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The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World

by Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Douglas Carlton Abrams

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64 Highlights

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 109

The Dalai Lama and the Archbishop are two of the great spiritual masters of our time, but they are also moral leaders who transcend their own traditions and speak always from a concern for humanity as a whole.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 113

“Joy,” as the Archbishop said during the week, “is much bigger than happiness. While happiness is often seen as being dependent on external circumstances, joy is not.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 195

“Discovering more joy does not, I’m sorry to say,” the Archbishop added, as we began our descent, “save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily, too. Perhaps we are just more alive. Yet as we discover more joy, we can face suffering in a way that ennoble rather than embitters. We have hardship without becoming hard. We have heartbreak without being broken.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 223

We create most of our suffering, so it should be logical that we also have the ability to create more joy. It simply depends on the attitudes, the perspectives, and the reactions we bring to situations and to our relationships with other people.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 436

Research conducted at the Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology at the University of Glasgow suggests that there are really only four fundamental emotions, three of which are so-called negative emotions: fear, anger, and sadness. The only positive one is joy or happiness. Exploring joy is nothing less than exploring what makes human experience satisfying.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 462

“If something can be done about the situation, what need is there for dejection? And if nothing can be done about it, what use is there for being dejected?”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 493

‘Wherever you have friends that’s your country, and wherever you receive love, that’s your home.’”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 555

Stress and opposition turn out to be exactly what initiate our development in utero. Our stem cells do not differentiate and become us if there is not enough biological stress to encourage them to do so. Without stress and opposition, complex life like ours would never have developed. We would never have come into being.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 609

more recent research by psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky suggests that perhaps only 50 percent of our happiness is determined by immutable factors like our genes or temperament, our “set point.” The other half is determined by a combination of our circumstances, over which we may have limited control, and our attitudes and actions, over which we have a great deal of control. According to Lyubomirsky, the three factors that seem to have the greatest influence on increasing our happiness are our ability to reframe our situation more positively, our ability to experience gratitude, and our choice to be kind and generous.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 641

“When we speak of experiencing happiness, we need to know that there are actually two different kinds. The first is the enjoyment of pleasure through our senses. Here, sex, the example I cited, is one such experience. But we can also experience happiness at the deeper level through our mind, such as through love, compassion, and generosity. What characterizes happiness at this deeper level is the sense of fulfillment that you experience. While the joy of the senses is brief, the joy at this deeper level is much longer lasting. It is true joy.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 859

So now, when I meet people, I do it on a human-to-human level, no need for formality. I really hate formality. When we are born, there is no formality. When we die, there is no formality. When we enter hospital, there is no formality. So formality is just artificial. It just creates additional barriers. So irrespective of our beliefs, we are all the same human beings. We all want a happy life.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 875

Many scientists say that after birth, there are a number of weeks when the mother’s physical touch is the key factor to developing the brain properly.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1001

“We have perceptions about our experience, and we judge them: ‘This is good.’ ‘This is bad.’ ‘This is neutral,’” the Dalai Lama explained. “Then we have responses: fear, frustration, anger. We realize that these are just different aspects of mind. They are not the actual reality. Similarly, fearlessness, kindness, love, and forgiveness are also aspects of mind.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1080

“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. I felt fear more times than I can remember, but I hid it behind a mask of boldness. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1123

When we turn a threat into a challenge, our body responds very differently.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1125

Our stress response evolved to save us from attack or danger, like a hungry lion or a falling avalanche. Cortisol and adrenalin course into our blood. This causes our pupils to dilate so we can see more clearly, our heart and breathing to speed up so we can respond faster, and the blood to divert from our organs to our large muscles so we can fight or flee. This stress response evolved as a rare and temporary experience, but for many in our modern world, it is constantly activated. Epel and her colleague, Nobel Prize-winning molecular biologist Elizabeth Blackburn, have found that constant stress actually wears down our telomeres, the caps on our DNA that protect our cells from illness and aging. It is not just stress but our thought patterns in general that impact our telomeres, which has led Epel and Blackburn to conclude that our cells are actually “listening to our thoughts.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1158

In contrast, if I see myself primarily in terms of myself as a fellow human, I will then have more than seven billion people who I can feel deep connection with. And this is wonderful, isn't it? What do you need to fear or worry about when you have seven billion other people who are with you?”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1226

In short, righteous anger is a tool of justice, a scythe of compassion, more than a reactive emotion. Although it may have its roots deep in our fight-or-flight desire to protect those in our family or group who are threatened, it is a chosen response and not simply an uncontrollable reaction.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1230

“Now medical scientists say,” the Dalai Lama continued, “that constant fear, constant anger, constant hatred harms our immune system. Everybody tries to take care of his or her health. So they need both a healthy body and a healthy mind. A healthy mind is a calm mind. Fear and anger are destroyers of a calm mind.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1285

Neither advocate the kind of fleeting happiness, often called hedonic happiness, that requires only positive states and banishes feelings like sadness to emotional exile. The kind of happiness that they describe is often called

eudemonic happiness and is characterized by self-understanding, meaning, growth, and acceptance, including life's inevitable suffering, sadness, and grief.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1307

Without love, there is no grief. So when we feel our grief, uncomfortable and aching as it may be, it is actually a reminder of the beauty of that love, now lost.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1346

The Archbishop often liked to quote one of his heroes, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who in turn was quoting one of his heroes, an abolitionist minister named Theodore Parker, who said: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1376

You know human beings are basically good. You know that's where we have to start. That everything else is an aberration.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1391

"When we look at the news, we must keep this more holistic view. Yes, this or that terrible thing has happened. No doubt, there are very negative things, but at the same time there are many more positive things happening in our world. We must have a sense of proportion and a wider perspective. Then we will not feel despair when we see these sad things."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1403

"I say to people that I'm not an optimist, because that, in a sense, is something that depends on feelings more than the actual reality. We feel optimistic, or we feel pessimistic. Now, hope is different in that it is based not on the ephemerality of feelings but on the firm ground of conviction. I believe with a steadfast faith that there can never be a situation that is utterly, totally hopeless. Hope is deeper and very, very close to unshakable. It's in the pit of your tummy. It's not in your head. It's all here," he said, pointing to his abdomen.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1450

When we relate to others from the place of compassion it goes to the first level, the human level, not the secondary level of difference. Then you can even have compassion for your enemy.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1529

There is a Tibetan Buddhist teaching that says what causes suffering in life is a general pattern of how we relate to others: "Envy toward the above, competitiveness toward the equal, and contempt toward the lower."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1591

Jinpa had explained how mudita works: If someone has something that we want, say, a bigger house, we can consciously take joy in their good fortune by telling ourselves: “Good for him. Just like me, he, too, wants to be happy. He, too, wants to be successful. He, too, wants to support his family. May he be happy. I congratulate him and want him to have more success.” Mudita recognizes that life is not a zero-sum game, that there is not just one slice of cake in which someone else’s taking more means we get less. Mudita sees joy as limitless.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1624

So similarly, once a person develops a strong negative emotion, like anger or jealousy, it is very difficult to counter it at that moment. So the best thing is to cultivate your mind through practice so that you can learn to prevent it from arising in the first place.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1647

I remembered seeing the lines of people who had waited for hours and hours to vote in the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994. The lines snaked on for miles. I remember wondering at the time, as U.S. voter turnout was hovering under forty percent, how long that sense of joy and appreciation for the right to vote would last and whether there was any way to revive it in America among those who have never been denied the right to vote.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1653

I could not help thinking of how we try so hard, with our natural parental instinct, to save our children from pain and suffering, but when we do, we rob them of their ability to grow and learn from adversity.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1711

Joy, it seemed, was a strange alchemy of mind over matter. The path to joy, like with sadness, did not lead away from suffering and adversity but through it.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1752

Without meaning, when suffering seems senseless, we can easily become embittered. But when we can find a shred of meaning or redemption in our suffering, it can ennoble us, as it did for Nelson Mandela.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1792

We often feel that suffering will engulf us, or that the suffering will never end, but if we can realize that it, too, will pass, or as the Buddhists say, that it is impermanent, we can survive them more easily, and perhaps appreciate what we have to learn from them, find the meaning in them, so that we come out the other side, not embittered but ennobled. The depth of our suffering can also result in the height of our joy.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2046

The real secret of freedom may simply be extending this brief space between stimulus and response. Meditation seems to elongate this pause and help expand our ability to choose our response. For example, can we expand the momentary pause between our spouse's annoyed words and our angry or hurt reaction? Can we change the channel on the mental broadcasting system from self-righteous indignation—how dare she or he speak to me like that—to compassionate understanding—she or he must be very tired.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2181

A healthy perspective really is the foundation of joy and happiness, because the way we see the world is the way we experience the world. Changing the way we see the world in turn changes the way we feel and the way we act, which changes the world itself. Or, as the Buddha says in the Dhammapada, "With our mind we create our own world."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2197

She explains that our perspective literally has the power to keep us alive or to cause our death. One of her fellow inmates at Auschwitz was terribly ill and weak, and others in her bunk asked her how she was holding on to life. The prisoner said that she had heard that they were going to be liberated by Christmas. The woman lived against all odds, but she died on Christmas Day when they were not liberated.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2246

The famous Overview Effect is perhaps the most profound example. Many astronauts have reported that once they glimpsed Earth from space—a small blue ball floating in the vast expanse, lacking our human-made borders—they never looked at their personal or national interests in quite the same way again. They saw the oneness of terrestrial life and the preciousness of our planetary home.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2255

A more recent study conducted by researcher Johannes Zimmerman found that people who more often use first-person singular words—I and me—are more likely to be depressed than people who more often use first-person plural—we and us.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2319

Sometimes, especially in formal occasions, people act as if they are different and special. But we all know that we are all the same, ordinary human beings."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2353

The Dalai Lama and the Archbishop were both insistent that humility is essential to any possibility of joy. When we have a wider perspective, we have a natural understanding of our place in the great sweep of all that was, is,

and will be. This naturally leads to humility and the recognition that as human beings we can't solve everything or control all aspects of life. We need others. The Archbishop has poignantly said that our vulnerabilities, our frailties, and our limitations are a reminder that we need one another: We are not created for independence or self-sufficiency, but for interdependence and mutual support.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2370

None of us are immune to the all-too-human traits of pride or ego, but true arrogance really comes from insecurity. Needing to feel that we are bigger than others comes from a nagging fear that we are smaller.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2397

"Now, we should also realize that the recognition of our own limitations and weaknesses can be very positive. This can be wisdom. If you realize that you are inadequate in some way, then you develop effort. If you think, everything is fine and I'm okay just as I am, then you will not try to develop further. There is a Tibetan saying that wisdom is like rainwater—both gather in the low places.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2506

"Why be unhappy about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being unhappy if it cannot be remedied?"

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2532

So many of the causes of suffering come from our reacting to the people, places, things, and circumstances in our lives, rather than accepting them.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2557

This is a deep recognition that while each of us should do everything we can to realize the goal we seek, whether or not we succeed often depends on many factors beyond our control. So our responsibility is to pursue the goal with all the dedication we can muster, do the best we can but not become fixated on a preconceived notion of a result. Sometimes, actually quite often, our efforts lead to an unexpected outcome that might even be better than what we originally had in mind.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2638

Where the wrong action is concerned, it may be necessary to take appropriate counteraction to stop it. Toward the actor, or the person, however, you can choose not to develop anger and hatred. This is where the power of forgiveness lies—not losing sight of the humanity of the person while responding to the wrong with clarity and firmness.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2711

Every day, think as you wake up, ‘I am fortunate to be alive. I have a precious human life. I am not going to waste it.’”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2717

Perhaps people will be moved to see that there are very, very, very many people in the world today who will not have had the kind of breakfast that you had. Many, many millions in the world today are hungry. It’s not your fault, but you woke up from a warm bed, you were able to have a shower, you put on clean clothes, and you were in a home that is warm in the winter. Now just think of the many who are refugees who wake up in the morning, and there’s not very much protection for them against the rain that is pelting down. Perhaps there is no warmth or food or even just water. It is to say in a way, yes, it is to say really, you do want to count your blessings.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2759

“But they took thirty years of your life—how can you not be angry?” Hinton responded, “If I’m angry and unforgiving, they will have taken the rest of my life.” Unforgiveness robs us of our ability to enjoy and appreciate our life, because we are trapped in a past filled with anger and bitterness. Forgiveness allows us to move beyond the past and appreciate the present, including the drops of rain falling on our face. “Whatever life gives to you,” Brother Steindl-Rast explains, “you can respond with joy. Joy is the happiness that does not depend on what happens. It is the grateful response to the opportunity that life offers you at this moment.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2793

Scientists have long known that our brains have evolved with a negative bias. It was no doubt advantageous for our survival to focus on what was wrong or dangerous. Gratitude cuts across this default mode of the mind. It allows us to see what is good and right and not just what is bad and wrong.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2810

Serotonin acts as a natural antidepressant, dopamine stimulates the reward centers of the brain, and endorphins are natural painkillers. Smiling also seems to reward the brains of those who see us smiling making them feel better, too. Smiling is contagious, stimulating unconscious smiling in others, which in turn spreads the positive effects.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2927

One of the differences between empathy and compassion is that while empathy is simply experiencing another’s emotion, compassion is a more empowered state where we want what is best for the other person.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2955

The Archbishop and the Dalai Lama had revealed throughout the week one of the core paradoxes of happiness: We are most joyful when we focus on others, not on ourselves. In short, bringing joy to others is the fastest way to experience joy oneself.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3000

So it seems that money can buy happiness, if we spend it on other people.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3062

“We have been brought up to think that we have to obey the laws of the jungle. Eat or be eaten. We are ruthless in our competitiveness. So much so that now stomach ulcers are status symbols. They show just how very hard we work. We work hard not only to supply our needs and the needs of our families, but we are trying to outdo the other.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3536

It seems that we are literally using our attention and awareness to establish neural firing patterns that help the brain avoid the destructive reactivity that the Dalai Lama said was so toxic to our mental and physical health. Many of these practices appear to integrate and harmonize the brain so that we can respond to the inevitable challenges of life with less fragmentation and more integration, less fear and anger and more ease and joy.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3610

“Now, in my own practice I engage mostly in analytical meditation. This is a form of mental investigation where you can see your thoughts as thoughts and learn not to be chained to them, not to identify with them. You come to recognize that your thoughts do not necessarily reflect the truth. In analytical meditation, you are constantly asking, What is reality? What is that self, or ‘I,’ that we hold so dear and that is the focus of so much of our concern? In analytic meditation, we contemplate on impermanence and on the transient nature of our existence.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3679

We often do not feel empathy or connection for those who we consider strangers. Perhaps you feel indifference, perhaps a sense of separation, or perhaps even judgment. Now try to imagine being this person. Imagine their life, their hopes, their dreams, their fears, their disappointments, and their suffering. Recognize that, just like you, they wish to achieve happiness and to avoid even the slightest suffering. Let your mind dwell in this realization and understand that you do not need an introduction because you already share the greatest bond—your humanity.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3765

All spiritual traditions remind us that death is an unavoidable part of our life, and contemplating our own mortality can help bring a sense of urgency, a sense of perspective, and a sense of gratitude.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3818

The next time you are delayed or something does not go your way, try being amused by the situation rather than getting angry or outraged.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3841

Remind yourself: “In order to make the most positive contribution to this situation, I must accept the reality of its existence.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3848

God, give us the grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3956

Compassion, as we have discussed, is necessary but not sufficient. It is the impulse to help others, but the action that follows from that desire is generosity.
