

# The Blooming Season

## Unabashed Joy

May/June 2024

**How can we deepen and share authentic joy?**



*Photo Credit: Pexels – Bell Co*

**“Joy is the reward, really, of seeking to give joy to others. When you show compassion, when you show caring, when you show love to others, do things for others, in a wonderful way you have a deep joy that you can get in no other way.”**

*— Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, [The Book of Joy](#)*

Beloveds,

This past January, Ada and I welcomed our daughter Hazel into the world. “Bundle of Joy” is often the phrase used to describe newborns, and our experience has been no exception. In this season of Blooming spring, Hazel will be four and then five months old, and already the experience of parenting her, and her own leading by example, is an instruction in Unabashed Joy.

As many of the exercises, questions, and resources in this spiritual deepening packet explore, the state or experience of Joy is a deeper, more nuanced, and more enduring thing than an immediate emotion like happiness. Parenting seems to be like this – there are times where we are stressed, exhausted, worried, overwhelmed, and unsure of ourselves. And yet all these emotions and experiences are in the context of great love, and great joy. It is a privilege and a joy to fret over a small, new human being. There is joy in co-parenting, even as we might communicate poorly in one moment, we find strength and support in the next. And of course, handling all the, shall we say, aspects of biological hygiene for an infant who can’t do it herself yet, is rarely exactly pleasant, but still - is a gratifying and joyful expression of love and care.

As you explore this packet, I hope it will help you find ways to name, claim, and deepen the joy in your own life. And especially, to help cultivate unabashed joy – Joy that does not apologize or compromise, Joy that can’t be embarrassed, Joy that lets its “freak flag fly,” as they say.

Even when life is hard, when there is grief and loss and no reason at all to be happy, Joy may find us still. There is Joy even in strife, as we hold fast to fighting for our values. There is Joy even in grief, as our love perseveres. There is Joy in the face of oppression, as a fundamental expression of resistance to all that would quash our liberated hearts.

May you find unabashed Joy in this beautiful season of the Genesee valley area, and may Joy find you in ways unexpected and unapologetic.

In faith and joy,

Rev. AJ van Tine  
First Unitarian Church of Rochester

### **GRATITUDE**

This spiritual deepening packet was guided into existence by Amy Stockwell and Tom Perry with the amazing support of the packet creation team, Rev. AJ van Tine and the three-church worship team that includes ministers and religious education & music leaders from First Unitarian Church of Rochester, First Universalist Church of Rochester, and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca (Onöndowa'ga:') Nation, Keepers of the Western Door and part of the Haudenosaunee People, on whose ancestral land First Unitarian Church of Rochester, First Universalist Church of Rochester, and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua now exist.

## READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING / EXTINGUISHING

### Chalice Lighting

Let there be joy in our coming together. Let there be truth heard in the words we speak and the songs we sing. Let there be help and healing for our disharmony and despair. Let there be silence for the voice within us and beyond us. Let there be joy in our coming together.

— *Rev. Carl Seaburg, WorshipWeb*

### Excerpt from "Joy Chose You"

Joy does not arrive with a fanfare  
on a red carpet strewn  
with the flowers of a perfect life

*joy sneaks in*

as you pour a cup of coffee  
watching the sunlight  
hit your favourite tree, just *right*

and you usher joy away  
because you are not ready for her  
your house is not as it should be  
for such a distinguished guest

— *Donna Ashworth, author & poet*

### Chalice Extinguishing

In the river, the water continually flows on, yet the river is ever there.  
"Our lives flow on in endless song," yet life and joy shall never end.

—*Rev. John C. Morgan, WorshipWeb*

May we hear the melody of Life and find ourselves singing harmony. May we be open to the dissonances in the Song of the Land and Its People, that we might be part of the World's urging toward Justice, Peace, and Love. May we feel in our bones the rhythms of Life and the Land, and find ourselves dancing.

—*Rev. Joseph Cleveland, WorshipWeb*



[Dancewalk! | SoulPancake Street Team](#)

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

*When preparing these exercises, we seek a variety of experiences – some easy and comfortable / some challenging – that draw on different modes of accessing the sacred. Participants will have a variety of life experiences, different access & mobility needs, and cultural norms. We write with that in mind.*

### **A. Recalling a Time of Overwhelming Joy**

For most of us, there is a powerful memory of at least one time when we were overjoyed beyond words. Recall that time and the overwhelming joy you experienced. Then express it through writing in words, or clay, or paint, or music. If possible, spend time with a friend and speak the experience again to them in all the detail you can muster. Finally, rest in the warm glow of the exercise and allow it to inform your life today.

### **B. Multigenerational Play and Playfulness**

Play is an essential part of being human, one of the key foundations of our human capacity to learn. Play is joy: the open-ended investigation of the world in all its variety and amazement. Both artists and scientists frequently write about the importance of play and creativity in their life's work. Find a child or access your inner child and do something purely for fun—make a drawing with mud, play a crazy song using pots and pans as instruments, cook up something you've never made before, make a tool using only the items in your junk drawer, etc. Do a happy dance with your partner or by yourself. Make up a song about how it feels to play.

### **C. Big Bang/ Exuberant Universe/ Unabashed Creativity**

Nature is endlessly creative, trying every possible permutation and combination, endlessly surprising. Here on earth, scientists are continuing to discover new and strange species; in their study of the cosmos, scientists are continuing to discover new and strange objects and processes. Dip into some of these discoveries by reading about the most surprising living creatures on earth.

With a child or with your own imagination, draw the craziest animals you can think of. This might be done as where one person draws the head, covers it up and passes it on, the next person does the neck and shoulders, etc. When you have a bunch of crazy animals, make up a story about them. How do they get around? How do they eat? What do they eat? What are their dreams for the present and the future?

Bonus: read about being in and part of the creativity of the Big Bang in Stephen Hawking's final theory. [On the Origin of Time: Stephen Hawking's Final Theory](#) by Thomas Hertog [Monroe County Library Link](#)

#### D. Deeping the Experience of Joy

Many philosophers and theologians have hypothesized that deep authentic joy comes from giving one's unique gifts to the world where they are most needed. On a blank piece of paper, make a list of all your gifts—the ones you are praised for, the ones you only know in your own heart, the ordinary ones and the ones that make you unique and a little crazy. Take several days to do this, letting things rise in your thoughts without editing or criticism. Then cut each of these words out, and rearrange them on another piece of paper, circling and emphasizing the ones that seem most important to you now. Are there immediate ways that you can use these gifts to apply even the smallest bit of healing to wounds in your family, community, or world? Do the easiest of those tasks and celebrate having made a difference. Consider doing the next easiest task and repeat.

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*These questions aren't "homework" that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead not to answers, but more questions.*

1. What are the kinds of experiences you have had in the last several days—no matter how fleeting—that have brought you feelings of warmth, of love, of awe? Do these experiences, either in the moment or in memory, produce feelings of joy?
2. How do spiritual practices (such as prayer or mindfulness) contribute to your awareness of the present moment and help bring joy?
3. Have you ever held authentic joy and real sadness simultaneously, knowing both deep joy in connection and wonder while recognizing the suffering and losses in the world? Can you hold space for joy with sadness, grief or anxiety?
4. What messages have you received from this culture which work against the experience of joy and how can you make these messages less loud?
5. What happens when you aren't feeling joyful but do something joyful anyway—like dancing or singing or making art or being completely silly or baking or ..... as if you were joyful? How does that feel?
6. How does being in community contribute to feelings of joy and what can you do to strengthen or deepen that experience?
7. What's the difference between authentic joy and the external messaging of toxic positivity? How can owning all your feelings contribute to your experience of real joy?

**Definition:** Toxic Positivity is the act of avoiding, suppressing, or rejecting negative emotions or experiences... either denying your own emotions or someone else denying your emotions. Read more here: [Toxic Positivity: Why It's Harmful, What to Say Instead.](#)

## RESOURCES

*Just as we select spiritual exercises that speak to a diversity of experience, we draw from a diversity of sources and include a diversity of voices here. We explicitly seek voices and perspectives of people with disabilities, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), Women, Trans and NonBinary People, other members of the LGBTQ community, children, and youth.*

### FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

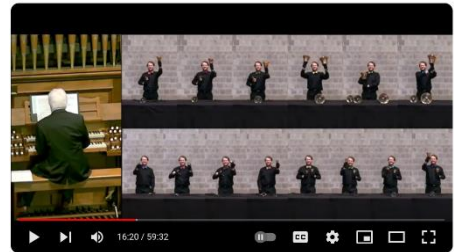
#### Hymns

STLT#410, [Surprised by Joy](#)  
*UU Society of Laconia, NH*

STLT#345, [With Joy We Claim the Growing Light](#)  
*Community UU Congregation of White Plains, NY*

STLT#1030, [Siyahamba \(We Are Marching\)](#)  
*First Unitarian Society of Denver, CO*

STLT#318, [We Would Be One](#)  
*Worship Service with First Unitarian of Portland, OR. Hymn begins at about 12 minutes with an organ, three singers and our 14-Thom Snell Bell Choir*



**Reading:** from [Theology Ablaze: Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year of Unitarian Universalism](#), by Rev. Dr. Tom Owen-Towle

In Egyptian mythology, shortly after death, we'll be confronted by the god Osiris with a quiz that must be answered honestly. After forty-two rather routine questions concerning how the deceased has lived, Osiris asks one crucial question that has two parts: first, "Did you find joy?" and, second, "Did you bring joy?" ... If we answer these questions affirmatively, we're given back a measure of continued existence. If not, we're lugged off and forthwith eaten by a hippopotamus.

**Quest for Meaning Article: [We Need Joy](#)** by Rev. Peggy Clarke, First Unitarian Society of Westchester, NY.

Excerpt: "I put a sign on my door with a sketch of two women frolicking on the beach and a quote from [Emma Goldman](#) which said: "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." Pollyanna, I am not. But if the work for peace isn't sourced by joy, the world we dream about will never be made manifest."

## WISDOM FROM WORLD RELIGIONS

### Christian Teaching

**Theology of Joy & the Good Life** – A project of the Yale Divinity School Center for Faith & Culture. This project has sought to build “a transformative movement driven by a Christian articulation of the joy that attends the flourishing of human life.” Following is a playlist of short answers to some of the questions that we have raised in this packet:

- What is Joy? ([YouTube video 5:03](#))
- What is the Difference Between Joy and Happiness? ([YouTube video 3:13](#))
- How Do We Cultivate Joy? ([YouTube video 4:06](#))
- Joy That Joins ([YouTube video 4:05](#)) Can there be a Joy that can connect people together across barriers of racial reasoning and geographic segregation?  
Bonus: The full “Gathering Joy” talk by Willie James Jennings can be [watched here](#).

### Jewish Teaching

“The Jewish response to trauma is counter-intuitive and extraordinary. You defeat fear by joy. You conquer terror by collective celebration. You prepare a festive meal, invite guests, give gifts to friends. While the story is being told, you make an unruly noise as if not only to blot out the memory of [Amalek](#), but to make a joke out of the whole episode. You wear masks. You drink a little too much ... You are denying your enemies a victory. You are declaring that you will not be intimidated. ... As the three-sentence summary of Jewish history puts it: *They tried to destroy us. We survived. Let’s eat.* Humour is the Jewish way of defeating hate. What you can laugh at, you cannot be held captive by.”

— [Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Therapeutic Joy of Purim](#), article published 1 March 2015

### Buddhist Teaching

#### Mudita: Practicing With Joy in Our Heart

[Heart Wisdom with Jack Kornfield - Ep. 128](#). Sharing a guided meditation and dharma talk, Jack Kornfield explores the transformative power of Mudita. “Joy arises ... from following the heart’s silent source. When we get still, and the mind quiets, and the heart opens, and we remember that Buddhas live in joy even among the troubled; out of that stillness there is a silent source of something beautiful that wants to come through every one of us.”

Bonus: [Loving Kindness Meditation Benefits and Texts](#)

### Beltane

May 1<sup>st</sup> marks the mid-point in Spring in the Northern Hemisphere. At the Spring Equinox new life was just beginning to emerge. But now, at the beginning of May, there is no denying that the Earth has been reborn. For modern Wiccans & neo-Pagans Beltane is a celebration honoring nature’s incredibly fertile energy at this time of year. It’s an incredibly joyful, festive time for coming together, to celebrate life.



## POETRY EXCERPTS

To respect copyright laws and support artists, we provide links to the full work from which an excerpt is taken.

Excerpt from **“Don’t Hesitate”** by Mary Oliver

Full poem: [Link](#)

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don’t hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still, life has some possibility left. ... It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that’s often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don’t be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

**“untitled”** by John O’Donohue, page 82 in [Poetry of Presence](#), [Monroe County Library link](#)

I would love to live  
Like a river flows,  
Carried by the surprise  
Of its own unfolding

“One of the advantages of being disorganized is that one is always having surprising discoveries.”  
— A.A. Milne

Excerpt from **“The Way It Is”** by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

Full poem: [Link](#)

Over and over we break  
open, we break and  
we break and we open.  
For a while, we try to fix  
the vessel—as if  
to be broken is bad.  
As if with glue and tape  
and a steady hand we  
might bring things to perfect  
again. As if they were ever  
perfect. As if to be broken is not  
also perfect. As if to be open  
is not the path toward joy.



Photo Credit: [@TeaofMind](#)

## QUOTATIONS

“Joy, rather than happiness, is the goal of life, for joy is the emotion which accompanies our fulfilling our natures as human beings. It is based on the experience of one's identity as a being of worth and dignity.”

— Rollo May, American existential psychologist, author of [Love and Will](#)



“In joy, we see even darkness with new eyes. Joy returns us to everything that is good and beautiful and worth fighting for. I was not alone. I was one in millions. I was part of a movement, one in a constellation. I had to shine my light in my specific slice of sky. I could do that.”

— Valerie Kaur, American activist and writer, quote from [See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love](#)

"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

— Frederick Buechner, American theologian, quote from [Wishful Thinking: : A Seeker's ABC](#)

“This is the real secret of life — to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now. And instead of calling it work, realize it is play.”

— Alan Watts, British writer, pioneer in interpreting Eastern wisdom for a Western audience

## MUSIC

“[This Joy](#)” – Resistance Revival Chorus

“[Joy Comes Back](#)” – Ruthie Foster

“[All This Joy](#)” – John Denver

“[Oh, Happy Day](#)” Live – Long Version by the Edwin Hawkins’ Singers

“[Ode to Joy](#)” – Singalong Concert for Everyone

“[Heavenly Day](#)” – Patty Griffin “... the very first love song I ever wrote... I wrote it for my dog.”

“[Joy Has Not Forgotten Me](#)” – Ordinary Elephant

You’ve got to sing like you don’t need the money Love like you’ll never get hurt You’ve got to dance like nobody’s watchin’ It’s gotta come from the heart if you want it to work. – “ <a href="#">Come from the Heart</a> ” – lyrics by Susanna Clark & Richard Leigh
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## VIDEOS

### [A Joy Story: Joy and Heron](#)

Animated short film for all ages.

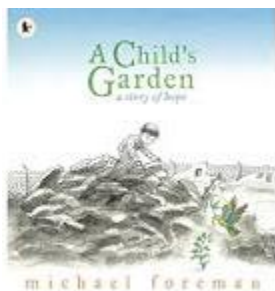
### [Ballerina Boys | Official Trailer | American Masters | PBS](#)

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo (The Trocks), an all-male company that for 45 years has offered audiences its passion for ballet classics mixed with exuberant comedy.

### [Snowball, the dancing cockatoo!](#)

This sulfur-crested cockatoo named Snowball went viral when he danced in perfect time to the Backstreet Boys in 2007.

## BOOKS



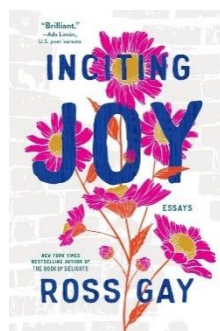
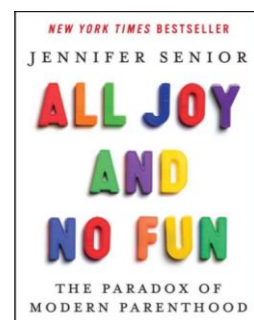
### **A Child's Garden by Michael Forman**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4T\\_LzSUabw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4T_LzSUabw)

This is a special story about a boy. He lives in a conflict zone, somewhere in the world. His village is ruined by war and his life is now behind barbed wire. But all is not lost because, like all children, he has hope.

### **All Joy and No Fun, by Jennifer Senior**

[Book Review by Hannah Phair, Economic Equity for Moms](#): “*All Joy and No Fun* is about how completely we are changed by our children. What I loved about the book is that it shows that parenting rarely fits the mold of “fun” that we might initially seek, but the process of raising children catalyzes an even more important emotion: joy.” [Monroe County Library link](#)



### **Inciting Joy: Essays, by Ross Gay**

[Publisher's Weekly Best 20 Books of 2022](#): “... Gay sheds light on all the places joy can lurk: it's there for him in strangers, in skateboarding, and can be found amid sorrow ... a spellbinding meditation on the ways joy deepens and grows in the company of grief, fear, and loss.” [Monroe County Library link](#)

### **Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art, by Stephen Nachmanovitch**

Improvisation, composition, writing, painting, theater, invention, all creative acts are forms of play, the starting place of creativity in the human growth cycle, and one of the great primal life functions. ... Play is the taproot from which original art springs; it is the raw stuff that the artist channels and organizes with all his learning and technique. .... Creative work is play; it is free speculation using the materials of one's chosen form ... Musicians play with sound and silence... Gods play with the universe. Children play with everything they can get their hands on. .... To play is to free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions and expand our field of action. [Monroe County Library link](#): [note: in the science section]

### **Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life, by Anne Lamott**

“Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life ... I think perfectionism is based on the obsessive belief that if you run carefully enough, hitting each stepping stone just right, you won't have to die. The truth is that you will die anyway and that a lot of people who aren't even looking at their feet are doing to do a whole lot better than you, and have a whole lot more fun while they're doing it. Besides, perfectionism will ruin your writing, blocking inventiveness and playfulness and life

force (there are words we are allowed to use in California). ..... Your day's work might turn out to have been a mess. So what? .... So go ahead and make big scrawls and mistakes. Use up lots of paper. .... messes are the artist's true friend." [Monroe County Library link](#)

## MORE RESOURCES

### [Queer joy: what it is and why we need more of it](#)

Blog post by Oxfam: "Queer joy is a positive feeling ... everyone can get, even if you're not a LGBTQIA+ person. You may have experienced queer joy when seeing your same-sex friends celebrate an anniversary, your company hiring an amazing transgender colleague, or eating a cake at a same-sex wedding. Queer joy is even more important for LGBTQIA+ people. It sustains the fight for being recognized as equals before the law, and in the eyes of society.

### [Black Joy: Resistance, Resilience and Reclamation](#) by Elaine Nichols

Blog post by National Museum of African American History & Culture. Kleaver Cruz (founder of The Black Joy Project) said that "Black Joy is not ... dismissing or creating an 'alternate' black narrative that ignores the realities of our collective pain; rather, it is about holding the pain and injustice...in tension with the joy we experience. It's about using that joy as an entry into understanding the oppressive forces we navigate through as a means to imagine and create a world free of them."

[Come Celebrate Juneteenth and Honor Black Music Month](#) with SPARC (Spiritus Anti-Racism Coalition).



**ROC Juneteenth**  
**5K Run/Walk**

Please join us for the live **Roc Juneteenth 2024 5K Run/Walk** on Juneteenth - Wednesday, June 19, at 1:00 PM at Genesee Valley Park, Riverbend Shelter. A virtual option will also be available. Register for either option at [itsyourrace.com](https://itsyourrace.com).

Join us after the race for an **evening of Jazz** beginning at 4:00 PM at the Genesee Valley Park, Roundhouse Shelter.

These events will feature a variety of vendors, food and a whole lot of FUN to be had with friends, family, and the community!

Benefits go to the construction of the Civil Rights Heritage Park at Baden Park.

**NO ONE IS FREE UNLESS WE ARE ALL FREE!**

Follow us on Instagram at [@rocjuneteenth5k](#)



**ROC Juneteenth**  
**JAZZ**

Roc Juneteenth 5k celebrates Black Music Month by presenting Rochester's **Inaugural Roc Juneteenth Jazz Event**.

**Date:** Sunday June 16, 2024  
**Time:** 1:00-8:00 PM  
**Location:** The Highland Bowl in the beautiful, picturesque Highland Park

This event highlights our local Jazz talent from students to professional Jazz artists.

Donations will be accepted for the construction of Rochester's **Civil Rights Heritage Park** at Baden Park and support for **Agape Haven of Abundance**, a nonprofit program that assists Rochester's most vulnerable youth with before and after school programming.

Follow us on Instagram at [@rocjuneteenth5k](#)

HUMOR & OTHER DELIGHTS

UU Hysterical Society



[The Ren & Stimpy Show - Happy Happy Joy Joy](#)

A cartoon take on toxic positivity



[Stay Weird: 66 Weirdest Animals in the World](#)



60. Mantis Shrimp

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