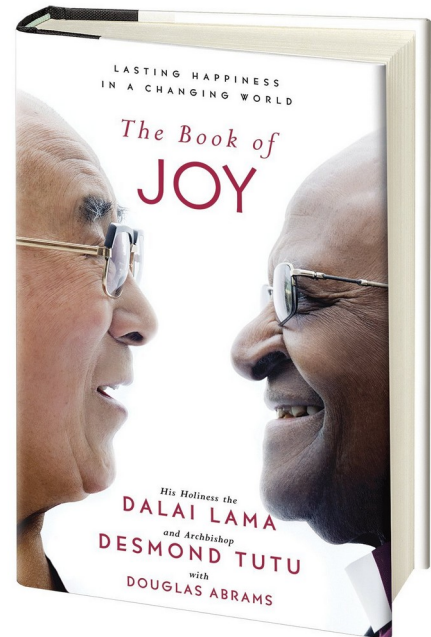


4.

You Are a Masterpiece in the Making
Fear, Stress, and Anxiety: I Would Be Very Nervous
Frustration and Anger: I Would Shout



p.83

so much of our own unhappiness originates within our own mind and heart – in how we react to events in our life.

“Mental immunity,” the Dalai Lama explained, “is just learning to avoid the destructive emotions and to develop the positive ones.

p.84

If your mental health is not good, then small disturbances, small problems will cause you much pain and suffering. You will have much fear and worry, much sadness and despair, and much anger and aggravation. [...]

One must develop the mind over time and cultivate mental immunity.

p.85

“I think we’ve got to accept ourselves as we are. And then hope to grow in much the way the Dalai Lama described. I mean getting to know what the things are that trigger us. These are things that you can train, you can change, but we ought not to be ashamed of ourselves. [...]”

...the Archbishop said many times that we should not berate ourselves for our negative thoughts and emotions, that they are natural and unavoidable. They are only made more intense, he argued, by the glue of guilt and shame when we think we should not have them.

p.86

Through self-inquiry and meditation, we can discover the nature of our mind and learn to soothe our emotional reactivity. This will leave us less vulnerable to the destructive emotions and thought patterns that cause us so much suffering.

So how do we deal with these obstacles to joy...?

The first step is to accept the reality of suffering.

p.87

Dukkha can be translated as “stress,” “anxiety,” “suffering,” or “dissatisfaction.”

It is also described as the stress and anxiety that arise from the attempt to control what is fundamentally impermanent and unable to be controlled. We try to control the moment, which results in our feeling that what is happening should not be happening. So much of what causes heartache is our wanting things to be different than they are.

p.89

Even if someone criticizes you or attacks you, then you have to think: Why did this happen? This person is not your enemy from birth. Certain circumstances caused the person to be negative toward you. There may be many causes, but usually your own attitude is an important contributing factor that cannot be ignored.

pp.91-92

"I think it takes time to learn to be laid-back" [...]

"It's like muscles that have to be exercised to be strong. Sometimes we get too angry with ourselves thinking that we ought to be perfect from the word go. But this being on earth is a time for us to learn to be good, to learn to be more loving, to learn to be more compassionate. And you learn, not theoretically ...you learn when something happens that tests you."

p.92

The Dalai Lama's serenity didn't come fully formed. It was through the practice of prayer and meditation... a vale of growth and development.

We can use our tears, our stress and frustration, as a well from which we can draw the life-giving waters of our emotional and spiritual growth.

p.93

Fear and anxiety are mechanisms that have helped us to survive. [...]

The problem is when the fear is exaggerated or when it is provoked by something that is really quite insignificant.

pp.93-94

Leadership itself seems to require an air of confidence that rarely allows the admission of weakness or vulnerability. [...] Even if leadership requires a show of strength during moments of crisis, our humanity is defined equally, or perhaps more, by our weakness and vulnerability, a fact that the Archbishop often says reminds us of our need for one another.

pp.94-95

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to act despite it." The English word *courage* comes from the French word, *coeur*, or heart; courage is indeed the triumph of our heart's love and commitment over our mind's reasonable murmurings to keep us safe.

p.95

It is very hard to be joyful with stress and anxiety; we have a continual feeling of being overwhelmed and not being able to handle our work commitments, our family commitments, or the digital devices that are constantly reminding us of all the things that we are missing. Juggling so many things at the same time, we can feel like we are always one step behind.

Jinpa pointed out that modern society has prioritized independence to such an extent that we are left on our own to try to manage lives that are increasingly out of control.

p.96

Stress and anxiety often come from too much expectation and too much ambition," the Dalai Lama said. "Then when we don't fulfill that expectation or achieve that ambition, we experience frustration. Right from the beginning, it is a self-centered attitude. I want this. I want that. Often we are not being realistic about our own ability or about objective reality.

p.97

when we see how little we really need – love and connection – then all the getting and grasping that we thought was so essential to our well-being takes its rightful place and no longer becomes the focus or the obsession of our lives.

p.98

constant stress actually wears down our telomeres, the caps on our DNA that protect our cells from illness and aging. It is not just stress but our thought patterns in general that impact our telomeres

pp.98-99

[Psychologist Elissa Epel and molecular biologist Elizabeth Blackburn] explain that it is not the stress alone that damages our telomeres. It is our response to the stress that is most important. They encourage us to develop *stress resilience*. This involves turning what is called "threat stress," or the perception a stressful event is a threat that will harm us, into what is called "challenge stress," or the perception that a stressful event is a challenge that will help us grow. The remedy they offer is quite straight-forward. One simply notices the fight-or-flight stress response in one's body – the beating heart, the pulsing blood or tingling feeling in our hands and face, the rapid breathing – then remembers that these are natural responses to stress and that our body is just preparing to rise to the challenge.

pp.99-100

the path of joy was connection and the path of sorrow was separation. When we see others as separate, they become a threat. When we see others as part of us, as connected, as interdependent, then there is no challenge we cannot face – together.

p.104

In addition to physical pain, we can also experience emotional pain, which may be even more common. We want something that we did not get, like respect or kindness, or we get something that we did not want, like disrespect or criticism. Underlying this anger, the Dalai Lama was saying, is a fear that we will not get what we need, that we are not loved, that we are not respected, that we will not be included.

[...] When we can acknowledge and express the fear – how we are feeling threatened – then we are often able to soothe the anger.

But we need to be willing to admit our vulnerability.

p.106

“Righteous anger is usually not about oneself. It is about those whom one sees being harmed and whom one wants to help.” In short, righteous anger is a tool of justice, a scythe of compassion, more than a reactive emotion.

pp.107-108

The Dalai Lama had said earlier that if we can discover our role in creating the situations that upset us, we are able to reduce our feelings of frustration and anger. Also, when we are able to recognize that the other person has their own fears and hurts, their own fragile and human perspective, then we have a chance of escaping from the normal reflex of anger.

Questions for reflection:

1. Have you thought about your feelings – fear, anger, sadness, happiness – as a ‘mental projection’ before? How are emotions and thoughts connected?
2. What do you think about the comment that “society has prioritized independence to the point that we are left alone to manage out-of-control lives”?
3. What do you think about the connection between fear and anger, and our physical and mental well-being?