

Delight

What is delight?
Why is delight important?
How can we develop delight?

Delight is an uplifting experience of joy, an expression of happiness. We see it around us in the laughing baby, the dog playing in a park, in unexpected discoveries. We experience it when we look at a sunset or a beautiful photograph, when we fall in love or are reunited with an old friend. Delight opens our hearts and transcends differences. It can happen suddenly or dawn on us gradually, even out of misfortune. If we have delight in our lives, it's easier to find the strength to keep going when life gets tough.

Delight is not necessarily random. It's often up to us whether we feel delighted or not. A sight or sound that gives us a joyful feeling one day may not delight us the next. An experience that delights one person may leave another unmoved. Helen Keller learned to delight in darkness and silence. Jane Goodall delighted in worms when she was a toddler, chickens as a child, and chimpanzees as an adult.

Delight is important because it releases us from fear, discontent and dissatisfaction. It lightens our mood and lifts us out of depression, self-pity, anger and craving. It relieves anxiety and cuts through pain. It can transform even the most difficult circumstances and bring peace to the heart. Delight helps us generate gratitude for the good things in our lives and for the good people who make them possible. It's a precious natural emotion that can help get us through the stresses of life.

Ancient societies all over the world knew the wisdom of taking delight and put aside time for regular celebrations. Celebrating rites of passage--such as a birth or a wedding--is a life-affirming way of sharing joy. Celebrations of delight bring people and communities together so that, during difficult times, they are able to cooperate with strength and courage. Around the world, ceremonies recognize the bravery, creativity and hard work of people in society. This is another form of taking delight.

So how can we develop delight? We begin by cultivating the habit of first seeing, and then appreciating, the good things we experience each day--the sunlight dappling through the clouds, the kindness of a stranger, food on the table. From there, we can develop delight in less obvious things, including difficulties that can become opportunities for growth--the testy bus driver who helps us practice patience, the colleague who says something hurtful, helping us enlarge our capacity to forgive.

Delight can move like fresh air through a negative state of mind, bringing spaciousness and ease. Instead of dwelling on what we feel we lack, the challenge is to rejoice quite deliberately in the good fortune of those around us: their health and good looks, their loving family, their beautiful garden or prestigious job. We can practice being pleased for our competitors when they win what we want, and nurture delight when something

good happens to someone we dislike. This takes perseverance but if we try (even if we have to fake it till we make it), we'll likely find that soon our joy at someone else's good fortune will be spontaneous. Almost magically, the very act of rejoicing in the good fortune of others allows our own concerns to fade into the background.

Expressing delight for others may not come naturally at first (especially if they seem to be having better fortune than ourselves). But delighting in the success of others is an extraordinary antidote to jealousy and envy, painful mind states that are like enormous self-inflicted poisonous wounds. Delight is transforming, it heals our hearts and relationships. It lightens us. Happiness, quite naturally, enters our life.

(Excerpted and abridged by L. Earnest from, The 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life, 2012.)

"The smell of good bread baking, like the sound of lightly flowing water, is indescribable in its evocations of innocence and delight."

--*M.F.K. Fisher*

"Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair."

--*Kahlil Gibran, author of The Prophet*

"Sometimes I go about in pity for myself, and all the while
A great wind is bearing me across the sky."

--*Ojibwa saying*

"A sudden gladness can unexpectedly shine forth in a time of great sorrow. Then again, even in our greatest joy we are apt to hear the not-so-distant wailing of the suffering world."

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"Birds sing after a storm; why shouldn't people feel as free to delight in whatever remains to them?"

--*Rose Kennedy*

"The colors of the rainbow, so bright up in the sky
Are also on the faces of people passing by
I see friends shakin' hands, sayin', 'How do you do?'
They're really sayin', 'I love you.'"

--*Louis Armstrong's version of What A Wonderful World*

--*Lyrics by George David Weiss & Bob Thiele*

"It must be this rhapsody or none,
The rhapsody of things as they are."

--*Wallace Stevens*