

On unproductive joy

This article in the February 2021 issue of *Canadian Family Physician* resonated so much.¹ It was shared widely in my medical circle and the universal chorus was “Yes! *So much this!*” Dr Niedra beautifully articulated what many of us have unconsciously felt but been unable to name this past year. Thank you for this gift of poetry disguised as prose. I, too, practise palliative care, as does the author’s friend 7000 kilometres away. That feeling of death by a thousand cuts resonated deeply. I so appreciate the author’s advice to gather the “flecks of gold [joy]”¹ wherever and whenever we can. I would also offer the tremendous power of stillness, of attention. Attention to our inner voices and emotions even when the mirror we hold up to them reflects back all the ugly. Instead of scrambling to escape or smother the anger, the frustration, the helplessness ... the moral distress, instead of reaching for the readily available distraction that offers only short-lived respite, take the bold step of allowing and actually paying attention to it all. It seems so simple, and even counterintuitive—like maybe you will open a

Pandora’s box of horribleness. Maybe you will. Muster the courage to allow it, all of it. Watch it as the silent witness, with the grace of space. Shine a light on its inner workings, its effects on your thoughts, your body, your breathing. Not thinking about it all—rather, feeling it. Something strangely unexpected happens. The grip loosens on the vice. The feelings that come have their moment to be, then recede back from where they came, only this time without that residue. Without that heavy, dark, palpable residue that so often comes out of unresolved frustration. There is lightness again, and so many, *so many*, flecks of gold.

—Manisha Sharma MD CCFP(PC)
Mississauga, Ont

Competing interests

None declared

Reference

1. Niedra E. On unproductive joy. *Can Fam Physician* 2021;67:123-5.

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