

# LIVING JOYOUSLY

By Dorothy Riddle

Joy is a quality of the Soul that produces a delight so extreme that we radiate and express it spontaneously. It is similar to happiness, but does not involve having achieved some result. Our natural state, as Souls, is joyousness. So why don't we feel joyous all the time?

Most of us assume that we learn through pain and suffering, that we change only when our current approach is too painful to continue. In other words, we assume that we change out of fear or to avoid discomfort. We can't experience joy if we are living in this fearful, constrictive manner.

An example of experiencing joy is how we feel when we listen to a beautiful passage of music. The beauty flows via the musician's selection of notes to be played in a specific sequence in conjunction with other notes. The musician cannot create "music" if all notes are selected indiscriminately, or if the musician's focus is on the notes that are being "given up" by not being selected. Thus our experience of joy comes from creativeness through limitation.

How can we shift our primary focus from fear to joy? First, we need an *experimental approach* to life. We need to love obstacles, to welcome making mistakes as part of growth. If we encourage ourselves in risk-taking instead of aiming for a static state of perfection, we expand our potential for experiencing joy.

Second, we need *intentional focus* as we take risks and make choices. Instead of focusing on our mistakes or on what we are giving up – e.g., attachment to specific outcomes, criticism of others, a sense of separateness and superiority – we need to focus on what we can learn from our mistakes and on strengthening our compassion for ourselves and others – which brings with it joy.

Third, we need to practice *forgiveness* – recognizing our shared humanity and the fact that we all make mistakes as we experiment and learn. We all behave inappropriately or immorally at one time or another. When we use forgiveness to release that constrictive focus on errors and mistakes, on wrongs done to or by us, we create the potential for expansion and joy.

Fourth, we need to rethink the *proper role of pain and suffering*. Pain warns us of potential dangers so that we can avoid them, and thus it plays a useful role. We usually create mental/emotional suffering through how we interpret that signal of pain. We need to be sensitive to the suffering of others, but immersion in our own suffering is counterproductive. We need to remember that the choices we make in interpreting our experience create our emotional state. Joy wells up as we reject the role of victim and embrace the role of creator.

Living joyously focuses in the moment on what we gain from each experience in terms of beingness. It involves releasing regrets over paths not taken or options not chosen. It requires openness to experimentation and growth. Choosing to live joyously rather than fearfully allows us to experience the interconnectedness of the cosmos.