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Joy and Pressure

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Joy and Pressure

Can you imagine forcing someone to enjoy anything? We cannot do that. We can tell others about the thoughts and experiences that we find joyful; we can invite and encourage someone to try listening to classical music, or to take a walk with senses alert to nature, or to engage in a conversation about his or her favorite subject, but we cannot ensure a response of joy in anyone. We cannot even initiate joy within our own selves. Joy is like air, because we recognize it when it is present, but we cannot save it in a container for future use as we can with water.

Joy and pressure do not appear to fit together, since the former is experienced as a free gift, while the latter seems to limit the kind of freedom required by joy. But if we become consciously aware that we are under pressure, as in trying to get a group of people together for a meeting on short notice, we can take a moment to distinguish between a pushy sense of "have-to" and a positive motive for our activity. Whenever we deliberately choose to engage in a well-ordered effort, we are liable to experience joy, even if it is barely perceptible.

We cannot apply pressure to God, others, or ourselves that will result in joy, but we can experience joy when we are under pressure, depending upon the sources that affect us. Every challenge we accept includes the high probability that we will feel pressured to succeed. We might be aware of expectations of others as well as our own strong desires to see our project to completion. Yet we often experience joy in the exercise of our skills, good will, intentions, and the use of our memories and previous experiences. Pressures from within or from outside us do not cause joy, but working toward a goal with an appropriate purpose in mind, opens us to the possibility of a special kind of joy. We are capable of recognizing that whether we succeed or fail to achieve our immediate goals for a particular task, we are fulfilling our calling in life to do what we can with all that we have and are.

Many of our experiences of joy are almost entirely devoid of pressure, as when we happen to notice a lovely view, or receive a sincere and unexpected compliment, or a spontaneous word of gratitude. If we reflect on the events of our day as well as our observations, and allow for some feelings to surface in conjunction with our thoughts, we are likely to notice a positive, yet perhaps subtle experience that we might or might not identify by the name "joy."

Most of our religious experiences bear a component of joy, though a particular new encounter with transcendence might evoke a bit of fear at

first. If we recognize that the fear is related to the unfamiliarity of our experience, and that our freedom to accept or reject is still intact, we will then recognize the gift: some gratuitous insight or interior movement that we neither create nor cause, but which is given.

Joy and pressure are not opposites, and are sometimes complementary in our experience.