimes it gives you joy and sometimes it does not. What is joy?

A yogi recently showed me photos of her new grandson. She was radiating joy. She attributed her joy to this new baby in her life, saying, "He makes me so happy." Yet if the baby were the source of happiness, then he would make everyone feel joy. There would be little joy molecules emanating from the baby. Those molecules would waft through the air and infect everyone who was around, like germs. But that doesn't happen. You can easily see the reality that it doesn't happen:

1. Sometimes the baby is crying, which disturbs the people around him. They are not experiencing joy when he is crying.
2. The new grandmother doesn't have to be in the same room or the same city as the baby. She can show his photo or merely think of him and feel joy. The "joy molecules" wouldn't reach that far.
3. Some people see the photo or even meet the baby and don't experience joy. Some people simply don't get joyful around babies. They may experience joy from puppies or kittens, or it might be beautiful gardens for them, or something else, but babies are not their thing.

Thus, the baby is not the source of the joy. Neither is the bath or the swim in the lake, and neither is anything else. You do not acquire joy from outside of you. This means you cannot buy it, you cannot chase and catch it, you cannot earn it, and you cannot receive it from someone else. This is because joy is inherent to your being. It is already within you, but you are looking in the wrong place. You are looking outside when you need to be looking inside.

As long as you look outside for joy, you will rarely find it. It's like looking for emeralds in the compost bin. You can dig and dig and dig. You can get steamy, sweaty and smelly, and you still don't find any emeralds. But when you stop digging, you may feel a surge of joy arise. When you stop chasing after things outside of you, you experience joy.

One of the most famous phrases in American history is "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The Declaration of Independence says that all human beings are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..." It lists "the pursuit of happiness," not "the experience of happiness." It's an American's right to be chasing happiness. The chase has become more important than the experience. As long as you are in the chase, you're like a greyhound running after the mechanical rabbit. Even if the dog is able to catch the machine, she or he doesn't experience joy. This means that you have to stop the chase. Even greyhounds get rescued! Who is going to rescue you?

As long as you are chasing joy, you will never have it. Yoga says that you have to stop the frantic and crazed routines that seem to own you. This doesn't mean that you should quit your job or leave your relationships. It means you can do everything, but without the frantic and crazed mindset that sabotages your life. Instead of searching for emeralds in compost, realize that compost itself is called black gold. Joy can be found anywhere and everywhere, when you stop and be where you are at.

Ram Dass titled a well-known book with this ancient yoga teaching, "Be Here Now." In our Embodiment yoga therapy course, we describe it this way, "Being with what is, while it is the way it is." I got a great lesson in this from a 17-year old yogi with cancer. When she was in intensive care, her family took shifts so there was someone sitting with her all day and evening, though they went home to sleep at night. Every morning at 3 a.m., she got much

worse, so I took the 3 a.m. shift. I went to her room and chanted to her every morning from 3 – 5 a.m. The nurses would sit and watch her vital signs improve while I was there.

I never knew what her condition would be when I arrived. She was comatose, and could not speak or acknowledge me in any way – but her vital signs improved. She made it through another night. So I came again the next morning. The family allowed me to be there as she died, and I chanted her through the next levels of her journey. It was a great honor to support her in this way. It was a great joy.

Joy comes in many varieties. There is explosive joy and quiet joy. There is sweet joy and bittersweet joy. There is quiet joy and there is overflowing joy. Sometimes joy brings laughter and sometimes it brings tears. But the bottom line is that you are not experiencing enough joy. The reason that you are not experiencing enough joy is that you don't really understand how it works. You're trying to chase it, but you are not good at it because you haven't been trained in how vitamin J really works.

You work hard at getting more joy. You go to all the right places, do all the right things, spend your time with all the right people – the places, things and people that had prompted an experience of joy for you in the past. You avoid the people, places and things that prompted pain in the past. You place yourself in the perfect environment, hoping the things that worked in the past will work again. You buy the right clothes, choose the yummiest foods, and even rent movies you have seen before. You decorate your home and body. Consciously or unconsciously, you manipulate the people around you so they will do what you want, give you what you want, and even say what you want. Still, you experience joy too seldom.

A team of psychologists studied joy in adults and in children. They published statistics in their report, that the average 2-year old laughs 60 times a day, and the average 30-year old laughs 6 times a day. This is why I say you don't have enough joy in your life.

You are made of joy. You have to work hard to suppress the joy that is ever-arising within you, and you have already perfected the art of doing this. You cannot really learn how to cultivate joy because it is not a learning process. It's an unlearning. You have to unlearn how to block the joy. The problem is that you have been blocking it for so long, and so has everyone around you. It's so ingrained in you that you cannot tell that you are doing it. In every *Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga class, we take you a little deeper into the unlearning, beginning with Shavasana and the Guided Awareness. As you learn to be aware of your whole body, beginning with your toes, you learn how to unblock your habitual blocking. The spinal release deepens your unlearning. Perhaps you thought you were learning how to relax your habitual tensions, but much more is really going on.

The physical tensions you feel are only the tip of the iceberg. First, there are physical tensions you don't even feel, because they have been tight so long that you don't notice them any more. Second, the tightest tensions are in the deepest layers of your body, and it's hard to feel in there, especially since you cannot see in there. Third, your physical tensions are the outward expression of mental and emotional tensions that you don't want to look at, or you don't know how to see. I refer to them as your blind spots, and life will blindsides you again and again if you don't begin to shine light into your blind spots. This means that your body, mind and emotions are always working together, expressed through your multiple layers of tension.

Remember that 90% of the iceberg is under water. The hidden part is the most important part. Your layers of tension are telling you that your aliveness is blocked in that area of your body, mind and emotions. These parts of your body, mind and emotions are less alive. Yoga describes it in technical terminology: these areas have less *prana*, which means less aliveness.

Where you are less alive, there is less joy. This is because life itself is joy-full, and if there is less life, there is less joy. The 2-year old, laughing 60 times a day, is more alive than you are. You were once that 2-year old. You were once that alive. You once laughed 60 times a day. *Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga will give that back to you. *Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga will give you more laughter, more aliveness, even more joy. *Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga will give you the bliss of your own being, which is why it is called *svaroopa*. Do more yoga.

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