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Reawakening Joy

*Why happiness is not something that happens to you —
and the daily practices that make it possible.*

There is a quiet revolution available to each of us — not in the headlines, not in a new productivity system, but in the interior landscape of our own minds. It begins with a single, radical act of self-awareness: recognizing that joy is not a reward waiting at the end of our struggles. It is a practice. It is, ultimately, a choice. Your choice.

The Brain That Leans Toward Shadow

Before we can cultivate joy, we must first understand why it so often eludes us. The human brain, shaped by hundreds of thousands of years of survival pressure, is wired to pay closer attention to threats than to blessings. Psychologists call this *negativity bias* — our tendency to register, dwell on, and recall negative experiences more vividly than positive ones.

A harsh word lands harder than a compliment. A setback lingers in memory long after a triumph has faded. This is not a character flaw. It is ancient architecture doing its job. The problem is that our environment has changed dramatically, and our minds haven't fully caught up. The very system designed to keep our ancestors alive now keeps many of us stuck in cycles of worry, rumination, and low-grade dissatisfaction. The threat is different, but our psychological and physiological response to it is the same.

Understanding this is the first act of compassion we can offer ourselves. We are not broken. We are human. And because we are human — because we are conscious, reflective, and capable of intentional choice — we also have the power to rewire what we repeatedly practice.

Joy is not the absence of difficulty. It is the presence of meaning, connection, and a deliberate turning of the heart toward what is good. Even in tragedy, good can be found; the coming together of friends, the rebuilding of community. It's our choice to concentrate on the good or the negative.

Happiness as a Conscious Choice

One of the most liberating — and quietly demanding — truths in positive psychology is this: happiness is less a circumstance than a decision we make repeatedly across the ordinary moments of our days. Research consistently shows that external circumstances account for a surprisingly small portion of our subjective well-being. The larger share is shaped by our intentional activities and, most powerfully, by our habitual patterns of thinking.

This does not mean forcing positivity or denying pain. Toxic positivity is its own kind of harm. What it means is this: we can train our attention. We can learn to notice the good that already exists alongside the

difficult. We can choose, again and again, to orient ourselves toward gratitude, connection, and meaning — not because life is perfect, but because that orientation changes the quality of every experience we have.

Making the conscious choice toward joy requires us to challenge the assumption that happiness must be earned, deserved, or arrived at. It is here, now, available — in every moment of every day - but it asks something of us. It asks us to show up for it.

The Transformative Power of Gratitude

Gratitude is perhaps the most well-researched intervention in the science of well-being, and yet it is still radically underused. Studies by researchers such as Robert Emmons and Martin Seligman have found that people who regularly practice gratitude report higher levels of positive emotions, greater life satisfaction, greater compassion, and even improved physical health.

What makes gratitude so powerful is that it does something the negativity-biased brain rarely does on its own: it *lingers* on the good. When we pause to genuinely notice what we appreciate — the warmth of a cup of tea, the loyalty of a friend, the specific way light falls through a window — we are literally counteracting our brain's default tendency to scan for problems.

But gratitude is not a passive feeling. It is an active practice. The difference between those who benefit from gratitude and those who don't is not their circumstances — it is the consistency and specificity of their practice. Vague thankfulness is pleasant. It's specific, felt gratitude that rewires the brain over time. Make sure to check out the Seven Daily Habits section below for specific practices to build gratitude and joy.

Compassion: The Joy We Give and Receive

Compassion — both toward others and toward ourselves — is one of the most overlooked pathways to lasting happiness. We often think of joy as something we feel when things go well for us. But research consistently finds that acts of kindness, generosity, and empathy generate some of the strongest and most durable positive emotions we can experience, for both the giver and the receiver.

Self-compassion adds another dimension. When we treat ourselves with the same warmth and understanding we would offer a friend — especially in moments of failure or pain — we break the cycle of harsh self-criticism that often blocks joy entirely. Self-compassion is not self-indulgence. It is the foundation from which genuine growth and happiness become possible.

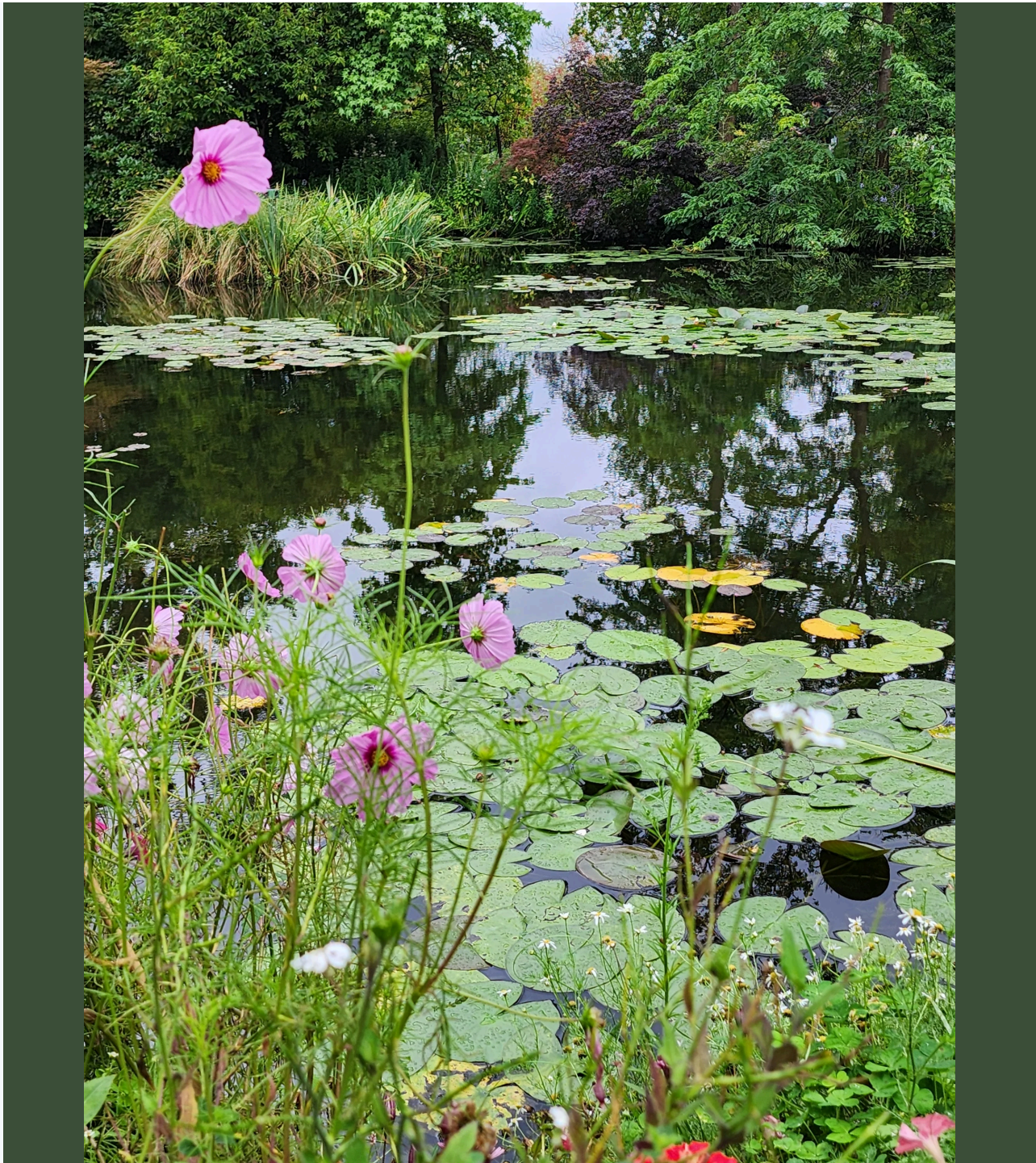
Practicing compassion expands our sense of connection to others and reminds us of our shared humanity. In a world that frequently feels polarized and disjointed, that expansion is its own form of joy.

A Final Word

Joy does not arrive fully formed when your circumstances align. It is grown, slowly, in the soil of attention and intention. It is nurtured by gratitude, expanded by compassion, and made possible by the quiet, daily choice to meet your own life with openness rather than bracing. The negativity bias will always be there — that is part of being human. But so is this: the extraordinary capacity to choose, again and again, to turn toward the light. To choose joy.

The garden is always waiting. You only need to tend it.

*With warmth and love,
Theresa*



Are you listening to yourself?

There are things we do to be responsible and productive. And then there are things we do that bring us joy. For a lucky few, there is genuine joy in living a responsible life. We call it luck, but the difference has more to do with living an aligned life than hitting a random jackpot

When we make choices based on who we're supposed to be, who others expect us to be, that's when daily living starts to feel like a duty.

Defaulting to the opinions of other people is like letting them tell us who we are instead of us teaching them. Living with that kind of self-betrayal isn't easy. We can only settle for it and justify it for so long before it starts eating away at us.

Living an aligned life, one where our choices and actions match who we authentically are, is our access to living a joy-filled life. And the best way I know to get back to living an aligned life is to ask ourselves quality questions (and be willing to listen to the answers).

Colleen



Seven Daily Habits to Cultivate Joy

Small, consistent practices — compounded over time

1) Morning Gratitude — 3 Specific Things

Each morning, before reaching for your phone, write three things you are genuinely grateful for. Be specific: not "my family," but *why* and *how* they matter today. Specificity transforms gratitude from a concept into a felt experience. It makes it a lasting impression; being specific creates an eternal list of things you are grateful for.

2) Two Minutes of Mindful Stillness

Sit quietly for two minutes and simply notice your breath and surroundings without judgment. This interrupts the mind's tendency to race toward worry and creates a small window of presence — the only place joy ever actually lives.

3) One Act of Intentional Kindness

Each day, perform one deliberate act of kindness — a genuine compliment, a thoughtful message, a small gesture of service. Research shows that *giving* activates the brain's reward centers as powerfully as receiving. Notice that bright smile in the store? TELL them! Great outfit? SAY it! You have the power to completely change someone's day.

4) A Walk Without a Destination

Take a short walk for the sole purpose of noticing beauty — a color, a texture, a sound. Leave your phone in your pocket. The practice of looking for beauty trains the brain to find it more readily over time. This can be five minutes around the yard, or half an hour in a park. Any amount of time gives you opportunities to discover beauty and peace.

5) The Self-Compassion Pause

When you notice self-critical thoughts, pause and ask: *What would I say to a good friend in this moment?* Then offer yourself that same response. This single habit, practiced consistently, can fundamentally shift your relationship with difficulty and with yourself. Remind yourself that you deserve grace just like everyone else. Talk to yourself in ways that you talk to others.

6) Protect the First and Last Hour

Avoid screens for the first and last hour of your day. These liminal hours — morning and evening — are when the mind is most impressionable.

Fill them with something nourishing: reading, journaling, music, conversation, or simply quiet.

7) Evening Reflection Practice

Before sleep, recall one moment from the day that was good — however small — and let yourself linger on it for 30 seconds. Neuroscientist Rick Hanson calls this "taking in the good": holding positive experiences long enough for them to form lasting neural pathways. We call it "Favorite Parts" at home; it's a way to retrain your mind to dwell on the positives as you transition to sleep.

Living in Alignment

"Alignment is not about perfection. It is about bringing your daily actions into quiet agreement with your deepest purpose."

— **Itayi Garande**

When Your Actions Match Who You Really Are

There's a quiet kind of exhaustion that comes from living out of alignment — saying yes when you mean no, chasing goals that were never really yours, showing up as a slightly altered version of yourself depending on who's in the room. Most of us know this feeling intimately, even if we've never had a name for it.

Alignment, at its core, is the practice of closing the gap between who you are and how you live. It's the practice of ignoring the "should" and concentrating on your true self.

Why We Drift

Life has a way of layering expectations on top of us — from family, culture, and social media to career pressures. Over time, we can find

ourselves living a life that looks successful from the outside but feels hollow from the inside. The goals we're chasing may belong to someone else. The persona we've built may have started as a coping mechanism that we simply forgot to outgrow. Misalignment isn't a personal failure. It's often just the residue of living in survival mode.

What "True Self" Actually Means

The true self isn't some mystical hidden identity waiting to be excavated. It's simpler: it's the version of you that exists when fear, approval-seeking, and performance are taken out of the equation. It shows up in the things that energize you without needing external validation, the values you hold even when they cost you something, and the quiet voice that speaks up right before you ignore it. It's true clarity.

Putting It Into Practice

- 1. Audit your "shoulds."** Take stock of your commitments, goals, and routines. For each one, ask: *Is this something I genuinely want, or something I think I should want or do?* The answer won't always be comfortable. Ignoring it is even harder.
- 2. Follow your energy, not just your discipline.** Discipline is valuable, but chronic resistance is data. Pay attention to what (and who) consistently drains you versus what naturally pulls you forward — that contrast points toward alignment.
- 3. Make small, honest edits.** Alignment doesn't require burning your life down. Start with one small shift: a boundary you've been avoiding, a creative pursuit you keep postponing, a conversation you've been rehearsing for months. Small authentic actions compound quickly.
- 4. Sit with discomfort before making decisions.** Before saying yes to something significant, pause. Notice whether the pull you feel is genuine excitement or anxiety in disguise. Anxiety wants you to act fast; alignment can wait. Your inner voice knows the difference. Pay attention to it.
- 5. Revisit your values — in writing.** Not the aspirational values you think you *should* have, but the ones that actually guide your decisions under pressure. Write them down. They become a compass when the noise gets loud.

The Ongoing Work

Alignment isn't a destination. It's a daily recalibration — a willingness to keep asking *Is this really me?* and to gently course-correct when the answer is no. The goal isn't perfection. It's integrity: the quiet confidence that comes from knowing your outer life is an honest reflection of your inner one.

That kind of clarity is worth the work.



2026 Female Travelers Christmas Markets Tour

Discover yourself in the magnificence of European Christmas Markets.

This holiday season, discover more than Europe's most beautiful Christmas markets — discover a new way of seeing yourself. Your journey begins in Paris, where festive lights glow along the Seine, the Eiffel Tower sparkles against winter skies, and the Notre Dame Christmas Market invites you to slow down and savor the season like a

true Parisian. In Strasbourg, the “Capital of Christmas,” enjoy the old world traditions and Alsatian treats in this fairytale village, stand beneath the magnificent tree in Place Kléber, and feel the magic of centuries-old traditions come alive beside the Strasbourg Cathedral. The experience continues in London, where Christmas markets buzz with festive energy. Stroll along The Queen’s Walk, Westminster Abbey, and Buckingham Palace. Enjoy the Christmas lights in the tradition of Charles Dickens, Mary Poppins, or Harry Potter – moments that awaken your sense of adventure and make the season feel unforgettable. This thoughtfully designed journey blends iconic sights with meaningful moments, leaving you not only with unforgettable memories — but with a renewed sense of confidence, joy, and connection to the spirit of travel itself.

[View the Tour Information Here](#)

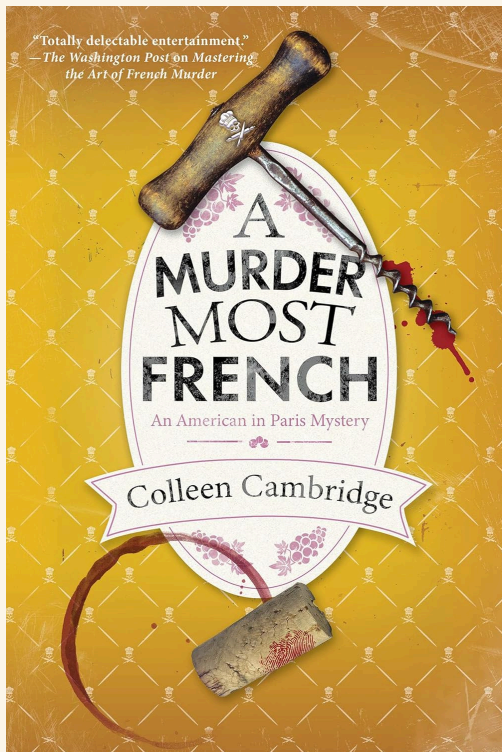


We're Growing!

At our core, we believe international travel is more than a journey—it's a bridge between cultures. By exploring the world, we deepen our understanding of one another, foster meaningful connections, and see global challenges through a more compassionate lens. Every destination offers an opportunity to expand knowledge, appreciate diverse traditions, and engage with communities in ways that promote mutual respect and shared humanity. Through thoughtfully designed

travel experiences, we help you discover not only new places but also new perspectives—because when we understand the world better, we build stronger global relations together. It's with this goal of global connections that we have formed Thats Perspective Travel, LLC. Join one of our curated journeys, or let us help you plan your next adventure; we're here to help!

[Click Here For More Information](#)



We fell in love with Colleen Cambridges series based on Julia Childs' fictitious best friend....so we're continuing the series! You can find the book at the link button below. We will be meeting at 10AM EST on Sunday, May 31 on Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85919312471?pwd=LCuecLdSvCjfbBr9awvk19af1okFza.1>

[Buy the book here](#)

Things We Love

We've curated lists of services and products we love and think you will, too!



We're all in on offering you the best cultural travel experiences available.

Reach out to us to help design your next trip, or to join one of our journeys.

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Most flights from the US reach Europe in the morning hours. What to do with your luggage while you wait for check-in at your accommodations? Stasher has you covered! With locations in multiple cities, they'll keep watch over your bags while you go discover the city!

[Find it Here](#)

Coming in May:

May brings a new level of expansion. We'll realign with our values and explore what we're excited about; what brings us a feeling of expansion without adding pressure.

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