

Joy vs Happiness



Re-Defining Joy

We often use the words “joy” and “happiness” interchangeably.

Yet they arise from very different places within us. Below is how cognitive psychology defines these two words.

Happiness is often connected to external experiences - moments of pleasure, achievement, celebration, or relief. It is responsive to circumstance and can shift as life shifts.

Joy, however, is more internally rooted. It is shaped by meaning, presence, connection, and alignment with what feels true. Joy can exist alongside life’s challenges and complexities. It is not dependent on perfection or ease.

Where happiness visits in moments, joy can live more steadily within us.

Understanding this distinction allows us to stop chasing happiness externally and begin recognizing where it already has presence internally.

Happiness

- External
- Event-based
- Circumstance-driven
- Temporary
- Experienced in the mind
- Based on reacting to life

Joy

- Internal
- Meaning-rooted
- Grounded in presence
- Sustainable
- Experienced in the body
- Connected to deeper emotions

Examples of Happiness vs Joy

Recognizing the Difference in Lived Experience

Happiness and joy can sometimes feel similar on the surface, yet their roots are often different. Below are examples that illustrate how each may arise.

Experiences of Happiness

Happiness is often connected to external events, positive outcomes, or pleasurable moments.

For example:

- Receiving good news or recognition
- Celebrating a birthday, wedding, or milestone
- Purchasing something you've wanted
- Completing a goal or achievement
- Going on vacation or a special outing
- Receiving a compliment or validation

In these moments, happiness is real and meaningful - yet it is often tied to what is happening around you.

When the event passes, the emotional intensity may naturally shift or fade.

Happiness is a process of the mind and thought giving an experience meaning.

Experiences of Joy

Joy often arises from internal meaning, presence, or connection - even in ordinary or quiet moments.

For example:

- Watching sunlight move across a room
- Feeling deeply connected in conversation
- Sitting in nature and feeling at peace
- Holding a loved one's hand
- Laughing freely without self-consciousness
- Feeling aligned with your purpose or path
- Experiencing stillness and contentment within yourself

Joy may feel less dependent on circumstance and more connected to presence, meaning, or inner resonance.

It exists in the body. When we begin to notice joy in the body, we shift from analyzing it to inhabiting it.

Reflect

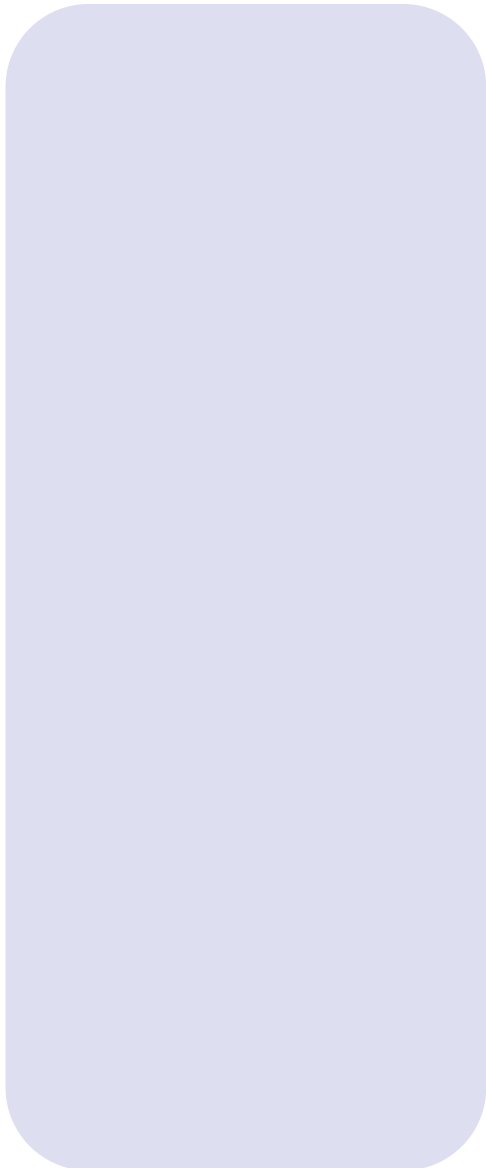
Can you feel the difference between these two feelings - in how you sense and process them?

Exploring the Difference

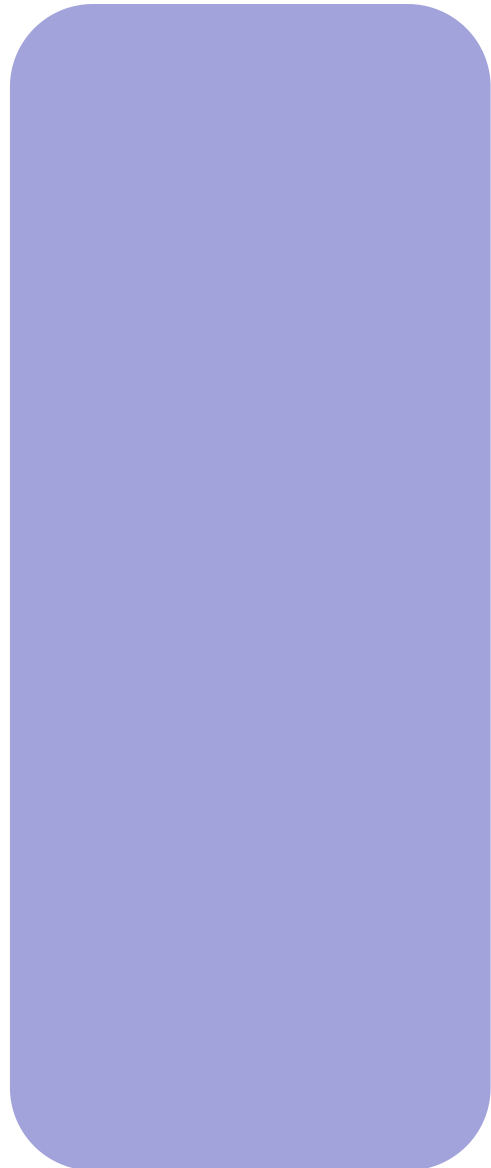
Reflection Prompt

Think about your own life experiences when you've felt joy or happiness. Write them down here and use the graphic description on the previous pages to help you choose under which category they fall. Based on the distinctions we've explored, consider whether each item feels more closely connected to happiness, joy, or perhaps a blend of both. Notice any patterns that emerge. What do these observations reveal about your current relationship with happiness and joy?

Happiness



Joy



Exploring the Difference

Reflection Prompts

Happiness

*Think of a time when you would describe yourself as happy.
Write briefly about that experience.*

What was happening?

What contributed to that feeling?

How long did it last?

Where did you feel it, if anywhere, in your body?

Reflection Prompts

Joy

*Now think of a time when you would describe yourself as experiencing joy.
Write briefly about that experience.*

What was happening?

What contributed to that feeling?

How long did it last?

Where did you feel it, if anywhere, in your body?

Noticing the Difference

Comparative Reflection

What differences do you notice between these two experiences?

Which felt more temporary?

Which felt more sustainable or internally rooted?

How did each feel in your body?

Which state feels more accessible to you right now?

Where in my life am I pursuing happiness... _____

...and where am I being invited to cultivate deeper joy? _____

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“It is the small joys and simple pleasures that sustain us.”

Laura Ingalls Wilder

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About Me



Christine's passion is to help others reconnect with their souls, awaken to who they truly are, and live the lives their souls intended for them in this lifetime. Her offerings guide you to awaken to your true self in this moment and connect more deeply with your divine Higher Self and Soul. Through this connection, you can access your inner wisdom and begin expressing your life's purpose and gifts in the world. Christine serves as your facilitator, guide, and channel - helping you find your dharma, your unique spiritual essence and path.

Christine holds a Ph.D. in Medieval and Romantic German Mysticism from the University of Pennsylvania and has extensive training in Western Astrology, Holographic Sound Healing, Usui Reiki - Master level, Metatron Colour Healing, Mindfulness (MBSR and other approaches), and Kabbalah. A former professor at Southern Connecticut State University, she also supports educators through her Uplift Teachers work, bringing mindfulness and soul-centered awareness to classrooms and beyond.

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