

5 Simple Practices for Returning to the Joy of You

Ann Strong

Why Strong from Within?

Our power to live happy, meaningful lives comes from expressing who we are on the inside – each of us uniquely ourselves. Not from trying to live up to what we think the world wants us to be. Or from what we think we should be.

Our world is created as heaven or hell through our thoughts and feelings inside. Not from external circumstances.

All misery comes from trying to be someone other than who we are and thinking that changing external circumstances will make us happy. These two widely-held misconceptions create all of the misery on the planet.

Don't take my word for it. Check in with yourself. Do you know this to be true? Does it ring true for you?

Strong from Within addresses both misconceptions. We play with and practice the specifics of the personal – who we are, uniquely and one-of-a-kind. We also play with and practice the universal – realizing more and more deeply that our thinking and feeling creates our world.

Let's look at the practices . . .

1. Express your core values.

For each of us, our core values serve as an absolutely reliable internal compass. Core values are not lofty ideals. They are active adjectives or verbs, which makes it easy to notice how much we are or are not engaged with them. Ideally, we have 5 - 8 core values. We can't keep track of more than that.

Our core values can be expressed as "I am . . ." statements.

For example here are mine.

I am . . .

- Present.
- Playful.
- Intimate.
- Spacious.
- Self-Aware.
- Inspiring.
- Of Service.

Now, one of your core values may also be "Playful." And, how I express and experience "Playful" and how you express and experience "Playful" may be different. It's not about comparing, because mine is uniquely mine and yours is uniquely yours. We each want to be clear about what "Playful" means to us.

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We can rely on our core values as a compass with which to make decisions. Will this project allow me to express my core values? Will the other team members appreciate the contribution of my core values?

We can also rely on our core values to notice on a daily basis how much we are living true to ourselves. Are we consistently expressing our core values in all areas of our lives?

If we are feeling frustrated, we can look to our core values to see which one, or more than one, we are going against. If I spend time with someone and engage only superficially, I become cranky quickly. I have violated my core value of Intimacy. If I schedule too many appointments too close together, I check out or become anxious. I have violated my core value of Spaciousness.

If you already know your top 5 - 8 core values, begin practicing more consistently expressing them. If you're not sure of your top core values, use the Core Values worksheet at the end of this article to identify them. Once you've identified them, begin to practice more consistently expressing them.

The simple practice of more and more consistently expressing our core values returns us to the joy of ourselves!

2. Develop your internal team.

The folks at Gallup developed one of the most valuable personal awareness tools on the planet, the StrengthsFinder assessment. For a tiny investment of 30 – 40 minutes and \$15, you can learn your top 5 strengths. And, live a happier, more fulfilled life for all the rest of your days if you consciously develop and apply your strengths.

The power of this knowledge is deceptive. Almost everyone who sees the list of their top 5 strengths for the first time says something like, “Yes, this is me. No surprises here.” Way too often, they then go about their business, forgetting they ever invested in this life-transforming validation of who they are.

A year or so later, I will meet them and mention StrengthsFinder, as I always do and they'll say, “Oh yeah. I did that.” When I ask about their top 5 strengths, they reply something like, “I don't really remember. Maybe something like Achieving and Studying.” Their most valuable personal happiness tools left out in the rain to rust. Don't let this happen to you!

Most StrengthsFinder practitioners, coaches and trainers help clients use their strengths in relationship with others. Developing work teams, volunteer groups, couples and families. While this is valuable and important work, it steps over a crucial first step – developing our internal team, aligning our own strengths within ourselves, for ourselves.

If you don't already know your top 5 StrengthsFinder strengths, stop reading now and give yourself this gift. To take the StrengthFinder assessment, go to: <https://www.gallupstrengthscenter.com/Purchase>.

If you know your top 5 strengths, but haven't known about developing your internal team, begin practicing now.

Three great ways to start practicing:

1. Whenever anything, personal or professional, frustrates you, inquire within. Which strength or strengths is frustrated? What would they like? What do they need? Which other strengths might offer support?

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2. When you haven't started an important project, check with all of your top strengths to see which one or two have the greatest capacity or interest in getting it started. Allow it/them to lead the project.
3. If you are being too hard on yourself about something, check with all of your top strengths to see which one or two have the greatest capacity and/or interest in treating yourself with loving kindness. Allow it/them to be in charge for awhile.

The simple practice of developing and consistently and consciously using our internal team returns us to the joy of ourselves!

3. Engage in your daily body, mind, heart, spirit practices.

When we tend our body, mind, heart and spirit daily, we naturally thrive. And, as with our core values and our top strengths, what our body, mind, heart and spirit need and desire is unique to each of us.

For myself, I've made a list of practices that nurture my body, my mind, my heart and my spirit. And, at the same time, I acknowledge that body, mind, heart and spirit are not actually separate. When I made my list, I often wanted to put one practice in two or three of the categories.

I offer you my list as an example. Of course, yours will be different. Maybe very different. Use the categories as I did or make one big list for all four categories. Do what uniquely works for you.

Body

- Qoya
- Kundalini Yoga
- Partner Yoga
- Dancing
- Walking

Mind

- Reading or listening to Three Principles material
- Laying on the Earth
- Engaging in silent meditation
- Creating mind maps

Heart

- Noticing what sparks joy
- Appreciation – giving and receiving
- Creating deep, meaningful connection
- Photographing beauty

Spirit

- Receiving prayers, poems
- Singing
- Practicing 40-day meditations
- Inspirational reading
- Practicing Lectio Divina

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Devote yourself to nurturing your body, mind, heart and spirit every day. As little as a few minutes a day will transform your life. If you can allocate an hour a day, even better.

The simple practice of engaging daily in activities that tend our body, mind, heart and spirit returns us to the joy of ourselves!

4. Begin to expect and recognize what sparks joy for you.

First, I want to acknowledge the woman who introduced me to the concept of “sparking joy.” An idea that she applies to tidying up, has now become a way of life for me. Thank you, Marie Kondo, author of the book, [The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up. \(link to Amazon\)](#) Life-changing magic indeed. Her methods have brought joy to and through my closet. And, the joy keeps rippling out from there.

The most miraculous part for me: six months ago, I didn’t use the word “joy” because I didn’t really have an experience of it. Sure, I knew happiness, fulfillment, pleasure, contentment. But it seemed to me that joy was reserved for when a baby is born. Or something like that. And, I’ve never had a baby. Or something like that, apparently.

I don’t know exactly what shifted, allowing me to open to the experience of joy. And, I am extraordinarily grateful. Perhaps it’s as simple as wearing clothes that spark joy every day. (All of the other clothes don’t live with me any more.) Perhaps having only joy-sparking clothes and space in my closet created a spaciousness for me to notice joy. Maybe it was there all along.

So, out of the closet and into our whole lives. I’ve noticed that what sparks joy for each of us is very specific and unique.

Some of the art here in Santa Fe takes my breath away, sparking joy. Typically for me, I’m aware of experiences, rather than things (like clothes and art), sparking joy. Noticing how the light comes in the room. A magical evening spent in intimate conversation with four other women, three of whom I just met that night. Watching my cat, Jasmine, wrestle with a small bag of candy that she treats like caught prey. A moment when my client is silent and then shares a wonderful ah-ha. The cool morning air coming in the open window.

The more we are present in the moment and aware that joy is available to us, the more we will experience it – both in mundane and sacred moments.

Back in the late 80s, I lived in Center City Philly, owned a car and parked on the street. I had a permit to park on certain streets surrounding my house. The permit did not guarantee parking. It simply authorized me to park on those streets for more than two hours – if I could find a space.

With extremely tight parking, I became an expert at finding spaces quickly. My secret: even when I didn’t need a space, I was always on the lookout. When I found one, I put it in my energetic parking space “bank account.” I kept a consistent awareness on available parking spaces whether I needed one or not. Then, when I did need one, it was always there.

I find that a similar awareness helps me notice what sparks joy. As I expect joy-sparkers, so I notice them. All we need to do to experience more joy involves becoming more aware . . .

The simple practice of expecting and recognizing what sparks joy for us returns us to the joy of ourselves!

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5. Live from the inside out.

Universally, for each of us, our world is created from the inside – from our thoughts and feelings, rather than from people or circumstances outside of us. While most of us know this to a certain degree, we may still find ourselves “explaining” exceptions. “I know my thoughts and feelings create my experience, but it’s different with my _____ (you fill in the blank: health, money, kids, marriage, etc) . . .”

The more we hear our “exceptions” and notice we believe *that* experience is created from the outside in, the easier it becomes to shift. As we more consistently remember our experience of life *always* comes from within – from our thoughts and feelings, rather than external circumstances, the less we need to try control others or circumstances.

One of my favorite aspects of knowing my experience is created from the inside involves noticing how different the exact same “issue” looks when I’m in feeling secure or insecure. If my mind is relatively clear and I feel secure, then when my computer has several glitches in a row, I take it as a sign to move away from the computer. I relish the time to get out of my chair, take a break and go for a short walk. If I feel insecure or anxious and the exact same thing happens, I get stubborn and frustrated and keep hacking away. Which makes my insecurity and anxiety worse, and could even spiral downward into a rough day.

When I’m not heaping judgment on top of my insecure thinking, I create space for new, inspired thought. The computer issues often clear up without effort on my part. Or my new thoughts direct my actions to resolve whatever needs resolved. Without all the upset and trauma.

The simple practice of knowing our experience of life is created from the inside out, returns us to the joy of ourselves!

The World Needs Each of Us!

If you’ve read this far, something is calling you now to be more you and to serve as a radiant light for others!

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If you would like a wonderful environment in which to more deeply explore returning to the joy of you, consider any of the following next steps:

Strong from Within personal retreat

Schedule a personal, solo 3 or 4-day Santa Fe retreat:

<http://annstrong.com/retreats/>

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Strong from Within coaching and mentor coaching

One-on-one, deep coaching. Over the phone or an in-person Santa Fe retreat or both.

Life and business coaching for small business owners and solopreneurs:

<http://annstrong.com/coaching-you/>

Mentor coaching and life and business coaching for coaches and strengths coaches:

<http://annstrong.com/mentor-coach/>

Read the First Book –

Thriving Work: 90 Days of Daily Practice for Transforming You and Your Coaching, Consulting or Healing Business

<http://annstrong.com/thriving-work-book/>

(Or purchase the Kindle version on Amazon) ([tiny url?](#))

About the Author

Ann is currently writing her second book, *Strong from Within: Simple perceptions and practices for returning to the joy of you.*

An entrepreneur since age 5, Ann began by selling seeds to the neighbors from her mother's four-o'clock flowers. At age 12, she realized the difference between religion and spirituality. In her 20s, she began teaching "Tapping Your Inner Power" workshops.

Ann has continuously written a newsletter or blogged since 1987. She's served as a spiritual small business coach since 1997. She mentors business owners, strengths coaches and business coaches going through major transitions and identity change.

She writes about and teaches how the human mind works – from the inside out – to create our own misery or happiness. She also ignites clarity, confidence and certainty in her clients based on their natural strengths, interests and fascinations. An experiential learner, Ann loves being her own first client and sharing what she learns with her readers and clients.

Core Values Worksheet

See attached below.

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Your Core Values worksheet

We all value many things. Yet, for each of us, a few things ignite us. We feel engaged, loving, convicted, more alive when we live our core values.

Choose 10 - 15 from the list below. Then narrow down to 5 - 8. Don't limit yourself to this list. It's a tool to get your creative juices flowing. If you see an idea that comes close to expressing a core value, but you know something that energizes you more, use that idea. When you have 5 - 8 that you feel clearly enthused about, these are your core values. And, they aren't set in stone. If, down the road, you realize a better way to express one or want to add one, do so. This is a living list.

Your core values support you in living the life you were born for. Did you know that the word roots of enthusiasm are "en" and "theos," meaning "in God?" What do you love so much that you are "in God" (or whatever you call your spiritual place)?

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