

## HOW JOYFUL ARE YOU?

Hi Creative One,

What is joy?

For most of us we might say it's happiness, while knowing it's more than happiness. Joy is a core human experience and often difficult to understand the true depth of its meaning in our lives.

Ph.D. Pamela Ebstyne King a researcher on the intersection of human thriving, moral, and spiritual development states *"through my research in the last two decades on human thriving, I have noticed that happiness can be a fleeting feeling that might accompany a slice of pizza and passes as soon as I digest it! As a developmental psychologist, I have interviewed and studied exemplary and ordinary lives. I have observed that many people have an enduring and underlying sense of something that is deeper than the emotion of happiness, and I have come to describe this as joy. **In my study of joy, I have also noticed that joy is more complex than a feeling or an emotion. It is something one can practice, cultivate, or make a habit.** Consequently, I suggest that joy is most fully understood as a virtue that involves our thoughts, feelings, and actions in response to what matters most in our lives. Thus, joy is an enduring, deep delight in what holds the most significance."*

All of us have experienced joy and we know it when it happens. It is interesting, in my personal self-awareness journey I began noticing that my joyful responses come in varying displays of emotions.

- There is an overwhelming all-consuming joy of courtship with your partner we call infatuation.
- The animated YES when we land the perfect basketball shot into the hoop.
- The overall calm of watching your baby sleeping when they suddenly smile from passing gas, and then there is ...
- The enduring joy attached to no event, it's when you breathe in and take stock of your life. You realize life is good, and you feel this sense of peace combined with blissfulness.

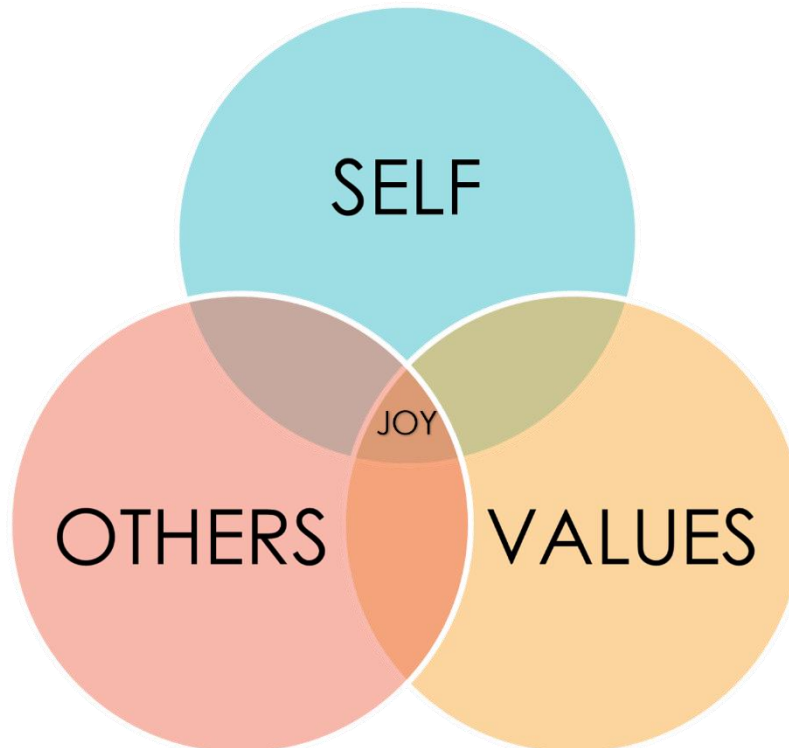
Dr. Pamela E. King also shares ...

*A helpful way of thinking about joy is understanding what matters most in human life. Reviewing philosophical, theological, and psychological approaches, I identified three areas that deeply inform joy. They are ...*

1. *Growing in authenticity and living more into one's strengths.*

2. Growing in depth of relationships and contributing to others
3. Living more aligned with one's ethical and spiritual ideals.

I hypothesize that the more one can live a strength-based life, reciprocate relationships with others, and live with moral coherency, the more joy one will experience in life. This suggests that joy is not just an individual pursuit, but one that deeply involves our connections with others. **We can discover and experience joy in a variety of ways—doing those things we love to do, growing in intimacy or providing for others, and clarifying and coherently pursuing our values. When these domains of the self, others, and values overlap, that is perhaps when we experience the most joy.**



In my noticing this is true, and I consider the joy of my husband whose values are slightly different and so it's also good to recognize that your joy might not be appreciated fully by another and to not allow others lack of enthusiasm diminish your own.

This is strange but did you know that much of early psychological research focused on negative emotions and therefore described joy as an absence of negative emotions.

What!!!

We intuitively know that's not the case. Thankfully research is starting to change.

However, it's good to know that many of our individual subconscious strategies are basically negative - the "wiring" of our brain focuses emotions, otherwise we'd be robotic like.

How do we raise our happiness?

Through creativity cultivating consciousness about what ignites happiness in ourselves.

## ASSESSMENT

**Do you ...**

YES/NO	QUESTION	YES/NO	QUESTION
	1. often wake up in morning depressed for no reason		2. agree with William Blake that energy is delight
	3. sometimes feel life has dealt you a rotten hand		4. tend to dance whenever you hear music you like
	5. tend to become serious when tired		6. enjoy most of the things that you do
	7. often feel drained of energy		8. laugh a lot at situations that others don't find funny
	9. get irritated when people insist that you enjoy yourself		10. often have an excess of energy that bubbles up
	11. sometimes see little meaning in your life		12. try to resist laughing when people are serious over trifles
	13. find jovial boisterous friends too much sometimes?		14. suddenly start singing without thinking?
	15. sometimes do not care what happens to you?		16. generally, feel in good spirits and full of energy
	17. feel it is always someone else who gets the breaks?		18. just enjoy life as it comes without worrying about later?
	19. forget one last you felt on top of the world?		20. feel grateful for being alive?
	<b>&lt; count your Yes's</b>		<b>&lt; count your Yes's</b>

**Key:**

If you answer **yes** to 8 or more of the odd number questions your amygdala (a roughly almond-shaped mass of gray matter inside each cerebral hemisphere, involved with the experiencing of emotions.) is working overtime.

If you answer yes to 8 or more of the even number questions you are probably joyful with more than your fair share of dopamine flooding your system.

# METACOGNITIVE CREATIVE SELF-AWARENESS PRACTICE ON JOY

This exercise asks you to connect to all the ways you feel joy. Before you begin take note of your current feelings.

If you have a lot going on emotionally or otherwise this probably is not the best time to complete this exercise. Instead, I invite you to simply complete step 3 until your mind and emotions are able to process what is currently happening in your life.

1. Get your supplies.
  - Mixed Media Journal
  - Paint, Markers, Crayons, Pastels etc.
  - Paint Marker, Crayon, or Colored Pencil in White for writing
  - Waterproof Blank Pen – recommend Micron or Faber Castell
2. Take Note of your current feelings before you even start the exercise.
3. Begin to Color or Paint a page in your mixed media journal in any way you like while thinking about the emotion of JOY. Note: You will be writing over the top of your design therefore it is important to know if you choose dark colors, you will need a white colored pencil, crayon, or paint pen.
4. Allow any paint to dry, when ready begin writing what Joy feels like to you...  
Example: I feel joy ... I feel joy after my body surfing waves in the ocean on a warm summer day. As your writing if you get stuck think of your 6 senses. Do you get joy from sounds, sights, tastes, smells, touch, and feelings (yes even another feeling can generate JOY like love, silliness etc.)
5. Journaling either on that same page or the backside what you noticed while doing the exercise? How do you after completing the exercise compared to when you began?
6. Draft an intentional plan for incorporating more JOY into your life.

As a bonus the next page includes tips to ignite the “happiness chemicals” produced by our brain.

### **DOPAMINE THE REWARD CHEMICAL**

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter produced by the hypothalamus, a small region of the brain that helps you feel pleasure. It's an important part in your reward system, meaning the brain releases dopamine when you do things that feel good or pleasurable or when you complete a task. Dopamine also helps with movement and motivation.

#### **HOW TO GENERATE THIS CHEMICAL**

- Completing a Task
- Doing self-care activities
- Eating Food
- Celebrating little wins

### **OXYTOCIN THE LOVE HORMONE**

Oxytocin is a hormone produced by the hypothalamus and released by the pituitary gland that produces feelings of love and connection. Also known as the cuddle hormone, the brain may produce oxytocin during sex or maternal behavior such as childbirth or breastfeeding.

#### **HOW TO GENERATE THIS CHEMICAL**

- Playing with a dog
- Playing with a baby
- Holding Hands
- Hugging your family
- Give compliment

### **SEROTONIN THE MOOD STABILIZER**

Serotonin is another neurotransmitter produced when you feel satisfaction or importance. It also helps regulate your sleep, appetite and mood. Many anti-depressant medications are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) that help boost levels of serotonin.

#### **HOW TO GENERATE THIS CHEMICAL**

- Meditation
- Running
- Sun Exposure
- Walk in nature
- Swimming
- Cycling

### **ENDORPHINS THE PAIN KILLER**

Endorphins are opioid peptides produced by the hypothalamus and pituitary glands that operate as neurotransmitters. They trigger positive feelings when you do something you enjoy such as having sex, laughing or exercising. They also stimulate pain relief, which is the same reaction that occurs chemically when taking prescription opioids. The euphoric feeling endorphins produce helps mask pain.

#### **HOW TO GENERATE THIS CHEMICAL**

- Laughter exercise
- Essential oils
- Watch a comedy
- Dark Chocolate
- Exercising

#### **Sources:**

What Is Joy and What Does It Say About Us? | Psychology Today

Who are you? 101 Ways of Seeing Yourself? Malcom Godwin

INTEGRIS Health Happy-Chemicals July Article