



The Monthly LOVELetter

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EN-JOY-ING SELF'S JOURNEY

Asking in the glow of the New Year and sneaking up on the holiday of love, it only seemed right to focus on what the power of Lovin SELF will bring you: the ability to truly enjoy your journey. That starts with finding the love and joy in everything SELF faces, pursues, and dreams every single day. And learning to face what's before SELF starts with focusing your willpower and taking that first step: quitting that soul-draining 9-5, discovering the work that makes your spirit sing, or finally leaving that abusive relationship (professional, personal, or romantic).

Sometimes, even the biggest of changes can leave us with only a fleeting sense of joy. We slip back into the mundane of day-to-day life and those cloudy feelings can begin to brew.

Joy isn't chronic or consistent smiles, rainbows, and glittery unicorns. Joy is being able to remain afloat when life tosses you anchors large enough to hold the *USS Gettysburg* in place. Joy is being able to remember that the sun is still shining behind the clouds. Even when the path before us gets bumpy, shut down for repairs, or drops off the map, having joy is having confidence

that the path will be true to SELF's desired destination.

SELF doesn't have to wait for someone to point out where the path is; you can pave your own. Like Tyler Perry mentioned at the 2010 NAACP Image Awards, where he received the Chairman's Award: "We don't have to wait for someone to green light our projects. We can create our own intersections." Even the original cartographers often had to find their own paths as they laid the maps of the continents and country before them. They only had the most rudimentary of tools and their own sense of determination to follow. However, those tools are still used today, and determination is as timeless as a good song.

Music is a great source of joy, and two songs that always bring me a great amount of joy are Bobby McFerrin's "Don't Worry, Be Happy" and Pharell Williams's "Happy." Both songs tell us that choosing joy will make it easier to deflect the weight of worry or bad news. And both songs equally make me want to get up off my seat and groove and dance. While the beats can move us, so can the lyrics, and each is its own source of pure elation.

Bobby reminds us, "In every life we have some trouble / When you worry you make it double"; and, Pharell insists on "Clap[ping] along if that's what you wanna do" even when "here come bad news talking this and that." Almost as a mantra, Pharell chants "Can't nothing / Bring me down / My level's too high" and, so, no matter the obstacle any bad news may reveal, he'll "be just fine, yeah." Maybe because he called Bobby, or remembered that "when you worry your face will frown / And that will bring everybody down." (Source: AZLyrics.com)

Which is just one more reason to focus your willpower and choose joy, how you live and face SELF's obstacles will most definitely have an impact on the people around you. Bad things will happen, and they need to be embraced for what they are: stepping stones to the next phase of your life, a light to get you around the next bend in the road. Your choices may inadvertently help someone else who is struggling, albeit silently, in the same way. Trust SELF, trust your gut, and even when you "ain't got no place to lay your head", choose to see it as a sign to look to the stars when you might have slept instead.



"Road in the Distance" by MeliSwenk (2009)

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My One Word is JOY

- + Joy gives power to what you Believe
- + Joy encourages the Heart, Mind, and Spirit
- + Joy adds Love to your journey
- + Joy tells you to Never Give Up
- + Joy says lean in to your Dream

From Evan Carmichael's *Your One Word*

Image from Stencil app. Quote originally appeared (1 Jan 2017) in Lovin Self blog post "Love Asked...Do You Believe?"
[Source: <https://lovinself.wordpress.com/2017/01/01/love-asked-do-you-believe/>]

ELEVATE SELF's JOY

Even though making dreams come true is hard work, remembering that you are pursuing dreams can help elevate the joy in the struggle. However, even the sailor fears still waters. While fear, doubt, and worry seem more ingrained than anything else, Oprah tells us, "Joy is the organic state of your soul." (Source: Oprah.com) It is the state SELF inhabited before identity, society, and worldly expectations were placed on you.

It isn't easy to live through the valleys lying in the shadow of the peaks. We are always looking up, trying to find our way back there, and even higher. Maintaining steam across still waters is where the power of joy comes into play. When it starts to feel like you're treading water, is the exact moment when you need joy, hope, and a light to look toward. The last thing you want to do is give up, to stop treading!

But, how do I find joy when I feel surrounded by darkness and doubt?

Remember what your goal is: achieving your dream. The one thing in this whole world that brings you joy. Using joy to sustain joy? I know, I know. It sounds a lot like squeezing blood from a turnip, doesn't it? But, it isn't. In some undated footage on YouTube, Tyler Perry says, that there will be times when your "dream has to take on the belief for you because you can't do it by yourself." Sometimes, even when joy seems out of reach, you need to remember what brings you joy to give you that extra boost, that extra *oomph*; to remind you what joy is.

Here are five questions to help you find ways to elevate SELF's sense of joy :

◇ *What are your favorite activities?* When SELF is feeling overwhelmed or stressed, take a moment to consider what you've been denying yourself lately. Spend working time indoors and all you can think about is the crisp winter air? Take your work and head to the nearest park or al fresco coffee shop. This may seem like a simple fix; but, when SELF is caught in a loop of bad feelings, the simplest solutions can evade even the sharpest minds. Next time SELF is feeling blue, take a moment to pick up your favorite book, game, or album and find a comfy spot. Snuggle up and spark a little joy.

◇ *What have you done for SELF lately?* As a continuation of the last bullet, self-care may not be one of SELF's "favorite" activities, but it most definitely is an important one. Even in the most jam-packed schedule, time for pampering SELF is a must! You can double-dip time that you are already required to take away from work and social time: personal hygiene. Use aromatherapy soaps, scrubs, or soaks in your favorite aromas while you shower or bathe. Make use of the sauna and/or massage elements of your gym, if they exist, every week or couple days when you're there to work out; or, as a treat, instead of working out that day. If you work out at home, use aromatherapy candles or room sprays while you do yoga or work the stationary bike. And, overall, when you get enough sleep and make healthy food choices, you are always doing your body good and that never makes SELF feel bad.

◇ *How do you define joy?* Literally. What are

the things that make you happy? Outside of the activities we explored with the first question. Do you like animals? Visit your local pet store or humane society regularly if you can't own a pet. Take a couple of hours to visit the local movie theatre or take in an off-off-off-off Broadway show. If you find that there's never enough time to visit the museum, library, or theatre, ask about volunteering there and that could eventually become a permanent position! Chase your joy for long enough and SELF will be surprised when you finally catch it.

◇ *Are you aware?* One of the things all humans have in common is an inherent desire to belong to something that is larger than themselves. Taking part in mindfulness and/or meditation practices, exploring spirituality and religion, trekking around different areas of your neighborhood for inspiration, and even volunteering at a local soup kitchen or women's shelter can broaden SELF's perspective enough, and make an impact on another's life enough, to bring you much joy and gratitude for the life you have and all you've experienced so far.

◇ *Who do you want to be?* Sometimes it can feel like life has stuck SELF in the corner and told you how it's gonna be. But SELF simply needs to remember that you are in control of your location, your work, and your reactions to life as it unfolds. Make sure you're surrounding SELF with positive people who challenge and cheer you; take stock of your professional relationships; and take a gentle, but honest, look at SELF. You always decide who you want to

How Can I Boost Willpower?

Gusto, spirit, determination, and even dedication are just a couple of words that we often use to describe one thing: willpower. That inner drive; some may call it motivation. Others, being inspired. When one is driven, one's willpower cannot be stopped. Each of these words calls to mind images of motion, propulsion, being pushed—or is it dragged?—along by some inner force that makes us feel antsy, restless, desperate if we aren't actively pursuing it. This "It," the subject calling to your willpower, might be described as your passion, or your worst enemy.

The goal, especially if seen as impossible, can tug at your heart and make you feel like you're doing nothing, even when you're working your grind and checking in every single day. These are the moments when it feels like willpower is failing SELF. You know how much you want that dream, to achieve that goal, and, yet, nothing you do seems to be gaining you any ground. You feel depleted, defeated. This is when you need to boost your willpower.

My good friends Merriam and Webster tell us that "willpower" is, simply, "energetic determination." Indeed, but, that seems . . . simple. Doesn't it? I mean, let's unpack this word. Which, is, really, made up of the two words: will and power.

Now, that second one, clearly, gives us the foundation of the entire concept: power.

Force, like we were talking about in the beginning paragraph. We all know what power is, and what it means. It's that first little word, just four letters, where we all end up struggling. Will. Not just any 'will', of course. *Your will.* Your will is my command—right? We all went there, right? Because this is the kind of power we're talking about. Your will: desire, wants, wishes, and even needs. The *power* here is only activated by your *will*.

With that in mind, remember that willpower can be boosted from the strength of the connection between SELF and your dream, your goal. First, is your dream still your dream? Take a moment to confirm with SELF. Has your determination turned blind? Are you simply chasing the goal because that's been the goal "all along"? Sometimes we need to reconfigure, adjust to what we've already completed or what couldn't be completed, or get confirmation that we're on the right track to get the proverbial second wind. Second, look at some of your habits. Are your actions really propelling you toward your goal? When stress rears its ugly head, a solid defense is a battery of effective behaviors that are second nature. Third, take steps to prepare for temptation. Being honest with SELF about how you make decisions or avoid them will help you stay the course, because you'll have effective backup plans and the trust in SELF to use them when the time comes.

"You can be born into a whole lot of a nightmare. But, God can usher you into a dream."

—Tyler Perry (2010)



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BUILDING EMOTIONAL MUSCLE

Trust SELF's Vision

After last month's promise to work toward embracing destruction of SELF, this element of building emotional muscle will seem like the proverbial child's play. Acknowledging where you have been, what you have been through, and that even more destruction may still come, is taking a solid step toward SELF's overall vision and making SELF's dreams come true.

Now that you understand destruction of SELF is as natural as breathing, you can lean in to the dream SELF is pursuing. Trust your heart, trust your gut, and trust the vision that you have for SELF. More than that, there needs to be a willingness to trust the direction the destruction is taking you in.

Destruction isn't just an isolated incident that happens because "it's natural." It's just one step in a natural process that intentionally drives SELF toward change. Keep tabs on your milestones, the Vision Board we discussed last month would help with that, and keep checking in to make sure this dream is still what you want. Now, don't take that as a cue to get wishy-washy and back out when it "gets too hard." Take a moment to do some honest self-inquiry and make sure the dream you're pursuing is still the dream you want. SELF can change; sometimes dreams or goals were only made to last for a short time, to get you out

of one situation and into a better one that would allow you to pursue something even larger. Don't limit yourself by thinking there is only one dream, one goal. It's just that you must meet them one at a time.

And along this path, there will be more obstacles, more molehills, more destruction. SELF will continue to change, and the dream along with you. But, never lose trust, never lose faith in your ultimate Vision. This is why it is so important to check in and make sure the goal you're pursuing is still the one important for your dream. There will be more destruction, and SELF's survival is only enhanced by the destruction you embrace. Is this dream, on the path toward your vision, worth the destruction and change you will face?

Like any other journey, the path may deviate. Like the cartographers mentioned in the editorial, SELF is collecting the tools necessary to mark where you've been and where you want to go. Have faith and courage to follow the path and keep your eyes on the goal. As Henry Ford once said, "Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off the goal." Trust in SELF's vision and embrace a willingness to readjust or correct your dream if it doesn't stay true to your path.

Don't limit yourself by thinking there is only one dream, one goal. It's just that you must meet them one at a time.

Mindful Minute: Joyous SELF

Joy is not always easy to achieve or find when the path seems dark. Some people think it is merely choosing to smile in the face of fear, defeat, or doubt. That is definitely a step in the right direction. To bring SELF a sense of joy that feels more stable starts with emotional resilience, to be able to embrace even the lowest and darkest of moments for what they are—whether they make you smile or cry. Even if you're more inclined to grimace than smile, one can live in joy, happiness, contentment—whichever word SELF feels most drawn to. Find the things, ideas, and people who bring you comfort, make you laugh, and can help you get things done. There's no greater source of joy than achieving a goal and reaching your dreams.

Here are five things to say to bring SELF more Joy:

- <3 I have the power of SELF to create my own joy.
- <3 I *do not* have to wait on others to pursue SELF's dreams.
- <3 Life is about the journey, not the destination.
- <3 iMatter!
- <3 I will trust SELF's vision for the future!

Lovin Self elevates Joy and boosts your source of Willpower!

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