

Dare we rejoice?

By THE REV. DR.
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Spirit Of Life

Times are tough. The U.S. is experiencing a constitutional crisis. Global economic markets are erratic. Nonprofits, educational institutions and entire states, including Maine, are being asked to comply with current executive orders or face loss of funding.

Seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, people of color, immigrants, LG-BTQ+ folk (especially trans and nonbinary people) and so many others fear that calling any attention to themselves will put their life or livelihood at risk. People around the world already are and will continue to suffer due to loss of USAID; many more will if current assaults on science, history, humanities and education are successful. Sadly, this list of bad news is only the tip of the iceberg.

When things are so dire, when so many people are filled with fear or anger, when so much is at risk ... dare we rejoice? So many of our spiritual traditions are observing celebrations at this time of year, and it may feel a little weird to be celebrating. Is there a role for JOY to play as we come to terms with reality and grapple with the next right things to do? That's a question on my mind a lot these days. My answer: a thousand times YES! In fact, I'm convinced that we need the spiritual practice of joy more than ever right now.

Fortunately, spring helps. We had a lot of snow this year in Maine, and spring has been a bit of a tease thus far. One day this week, it was 60 degrees, at least in the sunny spots. Did you also notice people exhibiting a bit more spring in their step? In two recent meetings I attended, folk could barely contain their excitement about seeing a crocus or hearing the first sounds of peepers. I've

even heard praise for mud! This is a good reminder that the Earth is currently writing us all a love letter we should not leave unopened. These simple joys of spring, transformation and new life are worth our time and attention.

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I was raised with an understanding of joy heavily influenced by Khalil Gibran, who wrote

that joy and sorrow are inseparable, neither able to be fully experienced without intimate knowledge of the other. This rings true for me, not least because of the lessons on joy we have learned from oppressed peoples throughout the ages. The emergence of spirituals from the context of slavery is but one example of people who transformed pain into soulful and joyful music. Sojourner Truth once said, "Life is a hard battle anyway. If we laugh and sing a little as we fight the good fight for freedom, it makes it all go easier."

Joy is not about ignoring or denying life's challenges, rather joy insists that we appreciate life's gifts despite circumstances. Joy is necessary fuel for resistance. Joy is a practice that can stave off resignation and inspire life. Have you practiced lately? What brings you joy? What beauty inspires you? When is the last time you felt pleasure? Emergent strategist Adrienne Maree Brown reminds us that "Feeling good is not frivolous, it is freedom." No matter how awful things are in the world around us, we cannot neglect joy — we need it too much as a balance to that which threatens to overwhelm us. Whatever your spiritual tradition, I suspect there is wisdom related to how joyful practice can inspire and sustain life. Perhaps we could all benefit from a refresher!

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