



I slept and
dreamt that
life was joy.
I awoke and
saw that life
was service.
I acted and
behold,
service was
joy.

Rabindranath Tagore
(1861 - 1941)
Bengali Poet

Joy comes to us in a variety of packages. We feel joy in connection and joy in surprise. Music can bring us joy, as can food or exercise or invention or subtle beauty. Joy may be stirred by the wisdom that comes with age or the innocence that babies embody.

We can know joy in service to others.

Service begins with listening inward. To serve, we need self-directed awareness. We must know our gifts, but more so, we must know what happens to us as we offer our gifts. Self-awareness can reveal the breadth of our unconditional generosity and it can unmask small traces of conceit. Knowing ourselves can help us sense how much to provide, how much to hold in reserve, and critically, how not to leave any excess kindness ungiven.

Service continues with listening outward. To serve, we listen in order to hear. We must understand what the potential recipient of our service asks of us. Service based on the needs of the receiver preserves dignity, autonomy, and equality and in doing so, allows our service to have deep integrity. We trust that recipients of support are the ones best able to define what would be helpful. It means offering a relationship before offering a hand.

Service is fulfilled in action. The joy of service is realized as we bring who we are to bear on what is needed. Service is active – it draws us out of ourselves and into the places where others find themselves. And service is not limited to persons or communities; we can serve nature, ideals, and spiritual reality with passion and commitment.

In service, we can joyfully realize the treasure of our talents.

What do I hear others needing today? How can I put one of my gifts into action?