

To the Practice of Both

by Addy Lindsay

There is an inexhaustible grief that seems to happen when I consciously miss something that I am right in the middle of. It is sort of like a tethered experience that seeks no means to an end, a discomfort in the midst of gratitude, a fear of the embodiment of deep and fulfilling joy. We, perhaps, are more familiar with the universal unfamiliarity that is sitting in our pain, but less inclined to relish in the pleasure of joy and acknowledge what it often costs us as we open ourselves up to the vulnerability of being truly seen.

There has always been a perceived binary between the linking of utter despair and genuine joy, such that there is no bridge or much effort to find a soft landing place between the two. This intangible longing for the present seems to be the paradox of both grief and joy. Both seem to have the capacity to make us feel alive, to produce in us an unquenchable desire that often leaves us to hide, to disconnect, to disengage.

The essence of both grief and joy are unified by a common knowledge of something deeper that leaves behind a powerful presence we seem to not be able to escape, a gaping absence of what was that is no longer. In grief, this presence often reveals itself to be that whimsical absence, an ache for that which is not near or accessible, a knowing of better days that seem behind us. In joy, this presence is the embodiment of unregulated abundance that feels threatening or liable to be stolen from us.

The cost of both can leave us running, or it can lead us near.

There is no limit to the depth of suffering, nor is there an inhibited flow to the joy a human heart is able to contain. I tenderly hold both as I witness the vacancy of city streets, the hush that towers over my favorite supermarkets, the loneliness that threatens to drive me to despair, the wails of suppressed pain I witness from strangers who have become my greatest teachers. I, perhaps for the first time, am able to see grief personified in the essence of joy that knows no limits because it knows all

quirks and corners of suffering. This grief keeps me quiet, still, listening, curious, thoughtful, and acutely aware, while joy keeps me hopeful, inclined, relieved, teachable, and full. Both provide me with the quaintest bit of light that encourages me to take a couple more steps forward.

Maybe I am able to discern this most in the face of my neighbor, my fellow human, an attuned other whom I seek to find commonality with. Most often, it is in the deep quest of deeply knowing another that I am able to find myself. This familiar stranger often generously holds up a mirror to myself, one who welcomes me and teaches me the paradox of an overlapping reality of longing that is coupled with a deep satisfaction of mindfulness and hope. In the dark of all despair and unknown, I let both lead the way, and—after all—it is usually both that leads me home again.