



HARMONY
JOURNALS

REGARDING JOY

Thoughts and Questions on Defining and Finding Joy

A Reflective Essay from Harmony Journals

harmonyjournals.com

A Note from the Authors

You may have noticed that we chose the word regarding rather than contemplating for the title of this essay.

The distinction was intentional.

Contemplating joy suggests turning inward — sitting with joy as we already understand it, examining it from within our existing relationship with it. That is a valuable practice. But it is not quite what we are after here.

Regarding joy suggests something different. It asks us to step back, to set the concept at a slight distance, and to look at it with fresh eyes — the way you might regard a landscape from a hilltop rather than while walking through it. Not to understand joy from inside our assumptions about it, but to examine it as if for the first time.

This is harder than it sounds. Joy is personal. It is woven into memory, into belief, into the stories we tell ourselves about what our lives mean. Pulling it out of ourselves long enough to look at it clearly requires a particular kind of willingness.

That willingness is, we think, the beginning of the whole practice.

Thank you for spending time with these ideas. We genuinely hope this essay opens something useful — a question worth sitting with, a perspective worth trying on, or simply a moment of honest reflection. We hope you enjoy the journey.



The Search for Joy

Human beings have always searched for joy. And searched is exactly the right term because, in many ways, joy has been an enigmatic part of the human experience. Many have tried to define joy first, believing that having a formula would provide a clear, trusted and fixed path to achieving it. Others have attempted to achieve it first, believing they could then capture its essence and write the recipe to reproduce it at will.

Those thinkers, it should be noted, include some of humanity's deepest minds. Every religious text we reviewed — from Jewish to Christian to Muslim to Buddhist to Mayan to Zoroastrian — has contemplated the question. Every philosophical and ethical school of thought we researched has a view of either what joy is or how to arrive there.

Yet after all of that searching, there has never been a single answer.

Some have found joy through faith. Others through purpose. Others through relationships, gratitude, service, wisdom, achievement, self-mastery, or inner peace.

Perhaps the reason joy is so difficult to define is that it is larger than any single experience.

And perhaps before we can find joy, we must first consider what we believe joy actually is.

What we call joy shapes the lives we build.

Many Paths Toward Joy

From religious to philosophical to modern, there have been many approaches to understanding joy, each focusing on a slightly different rationale.

The ancient Greeks often viewed joy as a byproduct of living well — a life manifest in virtue and purpose, expressed outwardly through character and conduct.

The Stoics looked inward rather than outward. Joy came through self-mastery and inner steadiness, independent of external circumstances. What happened to you mattered far less than how you chose to meet it.

Many religious traditions teach that joy grows through a relationship with God or eternal truths — that drawing close to that source is both the path and the destination.

Buddhist teachings emphasize freedom from craving and attachment. Joy emerges not from acquiring what we want but from loosening our grip on what we think we need.

Modern perspectives tend to connect joy to fulfillment, purpose, meaning, and personal growth — the sense that one is becoming something, contributing something, living toward something worth living toward.

To summarize — in a necessarily simplified way — joy may come from:

- a) Living an outwardly virtuous life
- b) Living an inwardly virtuous life
- c) Living in alignment with a higher purpose
- d) Living free from excess attachment and self-imposed limitation

Different paths. Different languages. Different centuries and cultures. And yet two threads run through nearly all of them:

Joy is deeper than pleasure.

Joy appears to be connected to how we live.

The Harmony Journals Perspective

At Harmony Journals, we return to the tension introduced at the outset. Some seek to define joy first and then pursue it. Others pursue it first and attempt to define it from what they find. We have a different suggestion entirely.

We wonder whether the more useful question is not what is joy or how do I get there — but rather what does a life moving toward joy actually look like from the inside?

That shift in question changes everything.

It moves joy from a destination to be reached or a formula to be cracked into something more like a condition that emerges — gradually, imperfectly, and often quietly — when the different parts of a life begin to move in the same direction.

Not perfection. Not balance in every moment. But increasing alignment.

Alignment between what we believe and how we live.

Alignment between ambition and gratitude.

Alignment between strength and gentleness.

Alignment between purpose and presence.

Alignment between who we are and who we hope to become.

This is why the journals are built around paired traits rather than single virtues. Because we have found — in our own lives and in the lives of those around us — that it is rarely the absence of a good quality that creates distance from joy. It is more often the overexpression of one quality at the expense of its counterpart. Ambition without gratitude. Confidence without humility. Mercy without justice.

We are not offering a formula. We are offering a practice.

Perhaps joy is not something we chase or reverse-engineer.

Perhaps it is something that gradually emerges as we become more whole.

SECTION IV

The Facets of Joy

The following facets emerged repeatedly across religious traditions, philosophical schools, and personal reflection. There are no right or wrong answers.

Step 1 — Rank the Facets

Rank all eleven from 1 (most important to your joy) to 11 (least important). Every facet must receive a different number.

Facet	Rank (1–11)	Rating (0–10)
Inner Alignment <i>Actions, beliefs, and values pointing in the same direction.</i>	_____	_____
Self-Mastery <i>Governing impulses, emotions, and habits with intention.</i>	_____	_____
Relationships & Community <i>The depth and quality of your connections with others.</i>	_____	_____
Spiritual Depth <i>Your relationship with something larger than yourself.</i>	_____	_____
Gratitude <i>Recognizing and appreciating what is already present in your life.</i>	_____	_____
Purpose <i>The sense that your life is moving toward something meaningful.</i>	_____	_____
Growth & Progression <i>Commitment to becoming wiser, more capable, more whole.</i>	_____	_____
Freedom from Excess Desire <i>Finding sufficiency without being driven by want.</i>	_____	_____
Resilience Through Opposition <i>Finding stability and growth through difficulty.</i>	_____	_____
Presence & Awareness <i>Inhabiting the current moment rather than the past or future.</i>	_____	_____
Integrity Between Beliefs and Actions <i>Consistency between what you value and how you actually live.</i>	_____	_____

Step 2 — Rate the Facets

Now rate each facet 0–10 on how strongly it is present in your life today. Use the third column above.

SECTION IV CONTINUED

Looking at Your Answers

Is there a source of joy in your life that does not appear in the facets above? Name it. Why does it matter to you? And how does it sit alongside the facets that ranked highest?

Which three facets received your highest rankings? Why do you believe these matter most to your experience of joy?

Which facet surprised you — either by ranking higher or lower than you expected?

How well does your ranking reflect how you are actually living your life right now?

SECTION V

What Is Joy?

Many people spend years pursuing joy before stopping to define it. Looking at your ratings, reflections, and experiences:

What is your personal definition of joy?

Where Does Joy Come From?

Where have you most often experienced joy? In relationships? In service? In achievement? In faith? In learning? In nature? In gratitude? In overcoming challenges? In becoming someone new?

Write about the circumstances, experiences, and patterns that have most often led to joy in your life.

What Pulls You Away From Joy?

What habits, attitudes, desires, fears, or distractions seem to interfere with joy?

What promises fulfillment but consistently leaves you restless? What occupies your time but rarely nourishes your soul?

Cultivating Joy

What actions could you take more intentionally? What mindsets would you like to strengthen? What relationships deserve greater attention? What practices help you become more present, grateful, purposeful, or aligned?

The Shape of a Joyful Life

Simply more joyful.

Describe the shape of that life.

Perhaps joy is not something we discover all at once.

Perhaps it is not a destination at all.

*Perhaps joy emerges slowly as we bring the competing parts of our lives into
greater harmony.*

*And perhaps the search for joy is ultimately the search for a life that feels
whole.*



harmonyjournals.com

Explore the full Harmony Journals series on Amazon