

BE HAPPIER IN ONE HOUR

**Enjoy Better Relationships, Better Health,
More Success and a Longer Life**

D. E. Hardesty

www.irrationalhappiness.com/dehardesty/

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This book is dedicated to everyone who wants to be happy.

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Introduction

Human beings are really kind of dumb. We have the natural ability to be happy any time we want. Yet, we don't learn to use it. Instead, we spend our time trying to acquire things and do things to make ourselves happy. We try to gather people around us who will make us happy. "Things" do not have the power to make us happy. Other people do not have the power to make us happy. To be happier, you have to learn to find happiness inside of yourself and bring it into your life.

People try to do things to accumulate lots of stuff, find better relationships, feel better, become more successful and live longer. A lot of this effort is aimed at making themselves happier. But, much of the time this effort is not effective. In reality, there is nothing we have to do to be happy. We make ourselves happy naturally. All of this running around trying to be happy just gets in the way.

You are probably saying to yourself that I'm crazy and that all of these things do make us happy. People who are not happy just don't try hard enough, or are not lucky enough to get what they want to make themselves happy.

I don't believe it. I look around and see people working like demons, acquiring things, gathering lots of people around them, and being successful. But, they are not happy. They are not healthy. Their relationships are toxic. Still, they keep working hard to get more of whatever they have.

The simple fact is, human beings evolved to survive and have babies who survive. That's it! To thrive as a species on a hostile planet, where everything was trying to kill us and eat us, our mind-bodies* evolved to do what it takes to survive. We did not evolve to be happy.

Because of the way we evolved, we approach everything we do as if it were a survival course. We sweat and strain, and pursue all kinds of things in order to be happy – money, looks, relationships, health, knowledge, entertainment. This activity is more of what we did 100,000 years ago, stumbling through jungles or across plains, looking for something to eat. We still refer to our environment as a jungle -- urban jungle, business jungle, dating jungle.

We are willing to spend a lot of time, and we are willing to suffer to get what we want – hoping that in the end what we get will bring happiness. People who are unwilling to make the effort are called lazy or losers.

What do we want though? In the end, don't we all just want to be happy? Isn't happiness the purpose of all of this hard work? Of course it is. We want to do more than just survive. We want to be happy. We want to be fulfilled. We want to live with purpose. Working hard, acquiring a lot of stuff, and being "successful" does not guarantee happiness.

The truth is, we all have the natural ability to be happy right now. At this moment, as you are reading this book, you can be happy. Nothing needs to change in your life. You can be happy just the way you are. And here is a bonus. Psychologists tell us that happy people have better relationships, better health, are more successful and live longer lives. They are not happier because of these things; instead they have these things because they are already happy. It is not success that makes you happy. It is happiness that makes you successful.

The way to approach life is to learn to be happy first. That's right. Just learn to be happy. By doing so, chances are all of the good things in life that you want will come to you. And, all of the time you are waiting for them you will be happy. If they never come, you will still be happy.

It seems obvious that happy people would have better relationships. It is much easier to have healthy long-term relationships if you are already happy, and you are not looking for someone who can accomplish the impossible task of making you happy.

It may come as a surprise that happy people are often more successful. One reason is that better relationships mean better connections with others and more chances of success. In addition, people who are happier are more apt to like what they do, and stick with a career longer. Staying with a job that you like usually leads to greater success than jumping from job to job, looking for the one that will make you happy (another impossible task).

Happy people are healthier and live longer. Nobody is quite sure why, but one reason is that it is easier to adopt a healthy lifestyle when you are happy. Unhappy people are more likely to sit on the couch, in front of the tube, hoping that the next joint, the next drink or the next pint of ice-cream will get them through another day.

So, this book is about being happier. It is about changing your approach to life so that the natural happiness that is already inside of you can come into your life.

It takes about an hour to read this book. During this hour, you will read about different ways of being happier, and each one includes something you can do right now to make yourself immediately

happier. Anyone who reads this book and tries the exercises can be happier in one hour.

Going forward, if you can devote an hour a day to these practices you will be happier and happier over time.

Is it worthwhile to devote an hour of your time to learning to be happier? Obviously I think so. If being happier will give you better relationships, better health, more success and a longer life, what better way could you spend your time?

The basic message of this book is, happiness is already inside of you, waiting to be released. It is not something you can buy and it is not something anyone can give you. Nobody can do anything to make you happier.

Instead, you have to find it within yourself and then choose to allow it into your life. Being happy is like flicking a light switch. When the light is on you are happy, and when the light is off you are not. The conditions of your life usually do not matter. What matters is whether the light is on or off. In this book, I show you how to turn on that light.

* In this book I will use the term mind-body, which refers to the way the human body and the human mind are inextricably linked, and interact with the world as a single unit.

Chapter 1

Look Inside for Happiness



The most important thing you can do to be happier right now is to learn that happiness is natural to you and is already inside of you waiting to be released. You just have to allow yourself to experience it. Once you know this truth of happiness, and incorporate it into the way you look at life, your level of happiness will increase.

We have known for thousands of years that happiness is natural to us. Sure, it is difficult to believe this when you look at the people around you. In addition, Western philosophy and religion have not offered people much hope here. One philosopher claimed that life was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” (Hobbes). Western religion has often not been much better. However, it is my experience that incredible happiness is there for you if you change the way you approach life.

Knowing that happiness is natural to you is important because ultimately you become what you think. If you believe that the world is a certain way, then that is often how it will be for you.

You see the world that you expect to see. Depending on how you look at it, the world can be heaven or hell for you.

We are used to thinking and believing that happiness comes from what we do and what we have. However, these circumstances (or conditions) of life only appear to create happiness. Authentic happiness does not depend on the conditions of your life. Real happiness is unconditional. You can experience it regardless of your life situation. You can be rich, beautiful and loved by all, and still be miserable. Alternatively, you can be sick and dying, and joyous.

Let's try a little thought experiment, which may illustrate what I have been saying.

Pretend that you look at the lottery ticket that you bought last night and discover that you have just won \$25 million. What is your reaction? Shock, amazement, disbelief and – happiness. Now ask yourself, where did this happiness come from? You might answer, “winning the lottery, of course.” However, you would be wrong. Winning the lottery may have triggered a feeling of happiness, but winning did not reach inside your mind-body and generate all of the chemical reactions that we know as the feelings of happiness. These feelings arose spontaneously, prompted by the idea of winning the lottery. The potential for happiness was already inside of you, waiting for your mind-body to give you permission to feel it.

Obviously, it does appear that winning the lottery caused the feelings of happiness to arise, but the idea of winning only gave you permission to feel sensations that your mind-body was already capable of producing. Winning appears to be the key criteria for being happy in this case. However, in reality it is important only if your mind-body's particular rules for happiness say that you can be happy only if you win the lottery and have lots of money.

What is really important is to know that the feeling of happiness was and is already available in your mind-body. It is waiting to be released. All it takes is an idea – a trigger – to experience it.

Now, authentic happiness (winning-the-lottery level happiness) is what we all want. It is already in the mind-body, and once you have taken care of your basic needs for food, clothing and shelter, you should be happy. In fact, you should be joyous. So, the first thing you can do to be happier is learn that happiness is already there, waiting to be released. This is the truth of happiness.

How does knowing this truth of happiness help you be happier? Once you know this – really know this – it changes your approach life.

For example, let's say you have a job that provides enough for you and your family to be comfortable. However, you believe another job will make you happier because it pays more. It is a high-stress job, but you believe that the additional money makes it worth the stress. The assumption, that making more money will make you happier (an assumption disproven by psychologists), sets you on a road to higher stress and less happiness. The job may prevent you from sleeping well or prevent you from being with your family. It may make you feel bad about yourself because you have to do things you do not feel right about. All of the things that come with the new job may obscure your ability to see the happiness that is inside of you. If, however, you know that the happiness you want is already inside, you might decide not to take the job.

Choosing a job is just one example of how knowing that happiness is natural helps you avoid doing things that will get in the way of being happy. Job choice is a big decision. However, every day you make hundreds of small decisions about what to do, or what not to do, based on what you believe about happiness. If you know that happiness is natural to you, then all of these little decisions will change. Knowing that happiness is natural to you, and acting on this knowledge changes the focus of your attention and intention. It puts everything in perspective and puts you on the path towards greater and greater happiness.

What to do

If you give yourself a chance, you may experience moments of real happiness that seem to come from out of nowhere. When this happens your mind-body may not believe this is happiness. It may tell you it's a fake, that it is irrational. Have faith in the irrational. If you change the way you approach being happy, you can begin to experience the depths of true happiness that are available to you as your birthright.

The first thing you need to do to begin experiencing this happiness is know that it exists. By the time you finish reading this book, you will hopefully be convinced. The first exercise we are going to do may show you that happiness actually does exist inside of you.

Here is the exercise:

Let's go back to the lottery winner. \$25 million! Unbelievable but true. You wake up poor, you go to sleep rich. Now, pretend that you are going to be in a play and that your role is that of the happy lottery winner. As a good method actor, you know that you have to pull from within yourself all of the feelings of happiness that you can. Your emotions have to be real because

you need to convince the audience that you really are an ecstatically happy lottery winner. Spend a minute or so doing this. Feel those emotions. Make them real for yourself. Be ready to convince the audience that you won the lottery.

Now that you have prepared yourself, examine your feelings of happiness. Are they real? Can you make them more real? Can you make them authentic? Try. See if you can make your feelings of happiness complete.

Once the feelings of happiness are as real as you can make them, ask yourself, where did they come from? What is their source? You should be able to see that the feelings are real and that they come from inside of you.

What you want from this exercise is the knowledge that true happiness -- real and authentic happiness -- is inside of you. It has no other source. If you can begin to see this truth of happiness, you have made an important start on your journey to being happier.

Chapter 2

Let Go of Your Rules for Happiness



If a person wins the lottery that person will be happy. The mere idea of winning is enough to make someone happy. The lottery itself does not create this happiness. Instead, the idea of it triggers the chemical reactions in the mind-body that we know as the feelings of happiness. We humans have the power to experience spontaneous happiness -- all we need is a trigger. But, why do we

need a trigger? Why can't we just be happy all of the time? The answer is, the mind-body seems to be set up so that you can only be happy when its rules for happiness are met. However, it is possible to ignore these rules. You can let them go, and just be happy.

From the day we enter the world, we see everyone striving for happiness by doing things. So, we try to do things to make ourselves happy. As we do this, our experience appears to show us that happiness does indeed come from what we do and what we have – from the circumstances of our lives.

Nobody seems to question the assumption that, in order to feel happy, something good must happen. But, why does it have to be this way? Happiness comes from inside of us and is natural to us, so why can't we just be happy?

The mind-body seems to be stuffed with rules for when you can and cannot experience happiness. In other words, we all have internal rules for what it takes for us to permit ourselves to be happy.

For example, your internal rules may say that you can be happy if A, B, and C happen. However, if A, B and D happen you cannot be happy.

If you believe that getting a certain job will make you happy, and you get that job, you will be happy when you get the news. The new job does not make you happy since you have not yet started it. The idea of it makes you happy. Happiness spontaneously arises within you when something good happens. The thing itself has no power to affect how you feel. All it can do is trigger happiness in you if your personal rules for happiness are satisfied.

YOU permit yourself to be happy. You have your internal requirements for happiness, as we all do, which seem to function automatically. However, it is still YOU who permits yourself to be happy. You permit yourself to be happy when the conditions of your life are right, and when those conditions no longer meet your personal requirements, your happiness goes away.

It may seem silly that, even though the potential for happiness is always inside of you, your mind-body permits you to experience it only when its rules are met. However, that is how we all operate.

Why would you permit yourself to be happy only when your rules are met? One explanation may come from our evolutionary past. Psychologists tell us that happy people are not as careful as those who are not happy. [1] 100,000 years ago, if you were a happy-go-lucky sort you did not last long in the jungles and plains. You were not as alert as you needed to be. So, to keep us safe our mind-

bodies evolved to see the world as a dark and dangerous place. This kept you unhappy, alert and alive.

The mind-body has not evolved far since then. The mind still tends to see more bad in the world than good. We still perceive bad as stronger than good. [2] In some places of the world this makes sense. But, a lot of the time seeing the people and the world around you as dark and dangerous only creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. This makes for bad relationships and a lot of unhappiness. In addition, it keeps you in a constant state of “fight or flight,” which is not good for your long-term health.

So, if you are looking for happiness to come from what your mind-body tells you to do, you may not see a lot of it in your life. The mind-body would rather keep you unhappy, but alive.

The kind of rules-based happiness I have been talking about is what I call “conditional happiness.” It is conditional because it exists only if the conditions of your life are just right – not too hot, not too cold. This kind of happiness is inherently temporary because the conditions of life always change.

Also, even if the conditions of your life do not change much, this happiness can disappear as you adapt to the circumstances of your life. Studies have shown that after the initial rush of happiness from winning a lottery, the winners return to being their same old selves. Having more money from winning the lottery did not make a lasting difference in happiness. In fact, some winners reported finding less enjoyment in life than non-winners. [3]

Adaptation works to limit happiness in other ways as well. One large study showed that getting married gives both the husband and wife a happiness boost for about two years. However, once the couple adapts to the situation, they both return to their previous levels of happiness. [4]

A new job can make you feel better for a while. However, after a brief honeymoon you may find that the new job does not bring you the kind of lasting happiness you sought. In fact, while the new job may look a lot different from the old job, it may feel the same.

Because our mind-bodies withhold happiness from us until conditions are right, we spend most of our time dissatisfied with life, waiting for the next great thing to come around the corner. Sure, when we satisfy some major desire there is a temporary mood boost. But soon new desires arise and new dissatisfaction. So the cycle repeats itself, over and over. Our basic pattern of existence seems to be:

- Dissatisfaction with life and desire for something new,
- Happiness on achieving that desire,

- Disappearance of what we wanted, or adaptation to the new circumstances, and
- Back to dissatisfaction with life and desiring something else.

So, our system of internal rules for happiness kind of sucks, but what else can you do? And, what is the problem in trying to do things to make ourselves at least temporarily happy?

Yes, you might find conditional happiness in the world if you look long enough. But if that is where you focus your attention real happiness will continue to elude you. When you seek happiness from what happens in the world, you keep reinforcing the wrong ideas about where to look for happiness.

Your mind is probably full of plans and strategies for future happiness. Unfortunately, focusing all of your attention on your plans, strategies, hopes, and desires may use up all of your time and energy. You may have little left to look inside, which is where real happiness comes from.

What to do

To be happier, you have to learn to allow yourself to be happy for no reason. This is something anyone can do. You can just be happy right now if you permit it, without anything changing in your life. Admittedly this is a radical idea. However, the practice of being happy for no reason has been around for thousands of years. It works for me, and I am nothing special. So, there is no reason that it cannot work for you.

To be happy right now, you need to ignore your personal rules for happiness. Just let them go, and be happy for the sole reason that you choose to be happy.

Here is an exercise:

Think of something that you want, and which you believe will make you really happy. Now that you have it in mind let us enter into a fantasy. In this fantasy, you now have what you want and having it makes you happy. As much as you are comfortable doing, allow yourself to believe that you have what you want. Experience the happiness that comes with it. Don't hold back. Allow the happiness to well up inside of you. Allow yourself to experience this happiness as completely as you can.

Now, while staying in touch with the happiness that you feel, let go of thoughts about what you wanted. Focus your attention only on the happiness you feel, and let go of your thoughts about what triggered that happiness.

If you can let go of thoughts of what caused your happiness, try to see that the happiness exists independently of what you wanted. Notice that you can continue to feel the happiness even when thoughts about what you wanted are no longer there.

In this exercise, I want you to see that happiness is inside of you, waiting for a trigger that releases it into your consciousness. You can experience it whenever you want. The only trigger you need to be happy is the thought that you want to be happy. The object of this exercise is to weaken the way that your internal rules for happiness block your experience of it. If you give this exercise a chance, you will feel just a little lighter, as the burden of carrying all of these rules lessens.

Now, say to yourself, "I choose to be happy, right now!" Say this to yourself a few times, and really mean it. Let these words be your trigger for happiness. You should be able to sense the feeling of real happiness in you. If you even sense a little of this happiness, you have taken an important step on the path to lasting happiness.

Chapter 3

Don't Let Pleasure Obscure Happiness



Everyone seems to be in a 24/7 rush for pleasure and distraction. What people really want is to be happy, but they seem to spend most of their time seeking sense pleasures. Perhaps they believe that pleasure leads to happiness. Or, maybe they have all given up on happiness and figure that they might at least find pleasure while they can. The problem is, the headlong race for pleasure can obscure real happiness. If you can just let go of your cravings for pleasurable experiences, you can be happier right now.

It's not strange that we fixate on sense pleasures as a means of being happy. We evolved to seek what tasted good and felt good, because 100,000 years ago these things usually kept us alive. While we may not remember what life was like back then, our genes do. For them, the passage of the intervening years is nothing. Our genetic heritage still impels us to survive by seeking what our mind-bodies consider pleasurable. Some schools of psychology

still believe that we are motivated primarily to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Sense pleasures include mind-body reactions to what we take in through our senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. There's no denying that pleasures are good! The taste of food, the experience of sex, and the warmth of a fire on a cold night are all wonderful. Some pleasures can even lead to spiritual heights.

However, sense pleasures, such as food, drink and entertainment are inherently temporary. There are several reasons for this.

The first is, you run out of whatever you were enjoying. You run out of dessert, wine, drugs, or whatever. Maybe the movie is over, the theme park closes, or the vacation is over and you have to go back to work. Whatever it is, it is done.

The second is you reach your limit. You eat until you are stuffed (hello Thanksgiving), you drink until you pass out, or you engage in sex until you are exhausted.

The third way pleasures don't last is that you get bored with them. I once had the idea of re-watching all six Star Wars movies in one day. After the first two movies, I was done.

The fourth way is you build up a tolerance for things. Addicts know that to keep getting the high you want you often need larger and larger doses. These could be larger doses of drugs, exciting activities or anything else that is your high.

While pleasures may be good while you are enjoying them, they usually contain seeds of future unhappiness. Some have a lot of side effects. For example, if you continually overindulge in food and alcohol you will turn into a fat sick person with a perpetual hangover. Even if there are no side effects, unhappiness can come when the pleasurable experience is over.

When I say that sense pleasures are temporary and can lead to future unhappiness, I am not saying sense pleasures are bad. In fact, I believe that they can be great. It is just that they have their downsides, and they are poor substitutes for real happiness. Authentic happiness does not end, you never get tired of it, and it has no nasty side effects. So, if you have the choice of pursuing pleasure or happiness, go for happiness.

Unfortunately, while sense pleasures are poor substitutes for happiness, often they seem to be all we know how to find. The mind-body does not know how to make you happy. That is not its job. We humans did not evolve to be happy, we evolved to eat, stay alive, and have babies. Happiness is outside the realm of the mind-body.

The mind-body sees something happen in the world, which causes something else to happen, and something else, etc. It knows only the world of cause and effect. It tells us that to be happy we have to do something. Pursuing pleasure is the most readily available thing to do. So, we pursue pleasure, even though what we want is happiness.

What is wrong with seeking pleasure, if that is all that seems to be available? If you are seeking pleasure instead of happiness, you are doing what the mind-body knows how to do, and you are reinforcing its idea that the goal in life is to find pleasure and avoid pain. If you focus on doing things to obtain pleasure, this focus can obscure the happiness that is natural to you. If your mind knows only to look for pleasure in the world, it will miss the happiness that is already inside of you.

What to do

Let's say that a person is sitting on a couch, unhappy, lonely, and looking for something to feel better. What to do? There is a pint of ice-cream in the fridge and episodes of *Friends* on the tube. There is a nice Chardonnay. There are also a few joints stashed away. These are reliable pleasures, which will for a time distract this person. But then what?

Here is where you have to ask yourself, what do I want? Do I want to be happy, or do I want to dive into the ice-cream? Do I want to stop being lonely, or do I want to light up a joint? In many ways, one choice cancels the other. Burying unhappiness in food, entertainment and drugs makes it impossible to see that happiness is waiting inside for you.

To be happy right now, you have to sever the connection to your mind-body's automatic desire to seek sense pleasure. You do this by looking inward for what you want, and not to the next sensation. You cannot argue with the mind-body. You cannot talk it into moderation and you cannot tell it how to find real happiness. You just have to let it go, and look somewhere else.

You find happiness by being mindful of what you are doing right now. This gives you the power to choose either to drown yourself in food, drink and everything else or let go of all of that and look inside for happiness. If you can let go of the craving for pleasure, you make space in your life for happiness.

Of course, you can be overwhelmed by unquenchable thirst for sense pleasures. Moving your focus away from these things is not easy. Minds are rational things, and reason says that if something makes you feel good, you should go for it. However, you cannot trust your mind in this.

You have to simply let go of the desire. You can be happier right now by simply choosing inner happiness over whatever you have around to provide you with another sensation. Sure, if you put away the ice-cream, the wine, the joint, the cigarettes, or the next hook-up, you will crave the pleasure. However, instead of automatically doing something to satisfy the craving, try looking inside for the happiness that is there. If you can see just a bit of it, this can sustain you until it becomes the first place you look for the happiness you want.

Here is an exercise:

Sit on a chair with your eyes closed. Take three deep breaths to relax. Now think of some sense pleasure that you regularly enjoy. For example, you might think of something you love to eat. Or, you might think of how something physically feels when you do it. Remember how it has made you feel. Indulge yourself in the memory of this feeling for a minute.

After the minute is over, let go of this thought and imagine something that triggers a feeling of happiness in you but does not involve a sense pleasure. This can be someone telling you he or she loves you. Or, it can be something you accomplished, which made you feel happy. Focus on the feeling of happiness. Try to isolate it, so that you can experience it independently of what triggered the feeling.

Now, go back and forth between the remembered feeling of pleasure and the feeling of happiness. Try to experience one and then the other, over and over.

The object of this exercise is to see that there is a difference between the feeling you get from pleasure and the one you get from happiness. When I do this exercise, the feeling of happiness is richer and deeper than the remembered feeling of pleasure. This is because the feeling of happiness is real and is here right now. The thought of pleasure, on the other hand, is only remembered.

Now, don't get me wrong. There is nothing inherently bad about pleasure. You can still have fun, and you can still feel all manner of pleasure. However, if you look first to the happiness inside, you can find real happiness and still experience all of the pleasures of being alive in this beautiful world. You can find pleasure in the world, but your basic feeling of happiness no longer depends on what you do in the world.

Chapter 4

Choose Happiness as if Your Life Depends on It



To be happy, you have to choose to be happy, regardless of your life situation. You need to choose happiness as if your life depends on it because, in reality, it does. If your ability to live a more successful, longer and healthier life depends on being happy, then you always need to choose it. Even if your life is not what you want it to be, and it seems irrational to do so, you still have to choose happiness.

Sure, if your situation is not satisfactory, then choosing to be happy may not make a lot of sense. However, being unhappy because life is not what you want it to be does not make sense either. If you can be happy only when your life is perfect, you can never be happy. Face it, life will never be perfect. The image of the kind of life we want is always a moving target. No matter how much money we have, we need just a little more. No matter how great a spouse or partner is, that person needs to be a little better. There is always something to be dissatisfied with.

Also, life is usually never as bad as you think. The mind-body has an inherently negative outlook. It evolved to see a lot more bad than good in the world, and it evolved to remember the bad longer. We carry a lot of negativity around with us.

To make the happiness choice you often have to ignore what your mind-body is telling you about how to feel. I believe that our purpose on Earth is to be happy. If that is true, then our journey through life involves overcoming the mind-body's natural tendency to look on the dark side.

Luckily, each of us has the power to choose how to react and what to feel. We do not have to be unhappy just because things are not the way we want them to be, or even if they are actually bad. The well-known therapist, Viktor Frankl, said:

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Most of us act as if we do not have this power. We just allow ourselves to react automatically to life. We often go along blindly with whatever our mind-bodies tell us needs to happen before we can be happy.

Instead of the mind-body leading you by the nose to a life of unhappiness, or at best boredom, you need to choose to be happy. You need to choose it regardless of your situation in life. There is an ancient myth that I am going to use to illustrate this idea.

* * *

According to legend, Sisyphus was a man who loved life and sought to live it his way -- a way that greatly angered the gods. To get back at him, the gods inflicted on him the perfect punishment: a life of misery and hard work with no purpose. They made him push a boulder up a mountain, only to see that boulder roll back down the mountain, over and over, forever. The tragedy is that while he was pushing his boulder up the mountain, he knew it would always roll back down. Faced with this situation (which may be a metaphor for many of our lives) it would be irrational if Sisyphus were happy. *But suppose he was?*

Let us look more closely at him, as he moves slowly up the mountain, straining against his burden. I imagine that he is an athlete in his prime. His focus is complete as he forces maximum effort from his muscles. He cannot think of himself or his predicament. If he does, he will lose his footing and fail at his task.

As I think of Sisyphus, I think of a marathon runner, focused on movement, with no attention left for him/herself. If the runner loses focus, he or she might miss the pile of leaves, wet from the

morning dew, and slip. Long-distance runners report the joy (the “high”) they get from racing. Even though their muscles may be “screaming with pain,” they push themselves to the limit. After the race, exhausted, they begin thinking of their next challenge, and the way they can go just a little faster.

I can easily imagine that Sisyphus, like the runner, would experience the same “high” that comes from pushing oneself to the limit.

Let us picture Sisyphus at the top of the mountain. Just as he completes his task, the boulder thunders back down the mountain. NOW FREEZE! Look at the face of Sisyphus as he stands there, exhausted. He sees the boulder rumble down the mountain and knows his toil will never end. Look into his eyes. What is he thinking?

We have now frozen Sisyphus in the space between the stimulus (the boulder rolling down the mountain) and his response. As Viktor Frankl said, his freedom lies in his power to use this space to choose his response. His freedom to be happy lies in choosing how to feel about what has happened. What will he choose?

He can choose to feel triumphant, having succeeded once again in making it to the top of the mountain. He can start thinking about the next journey up. He can start wondering how to coax just a little more strength from his body to make the journey a little faster and a little better.

Or, he can give in to despair. He can curse the gods who sit laughing at him as he drags himself down the mountain, once again, to face his endless task.

As I see it, Sisyphus has only one choice: to be happy in spite of everything. This may seem an impossible choice, but it is a choice that is his to make. Choosing happiness gives him a life worth living. Choosing despair is not an option because that is the choice to live in Hell.

* * *

Reading this story, you might have many reactions. The obvious one is he is crazy if he is happy. Is he? Given his situation, exercising his ability to choose happiness is the only sane thing to do. If he uses this power he has a happy life, if he does not he has a miserable life.

Another typical response is the idea that once someone has chosen to be happy that's it, the person stays happy. We all like to believe in the happily-ever-after myth. However, it does not work that way. In the case of Sisyphus, he has to keep choosing happiness. The natural tendency of the mind-body to react badly to a situation

like his will reassert itself. Again and again he has to make the choice to be happy.

Like Sisyphus, to be happy you have to choose to be happy again and again. Each time you make this choice it may seem irrational – and your mind may tell you it is not the right thing to do. You have to choose anyway. The good news is, once you have taken the first step to choosing happiness, the next time is easier, and the next and the next. Ultimately, it will become a habit and a way of life. You still have to choose happiness, but it will become your automatic reaction to whatever life throws at you.

What to do

The way you choose happiness is to emotionally accept your world as it is, right now, whether it is what you want it to be or not. When you emotionally accept things, happiness automatically arises in you. You say to yourself, “I accept the way things are right now, and I choose to be happy. I can always work to change the way things are in the future, but right now I choose to be happy.”

Another way of saying this is you loosen your emotional attachment to the way you think things should be. Your desires for things to be different can still exist, but you just allow them to be. Your emotional well-being and happiness do not depend on attaining these desires.

Choosing happiness may be a radical act from the point of view of the mind-body. However, remember that the mind-body did not evolve to make you happy, so who are you going to listen to -- your mind-body, or the feeling of happiness that you know is inside of you?

Here is an exercise:

This exercise should last less than a minute.

Bring to mind something that makes you unhappy. Perhaps it is a problem relationship, something that happened to you in the past, a personal characteristic you do not like, or a habit that you would like to break.

As much as you are comfortable doing, hold this thing in mind, and experience the unhappiness that comes with it. Once again, do this only to the extent you feel comfortable. If it is too uncomfortable, try this exercise with something else.

With this thing in mind, choose to be happy. Just choose it. Do not try to give yourself reasons for being happy, do not try to justify your happiness, and do not try to think of something

else that would make you happy. With this thing in mind, just choose to be happy.

Now let go of the thought.

In this exercise, the object is not to dwell on the unhappy thought. What we are looking for is that split second of awareness where you know you can choose happiness. At first, this awareness will not last long. However, if you can get only an inkling of your ability to choose happiness you have taken a big step. As you keep practicing this exercise, your awareness should grow.

During this exercise don't try to resolve the thing you were thinking about. We are not trying to resolve anything here. What we are trying to do is awaken and strengthen your power to choose. That power, by itself, will ultimately be the thing that resolves your problems.

Chapter 5

Find Happiness Through Meditation



Happiness does not exist in the past and it does not exist in the future. It exists right now. To be happy, you have to be here now to experience it. If your attention is on what happened to you in the past, or what may happen in the future, you will not be in the present – and happiness will elude you. Regular meditation is the most powerful tool we have for keeping attention in the “now.”

Meditation means all kinds of things. The way I am using the term is to describe a practice that helps you focus on the current moment. I will not be talking about meditation that helps you relax or obtain insights into your life. These are important, but these are not the goals of the meditation I will discuss.

As you learn through meditation to focus on the current moment, you begin to experience happiness. You will be able to see for yourself that, “Yes, happiness really is inside of me.” Once you start to see real happiness, you can choose it. The power to choose

to be happy exists only right now. You cannot choose to be happy in the past, and you cannot choose to be happy in the future.

People sometimes think of meditation as mysterious and otherworldly (a kind of “woo-woo” practice). It is not. It is merely the practice of focusing your attention. In everyday life, thoughts come up and capture your attention all of the time. In meditation, you learn to choose what to think. You can view meditation as the practice of the power to choose what to think.

Merely learning how to control your attention may not seem very powerful, but it is. Thousands of years ago, The Buddha said, “Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think.” Left to its own devices the mind can often lead your attention down negative paths of thought. These thoughts can cast a dark cloud over your entire life. To turn away from these thoughts, you have to learn how to control your attention.

In addition, without controlling your attention you are constantly being distracted by the chattering of your mind. You cannot center yourself in happiness if you cannot quiet this noise. What we chatter about is what we call our lives, or the stories of our lives, formed through memories of what happened and anticipation of what will happen. Memory and anticipation frame the current moment and tell us what we are doing. If you are focusing on the story of your life, you are driven to react to the drama that is your life. This makes it impossible to find true happiness.

Thoughts connected with what you want, what you do not want and what you fear are powerful. Your mind constantly chatters on about them giving you very little peace. It is very hard to be happy with all that nasty chatter. Your thoughts may express longings for pleasurable sensations; the need to please (stroke and inflate) your self-image; and the need to avoid unpleasant things. Many of the thoughts are emotion laden. Each little emotion-laden thought is not bad in itself. However, the pattern of automatically giving in to them can ruin your life. Without learning to control your attention you are at their mercy.

What to do

In the meditation we will practice here, you learn to center your attention and quiet your thoughts. You do this because it allows you to be in the current moment. All of the power to change the way you are, and to find real happiness exists in this moment.

First, meditation is something you practice regularly. Each session of meditation will help you towards the power to focus, but daily meditation (even if it is only for ten or twenty minutes) has a dramatic cumulative effect. For instance, researchers have found

that after only eight weeks of focused meditation, the area of the brain believed to be involved in promoting emotional stability, learning, and memory increases in size. [\[5\]](#)

There are many good books and Youtube videos on how to meditate. In my book, *Finding Your Power to Be Happy*, I devote three chapters to mindfulness and meditation. Here I am going to focus on the particular way you should meditate in order to move towards focusing your attention on the current moment – on the now.

The easiest way to meditate is to sit, so that is what I am going to talk about here. You can sit with eyes open or closed. I do both. I find leaving my eyes open to be somewhat more effective in keeping my attention in the current moment.

You can sit cross-legged on the floor or you can sit in a chair. Both methods are effective. The only requirement is that you sit in a way that your body is balanced, so that once you are settled you do not need to move. Ideally, your back should be straight and your head balanced over your body. You want a position that encourages you to stay alert during meditation.

The object of this meditation is to focus your attention, so you need to pick an object of meditation on which to focus. That object can be anything, such as your breath or a physical object such as a flower. You can focus on a word (mantra) repeated over and over. You can also meditate on a particular thought, such as compassion. The breath may be the most common object of meditation, so I suggest you start with it.

Once you are settled and have picked an object of meditation, simply focus all of your attention on that object. Ideally, you try to do this for the entire period of meditation, without allowing your attention to waver. Practically, however, your attention will waver. So, let's talk about what to do when this happens.

As you sit in meditation thoughts will come up. It is extremely difficult to stop the mind's incessant chatter. Just allow the thoughts to come up. The trick is not to get involved in them, no matter what they are. Think of the thoughts as bubbles in a champagne glass. They keep coming and coming and you just let them float by and disappear. You can also think of them as clouds drifting by. Just let them come and go without getting involved in them.

Inevitably some thought will grab your attention and pull it away from your object of meditation. However, after a time you will notice that your attention has been snatched away. When you do, gently move your focus back to your object of meditation.

What we are trying to do here is pull your focus away from the ongoing story of your life. If your attention is focused on the current moment, not on the past or future, you will have pulled yourself out of the drama, and made yourself ready to enjoy the now.

It is important that you do not spend time thinking about why you are meditating or what will result from meditation. Any thinking about meditation pulls you back into your mind. For example, if you are thinking about the benefits of meditation you may be putting your attention in the future. If you are thinking about how meditation will resolve some old problem, you may be putting it in the past.

If you must think about meditating at all, then tell yourself, "I am meditating for the sole reason of meditating and for no other reason." Try to view meditating as purposeless. This attitude will help keep your attention out of your mind and in the current moment.

Remember, in meditation you are not trying to get anywhere. You are already here now, and that is where you want to be. Happiness is right here, right now, so that is where you want your focus. All you are trying to do in meditation is to free your attention from your mind, which always wants you to be somewhere else.

Chapter 6

Find Happiness Through Selflessness, Charity, Compassion and Forgiveness



Humans are social by nature, and our mind-bodies have evolved in such a way that when we help each other we become happier. It is in our nature to build secure relationships with each other. One of the most important ways of connecting with others, even perfect strangers, is to focus on their needs. As we feel more connected, and as we act in ways that help build and maintain secure relationships, we become happier. The four main ways we focus on the needs of others are by practicing selflessness, charity, compassion and forgiveness.

Relationship with others is critical to your ability to be happy. When your relationships are not secure, you can feel the emotional pain of loneliness. Loneliness is so painful that we use it as a punishment for prisoners, when we force them into solitary confinement. Reaching out to others, focusing on their needs, and connecting with them helps turn loneliness into happiness.

If you are not doing the kinds of things that secure and maintain relationships, some part of your mind-body knows this, and unhappiness can result. On the other hand, focusing on others tells

the mind-body that you are doing what it wants you to do, and what you were born to do, which is to connect with other people.

Not only does focusing on others play to our evolutionary desire to build relationships, it moves the focus away from self. Any time you focus on your own needs and your own desires, you strengthen that part of your mind-body that falsely believes you can only be happy if you attain your personal desires. To be truly happy, you have to let go of this belief, and learn to experience the happiness that is already inside of you. If you focus on the needs and desires of others, you turn the attention away from yourself, and weaken the hold that your desires have on your ability to be happy.

Let's talk about how we turn the focus away from ourselves and towards others, through the practices of selflessness, charity, compassion and forgiveness.

Selflessness refers to selfless acts and states of mind that are motivated by what others want and need. When the welfare of others is important to you, you are building bridges to them. People always feel good about helping others who are in need, or who just require a little assistance and guidance. Humans are built to feel good when they do this. Ironically, when you are doing something for someone else, with no thought for your personal gain, that is often when you can be happiest.

Closely associated with selflessness is charity. True charity is giving to others or doing for others without expecting or even desiring anything in return -- not even a thank-you. Sometimes we talk about such charity as "feeding others." This can be literal feeding, such as working in a community kitchen, or it can be feeding in other ways. Reading to a blind person in a nursing home, for example, is another kind of feeding. As we evolved to be social beings, concerned as much for our "tribe" as for ourselves, it is in our nature to be charitable, and we feel good doing so.

True charity also diminishes the importance of "things" in our lives. If giving to others is more important than having things for yourself, these things have less hold on you. Your happiness does not depend so much on obtaining things, and you make room in your life for true happiness, which does not come from having things.

Compassion is a deep sense of caring about others. The Dalai Lama has said, "As long as we are human beings, and members of human society, we need human compassion. Without that, you cannot be happy." [\[6\]](#) Compassion is based on respect for others. It depends on realizing that they have the same right to happiness as you. Real compassion is also unbiased -- the closeness and

caring of real compassion should be the same for enemies as for friends.

The idea of compassion speaks once again to our genetic make-up. It is deeply ingrained in us to care as much for others as for ourselves. Indeed, under some circumstances we care more about others, sometimes requiring us to sacrifice our lives for the larger community. Therefore, to act compassionately is to be what our evolutionary past has created us to be.

Compassion is also the recognition that the self with which you identify is not different from the selves of other people. We are all connected on some fundamental level. As you begin to pay less attention to your own needs and more to the needs of others, you may see that your sense of separateness is an illusion.

Forgiveness is perhaps the hardest of the practices I talk about here. If someone has harmed you, it is natural to feel pain and to react with anger. The desire to hurt the person is understandable and justified. As you forgive someone who has harmed you, you give up the desire for vengeance, and the desire for that person to suffer. Do you want to be happier right now? Just forgive someone who has harmed you. This can make you happier immediately.

The Buddha said that holding anger in your heart is like picking up a burning ember to throw at someone. You burn yourself before you hurt the other person. Anger is an emotion that is harmful to everyone, especially the person who carries the anger. For one who strives for happiness, the only logical response to a hurt from another is forgiveness. Stop torturing yourself! Forgive the person who has harmed you and make yourself happier. You do not necessarily have to go to the person to do it. It is the anger in your heart you want to get rid of.

What to do

Practicing selflessness, charity, compassion and forgiveness will make you happier. -- it is as simple as that. These practices are both easy and difficult to do. They are easy because they are things we all know how to do. They are difficult because we often do not want to do them.

Charity usually comes easily for us. It is not difficult to do a kindness for a friend or even a stranger. Being selfless, compassionate, and forgiving are more difficult, because they require more tolerance and acceptance of others than may be comfortable. Still, these practices are all possible, and the benefits in happiness can be huge.

Here is an exercise in compassion:

With your eyes closed, picture in your mind someone you know and love. Then ask for happiness, peace, contentment, health and safety for that person. Use whatever words you wish, such as “I wish happiness for (the person); I wish peace and contentment for (the person); I wish health and safety for (the person).” Say these things to yourself, silently or out loud.

Then, say these same words for someone with whom you have a troubled relationship.

Say these words for someone who has harmed you.

Say these words for anyone else who may need your compassion.

Finally, say these same words for yourself. That is, ask compassion for yourself.

While saying these words, reach out with your feelings of compassion, whether it is for yourself or someone else.

As you express your compassion for another or for yourself, you tap into our natural desire for human relationship and closeness. This triggers happiness in you. You also turn your focus away from yourself and towards others, which also increases happiness.

Here is an exercise in forgiveness:

With your eyes closed, bring to mind someone who has harmed you. Perhaps this is someone you think should be punished for what he or she did. Think about what the person did, and how you feel about the person. With these thoughts in mind, and only to the extent you feel comfortable doing so, say to this person, “I forgive you for (say the thing he or she did).”

This forgiveness exercise seems simple, but it is not. When you speak the words, you should try to dig deeply into your emotions and find the will to genuinely forgive the person. You may have to do this exercise many times; each time uncovering layers of resentment within yourself and forgiving the person a little more each time.

If you cannot forgive, don't worry about it. Don't beat yourself up about it. Even the thought that you would like to forgive is a step forward and can actually make you feel a little lighter and a little happier.

As you do this exercise with a sincere will to forgive, you can become happier. As with the compassion exercise, you are tapping into our natural desire for a secure relationship, and you are taking the focus away from yourself.

Chapter 7

Find Happiness in What You Do



Humans do things. This is an obvious observation, but an important one. We never just sit idle -- even when it appears we are doing nothing. We breathe, think, move around, look at things, listen to things, work, play, talk, etc. We are always doing something. The challenge is to find happiness in what you do, no matter what it is.

What you do in life cannot make you lastingly happy. Such happiness is natural to you, and you only need to allow yourself to experience it. However, too often what we do in life negatively affects our ability to be open to happiness. Our reactions to what we do can be so overwhelming that they can get in the way of finding happiness. This is so even if we practice all of the ways of learning to be happy that I talk about in this book.

If what you do in life does not suit your skills, inclinations, likes, and emotional responses, your happiness and emotional health can

suffer. So, you need to carefully choose what you do. What you do in life should make space for happiness and should not fill your mind-body with so much stress and worry that it prevents you from ever being happy.

If what you do does not suit you, and you cannot overcome your negative reactions to it, you should make a change. A fanciful, but interesting illustration of work that had to change comes from the television series, "Doc Martin." In this BBC program, a successful London surgeon suddenly could not stand the sight of blood. He could not be a surgeon when he was sick at the sight of blood, so he left London to become a general practitioner, serving patients in a sleepy seaside town.

You cannot change what you do in an hour. Finding things to do that truly suit you can take time. However, if what you do prevents you from being happy, you need to start the process of changing what you do, or at least the way you do it.

Let's consider school and work, two things that occupy most of our time. The following are some of the criteria you might want to consider when you go looking for what to do. What you choose need not meet all of these criteria, but it should meet as many as possible.

- The work/schooling does not harm anyone, least of all you.
- The work/schooling meets three basic psychological needs: the need to feel competent in what you do; the need to build relationships with the people around you; and the need to feel autonomous -- meaning having choice and control of what you do.
- The work/schooling focuses on goals that are intrinsically meaningful to you.
- The work/schooling enables you to serve other people well.
- The work/schooling facilitates *flow* experiences (I will get to *flow* shortly).

Also, if you really love to do something, or you feel called to do something, then you should take this into account in choosing work or school. You cannot just say to yourself, "I love (feel called) to do this, but it is impractical. I need to do something else." Doing one thing while you yearn or feel called to do something else can be a happiness killer.

Inevitably, parts of what you end up doing may not meet anyone's criteria for what is enjoyable. In addition, even if a job will eventually suit all of your requirements, there may be periods (such as an apprenticeship) during which your work/school is not

much fun. As long as it does not make you miserable it is possible to approach what you do in such a way that you can still experience happiness doing it.

Regardless of whether the work is inherently enjoyable or dull, if you can you should approach what you do in a way that makes it a *flow* experience. A flow experience is a state of mind in which you enter completely into a task, forgetting about everything but the task. This getting-lost-in-the-work is usually very enjoyable. If you can find flow in what you do, you can be happy doing it, whatever it is.

For example, in the seminal book on flow experiences, titled *Flow*, [7] the author talked about an individual who worked on an assembly line. All day, every day, the person attached the same part to the item being built on the line. This could be a miserable experience for some people. However, the way this person approached the job made this into a flow experience. He reported enjoying his work, even after years of doing the same thing over and over.

To understand why a seemingly dull job could be an enjoyable flow experience, we have to understand the way such an experience is created. The four requirements for any activity to be a flow experience are:

- The activity should require skill;
- The activity should be challenging, but doable;
- The environment in which the activity is performed should allow you to focus all of your attention on the task; and
- The results (feedback) from what you do should be clear and immediate.

What the assembly worker did was record the amount of time he took to perform his task, and then each day devised ways to do it a little faster. This, for him, was a challenge that kept him engaged, and it created a flow experience. In many ways, this is not much different from the way a marathon runner approaches a race. The runner takes an extremely repetitive task, and fine tunes it so that he/she can go the fastest with the least amount of effort, for the longest time.

Many of us could say that what we do is just as repetitive and dull as what the assembly worker was doing. The same old grind, day after day, year after year – with little to show for it, other than making money. It is worthwhile to turn this sort of work into a flow experience.

What does a flow experience feel like when you enter into one? Let me illustrate from my own experience. Years ago a friend and I used to spend afternoons playing the ancient game of Go. The basic rules of the game are simple. However, it is a difficult game to master. We were evenly matched and challenged each other. Sometimes I won and sometimes he won. All of the elements of a flow experience were there when we played. The game was challenging, but I went into each game knowing I had the skill to win. We were both free to concentrate fully on the game. The goals of the game were clear, and there was always a clear winner, so we both had immediate feedback.

When we sat down to play, we both easily entered into a flow experience. I recall the feeling of moving my pieces effortlessly, and always feeling that I was in control of my game. We both forgot about everything except the game, and time did not exist for us. I remember many times we would put a pot of coffee on the stove, and the next thing we knew all of the water from the pot had evaporated and the pot was starting to smoke. We were happy. I look back with great fondness on those games.

Like my friend and I, many people play games that allow them to experience flow. For some, these are their only flow experiences, but others, like the assembly worker, are able to make work or school into such an experience.

Another way in which any kind of work or school can be enjoyable involves acceptance. True happiness exists here and now, and you only have to be present to experience it. In other words, your attention has to be in the present. If you can accept what you do emotionally, regardless of what it is, then you can be present. If you cannot accept it, then your attention will be somewhere else and happiness will elude you.

For example, assume a young girl has a weekend job bagging groceries. What she wants to be doing, however, is sitting at her computer logged into social media sites. If she does not emotionally accept what she does, she may be unhappy, or at best bored, until she gets off work. On the other hand, she might emotionally accept what she does, and challenge herself to do the best job possible. If she does this, she may happily breeze through the day, and when it comes time to be with her friends she will be in a good mood.

To emotionally accept something is to accept it exactly the way it is, with no emotional resistance. You can still plan to change what you do or how you do it. I do not recommend passivity or fatalism. But, when you emotionally accept what you do right now you make space for happiness to enter into your life.

If you cannot emotionally accept what you do, and you are emotionally attached to desiring something else, you are stuck. You are stuck in the idea that your happiness depends on what you do. It doesn't. Your power to be happy is always available to you.

What to do

So, what can you do, right now, to be happier in your work or school? If you are unhappy right now, coming up with a plan for a change will definitely make you happier. The change may involve different work or schooling, or it may involve changing the way you approach what you do.

As you sit reading this book, think about what you do. Does what you do make it impossible for you to be happy? For example, do you react so negatively to what you do that you have to spend your leisure time recovering from its effects? (e.g., Do you have to anesthetize yourself with alcohol or drugs?) If so, start looking for something else to do.

If what you do does not make it impossible to be happy, then think about what you will be doing tomorrow and the next day. Can you change the way you approach what you do, so that you can create a flow experience for yourself? If so, figure out how to do that. Figure out how to challenge yourself to doing a better and better job of whatever it is.

Is there a way that you can emotionally accept what you do? For many of us this is difficult because we spend much of our time wishing we were somewhere else, doing something else. The following exercise may help you find acceptance. This exercise involves work, but you can use it for school as well.

Here is the acceptance exercise:

Think about something you do at work that you would rather not be doing. Picture it in your mind, and try to bring up the feelings and sensations you experience while doing it.

Now, bring to mind what you would rather be doing instead of working. Once again, picture it in your mind and try to experience the feelings and sensations that go with it.

Now, go back to the work activity and tell yourself "I accept doing this, and I am willing to be happy doing this." As you say this to yourself, do so with will and intention. Try to make yourself feel happy about doing whatever it is.

If, as you do this exercise, you feel even a little of the happiness you are trying to attribute to the activity you have taken a big step. The truth is, as long as your reaction to the activity is not so negative that you cannot cope with it emotionally, you can be

happy doing anything. It is your emotional resistance that prevents you from experiencing this happiness. This exercise attempts to break down that resistance.

Ultimately, this exercise asks you to consider the following question: do you want to be happy, or do you want to keep resisting what you do because it is not what you would rather be doing?

Final Word - Keep Choosing Happiness

The core message of this book is that, in order to be happier right now you need to choose to be happy. You need to develop the ability and the willingness to choose happiness, even though being happy may not be the reasonable or rational thing to do. If you can choose happiness, you can be immediately happier. Does this mean you will remain happy? Realistically, no. You have to keep choosing happiness.

To be happy regardless of your situation in life is a radical act. It goes against everything your mind-body knows about being happy. It is as I have said before, irrational – at least from the mind-body's point of view.

Real happiness does not follow the mind-body's rules for happiness, so you can expect a fight when you decide to choose happiness. There will be many relapses as the mind-body's programming and experience reassert themselves.

It may take a while for the mind-body to adjust to a new way of being happy. You may have to keep choosing happiness, day-by-day and minute-by-minute. However, eventually it will be easier. For example, in meditation you may initially get only flashes of the happiness that is available to you. Over time, however, you may be able to sustain a feeling of deep happiness for an hour or more.

So stay with it. Keep choosing happiness.

The Buddhists talk about crossing over to the other shore (enlightenment). Once you do that you never have to worry about going back. Initially, however, you may catch only glimpses of the other shore, dimly through the mist. Then you may take your raft and move towards it, only to be pushed back by the current. Each time, however, you see it better and the sight of it strengthens you. Finally, you land, stand up and breath the free air of enlightenment and true happiness, and send the raft back for the next person to follow you.

May you keep choosing happiness, and find what you are looking for.

About the Author



D.E. Hardesty, has been studying spirituality for over forty years. He started writing about happiness in response to his daughter's questions about what to do in life. As she entered the critical "quarterlife crisis" years of the early twenties, she had many questions about how to be happy, what goals to pursue, and what to study in school. As he says in the preface to his first book, *Finding Your Power to Be Happy*, "I had found my path to happiness, and I was living it. She was just starting on that path. What should I tell her?" His first book is an extended answer to her questions.

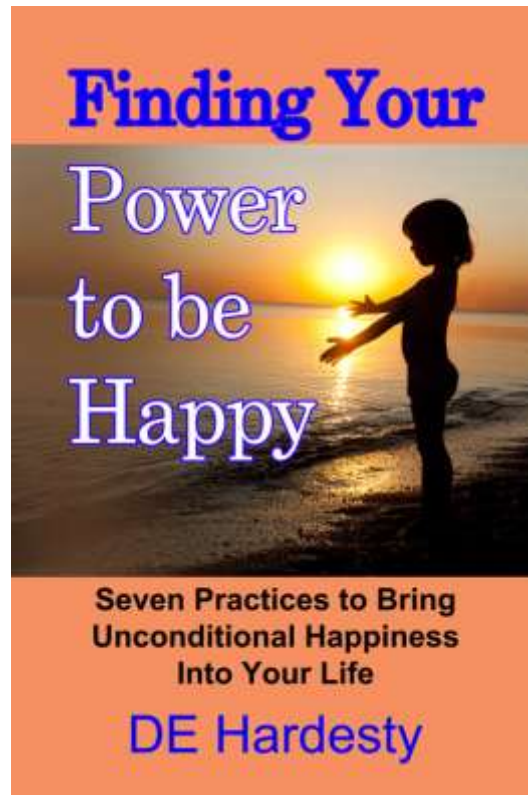
His second book, *Be Happier in One Hour*, continues exploring the ways to find happiness in our lives.

About his writing he says

"They say that if everyone lights a single candle there will be light and peace in the world. This is my candle."

D.E. Hardesty lives in Northern California with his wife Beth and their cat Patrick.

[Other Writing by D.E. Hardesty](#)



Finding Your Power to Be Happy: Seven Practices to Bring Unconditional Happiness into Your Life. D.E. Hardesty.

324 pages. For more information on this book, see

<http://www.irrationalhappiness.com/finding-your-power-to-be-happy/>

D.E. Hardesty blogs at

<http://www.irrationalhappiness.com/>

<https://50waystobehappier.wordpress.com/>

<https://50manerasdesermasfeliz.wordpress.com/> (Spanish language)

[Sample - Finding Your Power to Be Happy](#)

Chapter 1

The Power to Be Happy

You have the power to be happy. Despite anything that has happened to you, or anything that may happen to you, you have the power to be happy. I am not saying you will be happy every second of your life. Bad stuff happens, and you will react with pain, grief, or anger. These are immediate but temporary responses that come with being human. Luckily, they usually occupy little time in your life. The rest of the time you can be happy.

Nobody is a victim of life. Nobody's happiness is hostage to what happens in life. You are a free being with the power to choose the way you feel. You can be happy regardless of anything that happens or does not happen to you, and regardless of the chaos that is in the world or your life.

Yours is the power to choose what to think about, what to look at, and what to feel. You have the power to choose how you'll experience life. This power enables you to find happiness inside of yourself, instead of waiting for life to be perfect. In simple terms, you have the power to control your mind, and with this power you can choose to be happy. With all this power at your disposal, your life can be heaven on Earth.

Now you may say, "If I have this power, why am I not happy? I have been slogging through life for a long time, and I am tired, bored, and unhappy doing it. Why can't I be happy?"

The simple reason is that it takes practice. It takes practice to learn to search inside of yourself for happiness instead of constantly chasing after it in the world.

The purpose of this book is to show you where real happiness comes from, and how you can enjoy it into your life. The good news is: *You need do nothing to bring it into your life.* You just need to know what it is and how to stop doing what prevents you from experiencing the happiness that is your birthright.

Why Do We Want to Be Happy?

When it comes right down to it, everyone just wants to be happy. According to the Dalai Lama,

It is a fact - a natural fact of life - that each one of us has an innate desire to seek happiness and to overcome suffering. ^[1]

Our need for happiness is so great that, once we remove pursuits aimed at staying fed, staying warm, and caring for our children, we do most of what we do to be happy.

The philosopher Aristotle said that people choose happiness for its own sake, not to achieve some other purpose. If you have true happiness, you do not need anything else.

The wish for happiness is basic to us. Why is this? What is it about happiness that makes us want it so much? We want it because being happy makes an enormous positive contribution to life. The benefits are so great that you may find that aiming for happiness is a lot more important than many of the other things you do.

Let us look at some of the benefits of being happy:

- It is true that good relationships can make people happy. However, evidence suggests that happy people are better at establishing good relationships.
- Happy people are more successful in life. Success does not always make you happy, but happiness can make you successful.
- The evidence shows that happy people are healthier, both physically and emotionally. Happy people live longer. ^[2]
- Happy people are creative. People who worry excessively about what they do narrow their focus, while happiness leads to an expansive creative mood. ^[3]

In short, happiness, by itself, improves nearly every aspect of life. *It is the glue that holds a good life together.*

In addition, happiness may be “adaptive.” Adaptive behavior helps us perform better in the world. In other words, happy people may be better able to cope with whatever life throws at them. Perhaps we instinctively know this and seek happiness as a guide to living successfully.

Beyond living longer and healthier lives, we may seek happiness for other reasons. Many people believe that each of us exists for a specific purpose. Although there are many beliefs about that purpose, nobody can say with certainty what it is. However, perhaps as we align our lives with our purpose, we become happier. Said another way, perhaps the closer we get to true happiness, the closer we are to realizing the purpose for our time on Earth. I do not know the nature of that purpose, but I believe that happiness is vital to it.

If happiness underlies and animates our purpose, then aiming for it seems a reliable way of moving toward that purpose. In other words, if you let what makes you happy be your guide, there is a good chance that you are on your path to fulfilling your purpose.

Irrespective of the good reasons for being happy, we want happiness. It is the way we are. *All by itself, it makes life worth living.*

One of my favorite songs from 2014 is (no surprise) “Happy,” by Pharrell Williams. One of the lyrics is “Happiness is the truth!” The man is definitely on to something here.

Finding Your Power to Be Happy

To be happy, you have to learn that lasting happiness is always available to you, and that it is unconditional. To be unconditional means that it arises within you naturally, and does not result from anything you do, anything you have, or any other condition of your life. All you have to do to be happy is to experience this *truth of happiness*. What helps you to have this experience is to practice letting go of your attachment to your desires for what you may mistakenly think makes you happy.

What I have just said is the simplest explanation of your power to be happy. To truly understand it requires a lot more. My explanation is like a photograph of an onion. It is accurate — but you need to start peeling off the layers of the onion to get at its core. That is what the remainder of this book is about.

In this chapter I summarize the seven practices aimed at helping you find your power to be happy. All of these practices will be explained further in the chapters that follow. Most of what I will cover comes from ancient wisdom. I am not breaking any new ground. What I am trying to do, however, is organize this information in a fashion that makes it easy to follow and incorporate into your life.

Practice 1: Learn the nature of unconditional happiness. Such happiness is not the same as conditional happiness or sense pleasures.

Deep inside all of us, at the center of our being, is an unending font of lasting happiness. There is no consensus as to where it comes from, but it is real. This happiness is deep down, satisfying, lasting, and unconditional.

Unconditional happiness is not a feeling you get from taking a big bite of something sweet, and it is not the joy of sex or the thrill of victory. These are mere sensations. It is not the temporary rush of feeling when something good happens to you. Unconditional

happiness is not a sensation, and it is not temporary. It does not relate to how you feel right now, or how you feel about something in particular. If you allow it to be, it is your emotional ground of being.

If I were to ask you, “Are you happy?” You might say, “I am happy, and I have been happy for a long time. I cannot imagine myself being unhappy.” This characterization of how you feel describes the lasting happiness that I characterize as unconditional happiness. This happiness exists for no reason at all.

You might also answer, “I was happy last month when I got a promotion, but the new job is stressing me out now.” Here we are talking about conditional happiness. It is what you feel when something good happens. These are temporary, or transitory, states of happiness.

You may also report happiness that results from a pleasurable sensation. Sight, sound, taste, hearing, smells, feeling, and thoughts all cause pleasant and unpleasant reactions. You might say, “Listening to this song on the radio always makes me feel good.”

Conditional happiness and sense pleasures come and go in life. We cannot usually do much about them. We hope the good feelings will last for a while and that the bad ones will be brief. The nature of conditional happiness and sense pleasures is that they are temporary. In addition, they usually result from what you do. If you stub your toe, you have pain, which is a sensation. If you ride a roller coaster, you experience the sensations of excitement and thrills.

Unconditional happiness can *underlie* all of these temporary feelings. It can be a constant in your life. Once a temporary feeling of happiness, unhappiness, pleasure, or pain is over, unconditional happiness is a feeling to which you can always return. It can be your emotional state during times when nothing in particular is happening to make you happy or give you pleasure.

The purpose of this book is to help you find unconditional happiness. Some call unconditional happiness tranquility, joy, equanimity, harmony, or peace. The label is unimportant because the experience defies description. It involves feelings of freedom, and letting go of the hold that your day-to-day cares and concerns have on you. It is also the sense that everything is OK. Such happiness has the power to change your entire world for the better.

Let me give you an example of how unconditional happiness can change your perspective.

Every Sunday morning my wife and I go to the local farmers' market, and while we shop, I usually watch the people there. I remember one morning when I was happy and glad to be alive. As I looked at the people, each face had a glow. What I saw all around me was an outward reflection of what seemed to be inner joy. I do not know what I actually saw, and it really doesn't matter. What I experienced was the world that my happiness created for me. It was a great way to start the day.

Practice 2: Learn that unconditional happiness arises naturally from your deepest self. It does not come from what happens to you in life.

Unconditional happiness is natural to you. Whether you experience it or not, it is your ground of being, and the unconditional happiness you feel arises from deep within your unconscious. Such happiness does not result from anything you do in life.

You are born with this happiness. It is your birthright. Some believe that what you experience as unconditional happiness is your deepest self as it touches the Divine, God, or some other power or spirit of the universe. It could also be a natural experience of the human body. Nobody knows its ultimate source. In this book, I refer to the ultimate source of unconditional happiness as Source. Regardless of its true Source, when it arises, you experience it as real happiness.

Though it is natural to us, we seem to grow up believing that lasting happiness comes from what we do in the world. You have to give up this belief before you can begin to allow unconditional happiness into your life. You can experience unconditional happiness by letting go of your self-centered fixation on what you think will make you happy, but this is not easy! You have to train your mind to start looking inward for happiness, not outward.

For the most part, what you do in life and what you receive in life provide only conditional happiness and sense pleasures. These emotions are temporary. Unconditional happiness is natural to you but may be overwhelmed by unquenchable thirst for sense pleasures and conditional happiness. You may mistakenly believe that sense pleasures and conditional happiness will provide the lasting happiness you want.

Your power to be happy lies in your ability to turn your attention away from what you assume will make you happy, and toward unconditional happiness. Turning your attention away from these desires is easier once you fully understand that what you do and what you receive in life are not the sources of unconditional

happiness. Understanding that you have the innate power to be happy is the start of your journey to lasting happiness.

Trapped in the Belief that Happiness Comes from Stuff

Minds are rational, and reason says that you become happy only when good things come your way. In the world that you see, every effect has a cause. Because it is rational, your mind may be on a never-ending search to do something that brings happiness to you.

The mind bases the way it thinks on what it sees in the world. It sees something happen, which causes something else to happen, and something else, etc. This frame of reference is all that the mind knows, and from which it naturally infers that to be happy, something has to happen. Therefore, it impels us to keep doing something to find happiness.

When Janie was three, she got a wonderful toy for her birthday. This toy brought her happiness for a long time. For her, the toy was the cause, and happiness was the effect. From then on, what she mainly wanted was toys. Sometimes they made her happy and sometimes they did not, but she never forgot the lesson she learned when she was three. For the rest of her life, her way of being happy was getting more “toys.”

Most of us are firmly attached to our ideas about how to be happy in the world. This attachment makes us keep doing or trying the same things to make ourselves happy.

What you do can provide pleasurable physical sensations, or ego elations, which can temporarily mimic happiness. Food and drink, entertainment and sex all provide temporary distractions and pleasures, which can substitute for happiness. These sensations, however, do not last, and are not nearly as satisfying as real, lasting happiness. Shallow sensations of happiness may feel good, but you cannot seek after sensations forever. Either your money or your body is going to give out.

Conditional happiness may last for a while, but, like sense pleasure, it eventually fades. This happiness is, in a sense, a peek at the real thing. However, because the mind believes that such happiness comes only from doing or having something, once that something is gone, the happiness goes with it.

On the other side of the coin, we grow up learning that negative things make us unhappy. Bad things happen, and we react emotionally. There is much grief in the world, and all of us at some point will experience painful physical and emotional sensations. However, negative events and circumstances do not affect unconditional happiness, and they are usually temporary.

If you can accept that good things happening in the world result in sense pleasures and conditional happiness, but not lasting happiness, you are ready for the real work. Once you accept this truth of happiness, you can start to train your mind to think in a different way.

To bring lasting unconditional happiness into your life, you have to train yourself to look inward for it, not outward. Once you do this, you can naturally let go of your self-centered preoccupation with pleasures and conditional happiness. Of course, you can still have fun; you can still feel all manner of pleasure and you can still experience intense happiness when something good happens. Nothing lessens the wonderful feelings. However, your basic feeling of happiness no longer depends on what you do in the world.

Happiness for No Reason

The pleasant and unpleasant sensations that come from what you think, do, and say occupy relatively little time in your life. Most of the time you are just living, going through your day with little happening to make you happy or unhappy. Yet, during these seemingly fallow times, you may spontaneously feel happy. Why is this? How could you be happy for no identifiable reason?

There *is* a reason, however. It is because happiness is your basic ground of being. If you are feeling happy, you are experiencing what is natural to you.

Good and bad experiences cause immediate and temporary sensations. Real happiness, however, is natural and unchanging. If you were not blocking it from your awareness, you would experience happiness as your permanent state.

Doing Nothing Calculated to Find Happiness

Taoist philosophy has a lot to say about the misconceptions we have regarding what it takes to be happy. This philosophy goes back 2,500 years to the *Tao Te Ching*, written by the sage Lao Tzu. Chuang Tzu provides more guidance on this philosophy in Thomas Merton's book, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*.

The teachings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu do not provide specific steps to arrive at your goal of happiness. Instead, their wisdom prepares the mind to accept the idea that you can have great happiness without doing anything to get it. Chuang Tzu summed up the Taoist philosophy of happiness nicely when he said that his "greatest happiness consists precisely in doing nothing whatever that is calculated to obtain happiness..." [\[4\]](#)

Of course, even in Taoist philosophy, true happiness does not just land on your doorstep. Notice that Chuang Tzu did not say that he did nothing at all. He said he did nothing “calculated” to gain happiness. In other words, he did nothing with the goal of getting happiness. You can live an active life, and happiness can be at the heart of that activity. However, if the aim of the activity is happiness, then it can disappear like the morning mist.

You have lived your entire life in a cause-and-effect world, where something happens only if something else causes it to happen. What is true of your day-to-day physical activities may also be true of the activities of your mind. Everything we can think of or imagine happens because something caused it to happen. Unconditional happiness, however, does not have a cause.

If it does not have a cause, what can you do to be happy? You have to work to prepare yourself to experience it. You need to turn the focus of your attention away from desires for what you believe will make you happy, to make room in your life for real happiness.

Happiness is something that is always right here and right now. You need only allow yourself to experience it. In other words, lasting happiness is one of the few emotions that can arise from a milieu of not doing anything. It is unconditional. Once you discover this truth, and learn to practice this truth, you can find it.

Irrational Happiness

Taoist philosophy says that lasting happiness comes after your mind has finally given up the idea that it is something for which you must search. Chuang Tzu wrote, “You never find happiness until you stop looking for it.” [\[5\]](#)

Of course, the notion that you can find lasting unconditional happiness without looking for it is a paradox. How do you find something without looking for it? This idea is so foreign to the way we think that it is even difficult to imagine. It’s hard to think about how to find something without looking for it because it’s not rational, and the mind works with reason. We were born to reason our way through questions, and our nature as reasonable, logic-using beings works against finding the answer.

The truth is that you can experience real happiness for no reason at all. Free yourself of your mind’s belief that happiness comes from what you do or have. Then you can shift your attention to a place of awareness where lasting happiness exists without cause. When you do so, the paradox that had its abode in the “head”quarters of rational mind simply disappears. In other words, you do not have to search for something to make you happy; you have to *stop the search* and learn to recognize your fundamental happiness.

Unconditional happiness is beyond the reach of the rational mind. It does not come from anything; it just is. It is, in a sense, irrational happiness. If you conduct your search for it using rational methods, you cannot be lastingly happy, because you will find only conditional happiness. Conditional happiness can result from what you think or do, but it disappears when the conditions that created it are gone. Unconditional happiness has no cause, so it cannot disappear.

It seems irrational that you can have lasting happiness without doing anything to get it. However, the truth is that seeking something to give you happiness is a surefire way to keep it hidden. If you commit yourself to your mind's never-ending but fruitless quest for what provides happiness in the world of cause and effect, you trap your attention. Your attention is not free to experience the happiness that is already inside you. If you never give up hunting for pleasure and conditional happiness, you can never set free the lasting happiness that is natural to you.

It is likely that your mind is full of plans and strategies for future happiness, based on what you believe made you happy in the past. Unfortunately, focusing your attention on all of your plans, strategies, hopes, and desires for pleasure and conditional happiness fills your mind with dissatisfaction about your life, and prevents you from experiencing real happiness. The nature of your mind's search for something to make you feel good works against your happiness.

Let me tell you the story of someone who might have managed to stay happy, even though he should have been miserable. According to Greek legend, Sisyphus was a man who loved life and sought to live it his way — a way that greatly angered the gods. To get back at him, the gods inflicted on him the perfect punishment: a life of misery and hard work with no purpose. They made him push a boulder up a mountain, only to see that boulder roll back down the mountain, over and over, forever. The tragedy is that while he was pushing his boulder up the mountain, he knew it would always roll back down.

Despite the utter futility of Sisyphus's life, the writer Albert Camus imagined that Sisyphus could be happy. How could anyone believe that Sisyphus was happy? Common sense says that despair should fill every second of his existence, because he knows that he faces an eternity of hard labor, without purpose or meaning. I agree with Camus, and so would many others whose ideas we will explore in this book. Despite everything, Sisyphus could be happy.

If Sisyphus were happy, his would be irrational happiness. It would have to come naturally from his deepest self, because what he was doing could only make him miserable.

Have Faith in the Irrational

If you give yourself a chance, you may experience moments of real happiness that seem to come from out of nowhere. Your mind may not believe this is happiness. Your mind may tell you it's a fake, that it is irrational. I have been there and done that, and I guarantee that this can happen. You may have a lot of experience with your mind telling you that you cannot be happy unless something good happens. It takes time to unlearn this way of thinking.

Have faith in the irrational. At some point, you will begin to experience the depths of true happiness that are available to you as your birthright. Then you will know that the happiness your mind seeks by doing something to get it is the fake. You will know that real happiness is natural to you, and is within your power.

Practice 3: Learn to turn your attention away from your desires for conditional happiness and sense pleasures, and turn it towards unconditional happiness.

Unconditional happiness seems to lie deep within the unconscious, and must be invited into awareness for one to experience it. However, most of the time our attention focuses on conditional happiness and sense pleasures which, as we have seen, are temporary. It's hard to drop the conviction that these can give us lasting happiness, but they cannot.

Our most pressing desires demand our full attention and prevent us from bringing real happiness into consciousness. To experience unconditional happiness, you need to learn to turn your attention away from these desires. When you do, your attention naturally turns towards unconditional happiness.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Buddha diagnosed the cause of emotional suffering as our craving for what we want but do not have, and our longing to hold on to what we do have. Our attachment to what we want prevents us from turning our attention to unconditional happiness. I am not writing a book on Buddhism, but I cannot find a better explanation of why people do not experience the full, all-out happiness that is natural to them.

According to the Buddha's analysis, if you can cure the disease (attachment to self-centered desires), suffering goes away. What remains is happiness. From the time of his enlightenment until he

died 45 years later, this is what the Buddha taught. It is the second of his Four Noble Truths.

The Attention to Desire

Desire in this case means intense thirst, greed, need, or longing for what you do not have, and the craving to keep what you do have. The craving can attach to whatever circumstance gives you conditional happiness or pleasure, including wealth and power, and it can attach to your personal ideas, opinions, and beliefs - especially those pertaining to self-image.

We want sense pleasures and conditional happiness for their own sake, of course. They make us feel good. However, often we want them because we mistakenly believe that they can also give us lasting happiness. Remember, what we do or attain can give us conditional happiness or sense pleasures, but cannot provide the lasting, unconditional happiness that we all seek.

The need for lasting happiness is powerful. However, it aims in the wrong direction. It aims toward doing things and getting things in the world. It frustrates people when these things and experiences do not bring lasting happiness. This frustration only serves to exacerbate the need for them.

The desires for happiness, and what we believe brings happiness, are self-centered. This does not mean we are selfish people. Instead, our need for them is like the need to drink or eat. It is personal to us.

Self-centered desire attaches to what we want or want to keep. It also attaches to what we do *not* want. We want or desire to avoid what we believe will make us unhappy.

The best analogy I can find for self-centered desire is in the realm of addiction. Addiction is not simple want or need, but is instead a craving so powerful that you cannot ignore it. Like addiction, self-centered desire fills your awareness and pushes everything else to the side. Unlike addiction, however, which may focus on a single need, this desire attaches to all wants and needs, all experiences, and all people.

As in addiction, you can never permanently satisfy this self-centered desire. You may temporarily satisfy it by getting the “fix” of some “thing” or circumstance, but this only feeds the addiction. It will always return — stronger than ever.

Most of the time, our self-centered desires remain unfulfilled. For example, our need to keep what we have is never satisfied because nothing lasts. Focusing on our unfulfilled desires is a great source

of unhappiness. In addition, the attention that we pay to them robs us of the ability to move our attention to unconditional happiness.

I am not saying that you should not experience sense pleasures and conditional happiness. You should enjoy them throughout your life. However, when you are finished enjoying them, you should not continue to focus on them. When they are here, enjoy them; when they are not here, do not allow your need for them to make you unhappy.

Driven by this thirst (selfish desire), they (people) run about frightened like a hunted hare. Overcome this thirst and be free.

~ *The Dhammapada*, 343.^[6]

Practice 4: Learn to see the truth of happiness in yourself through mindfulness and meditation.

To shift your attention from self-centered desire toward unconditional happiness, you first must learn to see the truth of happiness in yourself. The way to see the truth of happiness inside of you is through the practice of mindfulness and meditation.

The truth of happiness involves knowing that unconditional happiness is natural to you. This truth also involves knowing that if you let go of your attachment to self-centered desires for sense pleasures and the conditional happiness of favorable circumstances, unconditional happiness can enter your life.

To see the truth of happiness in yourself, you need to practice both mindfulness and meditation. These are perhaps the most important practices in finding it. Seeing weakens the hold that your self-centered desires have on your attention. It also shows you where to focus your attention to experience happiness.

Mindfulness (Learning to See)

To see how your self-centered desires make you unhappy, you need to be mindful of yourself. To be mindful is to see the way the world is for you now. It is to be aware of this moment. If you see the world as it is, you do not trap your attention in your mind's of the way it is. You also do not trap your mind in your beliefs about the way it is.

You spend much of your time in your mind, looking at your ideas about the world and your memories of the world. To be mindful is to pull your attention out of your mind and observe the world directly.

If you can be mindful of yourself and what you want, you may see that what you want will, more often than not, make you unhappy and perpetually dissatisfied. You may also see that getting what

you want may make you happy for a time, but that it isn't long before you move on to dissatisfaction and new desires.

Bill is eight years old and desperately wants a particular toy for Christmas. He has seen it advertised and can imagine himself happily playing with it. It is December 5, and he spends much of his time thinking about the toy. He is unhappy about having to wait. He has plenty of other toys, but he wants this one.

The magical day finally arrives, and Bill has his toy. For a few weeks, he plays exclusively with this toy. He can hardly wait to get up in the morning and enjoy it. Then he is visiting a friend's house, and his friend, Sammy, has a different, more interesting toy. Beholding the wonders of this new toy, Bill's dream toy begins to pale. Desire is beginning to grow for a toy like that of his friend.

Self-centered desires often lead to dissatisfaction with the way the world is, and the result is unhappiness. Satisfaction of major desires can bring temporary sense pleasure and conditional happiness, but, even for little tykes like Bill, they are soon replaced with new desires and new unhappiness. And the cycle repeats itself, over and over. To weaken the hold of self-centered desires, you have to see the futility. You have to see that the cycle will never lead to lasting happiness. You have to see the truth of this in yourself.

Meditation

I devote later chapters to meditation, so here I will not go into the specifics of how, when, and where to meditate. Here, we examine the goals of meditation, and the way it fits within what we are looking at in this chapter.

Like mindfulness, meditation enables you to see. As you practice meditation, you can see the futility of desire. More importantly, in meditation you can learn to turn your attention to your eventual goal: unconditional happiness.

Meditation is nothing mysterious. It is merely the practice of focusing your attention. It is the practice of thinking what you want to think. People often think of meditation as mysterious and otherworldly. It is not.

As you will see in the chapters on meditation, you can sit while meditating, with eyes open or closed; you can meditate while walking around, and you can meditate while lying down. The only constant is your purpose in meditation, which is to focus your attention and keep it focused on your object of meditation.

Your object of meditation can be anything. For example, you can meditate on your breath or a physical object such as a flower. You

can also meditate on a particular thought, such as happiness or compassion.

In meditation, you learn to choose to focus your attention and let other thoughts that come into your mind pass by, like drifting clouds. You learn to choose what to focus on, so your attention is not at the mercy of your reactions to the world, and your self-centered desires. Learning to control your attention and choose your thoughts opens for you the space to choose. Without this space to choose, you just react.

In everyday life, thoughts may come up and capture your attention without you being aware that it is happening. These thoughts can ruin your day. In meditation, you learn to find space in which to choose how you'll respond to the thoughts that come up. You can think of meditation as the practice of the power to choose what to think about and what to turn your attention to.

Viktor Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, said:

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Thoughts connected to your self-centered desires are powerful and pervasive. They are like addictions. These thoughts express longings for pleasurable sensations; the need to please (stroke and inflate) your self-image; and the need to avoid unpleasant things. Each little desire is not bad in itself. Rather, it is the pattern of automatically giving in to them that can ruin your life. Without learning to choose what to think about, you are at their mercy.

When you learn to choose what you'll think about, you can learn to focus your attention away from what you think you want and more towards the spaciousness of unconditional happiness. At first, the feeling of unconditional happiness can be subtle. However, in meditation you can nurture this feeling so that it grows to fill your entire awareness.

Practice 5: Let go of your attachment to self-centered desires through acceptance, nonattachment, selflessness, charity, compassion, and forgiveness.

To reduce the hold that your self-centered desires have on your attention, you need to practice. You need to practice letting go of your emotional attachments to them, so that your attention is free to enjoy unconditional happiness. Later chapters cover practices aimed at freeing you from the grasp of your endless wants and needs. These practices are acceptance, nonattachment, selflessness, charity, compassion, and forgiveness.

Acceptance

Acceptance means that you emotionally accept your world as it is, whether it pleases you or not. Acceptance also means that you do not make happiness dependent upon the condition of your world being other than as it is. You may believe that things are not right the way they are, and your goal may be to improve them. However, you do not let any problems with the way your life is going disturb your happiness.

Nonattachment

Nonattachment is a state in which you do not attach emotionally to what you want. Your desires still exist, but you just allow them to be. You notice them but are not subject to them. If you are unattached, then they cannot dominate your attention, preventing you from shifting your attention to unconditional happiness.

You achieve nonattachment by treating all thoughts about what you want as mere thoughts that come and go. These thoughts come into awareness, and before you allow them to take hold of you, you accept them for what they are, and let them go. You can practice doing this in meditation.

Selflessness, Charity, Compassion, and Forgiveness

The qualities of selflessness, charity, compassion, and forgiveness are human qualities that place more importance on the needs of others than on your own. By practicing these qualities, you reduce your focus on yourself and your needs. In so doing, you weaken the hold that your self-centered desires have on your attention, thus freeing it to find unconditional happiness.

The Devotional Path to Letting Go of Self-centered Desire

All the major religions are either devotional or include branches that are devotional. For example, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and some types of Buddhism are devotional.

We do not usually view happiness as a goal of devotional religions. Christianity, for example, aims at salvation both before and after death. However, this does not mean that a devotional path cannot lead to happiness. Those committed to devotional practices such as Christianity or Bhakti Yoga report intense joy as awareness of God grows through devotion, prayer, and meditation.

As I said earlier in this chapter, happiness comes from our unconscious self. Some believe that this deep self is “God-conscious.” Among devotional people who are less self-centered than the norm, God-consciousness may arise.

The path to happiness (God-consciousness) through devotion is simple. You devote your heart and soul to God, fully accepting your lot in life as God's will. Obviously, any need for life to be other than it is simply drops away. In other words, you naturally let go of your self-centered desires as devotion fills your mind and heart.

Practice 6: Live ethically, which reduces the power of self-centered desires as well as the guilt and regret that preclude happiness.

To live ethically is good for society and is good personally. To live peaceably together, people have to behave ethically. For the individual, acting ethically promotes happiness. When you act ethically, you do not suffer the disapproval of society, or the self-loathing and stress that come from guilt. In addition, unethical conduct comes from self-centered desires for what you believe will give you happiness or pleasure, even at the expense of others. Living ethically lessens these desires.

Yoga

Ethical living is a key part of the practice of yoga. Yoga teaching, especially in Raja Yoga, is clear about the way to behave in the world. Actions such as lying or stealing usually have their source in self-centered desires. As you focus on acting ethically, you begin to get at the root of the motivation behind unethical actions, which is self-centered desire.

In addition, in yoga a fundamental goal of ethical living is not to add to your "karmic debt." Karmic debt is the result (fruit) of actions performed in the past, which you carry with you throughout life, and, if not resolved, into future lives. When the fruit of negative karmic actions ripens, something painful appears in your life that makes you unhappy.

What comes to mind for me when I think of karma, is Marley's Ghost (in *A Christmas Carol*, by Dickens). In the story, he dragged behind him a "ponderous chain" of guilt that he'd forged in life. Dragging a great chain of guilt (the fruit of karmic actions) behind you is no way to happiness.

Buddhism

Ethical living plays a vital role in Buddhist teaching as well. The Buddha's Eightfold Path is a guide to living in a way that helps you to reduce your desire for what you mistakenly believe will make you happy. This Path includes instructions on how to live ethically.

Taoist Philosophy

Taoist teaching, described in both the *Tao Te Ching* and Thomas Merton's book, the *Way of Chuang Tzu*, stresses ethical living. To be in harmony with the Tao, which is synonymous with happiness - specifically, The Way to happiness — one must act ethically. It is difficult to come away from reading either of these books without concluding that ethical living is the only sensible way to exist.

Religious Devotion

Ethics plays an important role in religious practices, such as Christianity and Hinduism. Think of the importance of the Ten Commandments. As with yoga, Buddhism, and Taoist philosophy, compliance with religious laws can deepen religious practice and bring one closer to awareness of God by focusing attention away from personal desires.

Practice 7: Choose work that promotes happiness.

Your life's work can either support your efforts at finding true happiness, or it can prevent you from achieving this goal. It is important that your work or schooling promote happiness. Because you devote so much time and effort to work and school, if they do not fit you, your happiness and emotional health are likely to suffer.

Too often, what we do at work negatively affects our openness to happiness. When we react negatively to what we do on the job or at school, we have to spend much of our leisure time undoing these effects.

What you do in life cannot make you lastingly happy. However, your reactions to what you do can be so overwhelming that they may get in the way of meditation or other practices aimed at finding true happiness. Therefore, you need to choose work that makes space for yourself. You need work that does not crowd your awareness with so much stress and worry that it prevents you from being happy.

According to the self-determination theory (SDT) of Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (and common sense), work that promotes growth and happiness has several important characteristics. Your work (or schooling) need not feature all of these, but should have many of them.

- The work does not harm anyone, least of all you.
- The work meets your basic psychological needs for feelings of competence, relatedness to others, and autonomy.

- The work focuses on goals that are intrinsically meaningful to you.
- You love the work that you do.
- You feel the work represents a purpose or calling in your life.
- The work enables you to serve other people well.
- The work facilitates flow experiences.

In the following paragraphs, I want to make some important points about them.

Work That Does Not Harm Anyone (Right Livelihood)

An important part of the Eightfold Path of Buddhism is *right livelihood*. The Buddha said that you should not earn a living at the expense of life, and you should not support those who harm their fellow humans or other sentient beings.

The well-known teacher of Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh, describes right livelihood more broadly. His words capture my own sense of what the Buddha taught. He said,

...you have to find a way to earn your living without transgressing your ideals of love and compassion. The way you support yourself can be an expression of your deepest self, or it can be a source of suffering for you and others. [\[7\]](#)

Work You Can Cope with Emotionally

It is important to choose work that does not continually provoke you to react negatively. Studies show high rates of depression among people in certain occupations. People in these occupations are more likely to experience stress and even tragedy. Some people can handle these situations emotionally, and some cannot.

A stressful occupation may cause you to react badly to what you experience daily. If it does, you may spend much of your time coping with your reactions. Such reactions can go a long way toward overwhelming your ability to be happy. You may not be able to sleep, and you will have little chance of enjoyment or satisfaction.

You need time, lots of time, during the day when you are conscious of what you are doing and not unconsciously reacting. By reacting unconsciously, I mean reacting to what happens in such a way that you are no longer in control of your thoughts and emotions. You want to avoid being in a state where you cannot turn off your negative thoughts and emotions.

Work That Flows

Flow is the name given to a specific experience that results from entering a task in a certain way. In Flow, you experience effortless involvement in the task and a sense of control. You may also lose your sense of time. Concern for self, and even awareness of self, disappears as you immerse yourself in the activity. Finding Flow in work is important because the more time you spend being happy, the easier it is to move into happiness as your constant state of being.

Flow is important for several reasons. First, it is an experience of nonattachment. As I discussed earlier, nonattachment is a state wherein you do not attach emotionally to what you want or need. In other words, what you want does not dominate your awareness. Flow activities provide you with practice in being nonattached. Although you are not consciously practicing detachment, as you would do in meditation, you are still not attached. The more time you spend in Flow, the more you get used to nonattachment as a way of being.

Second, while in Flow, you forget your self-centered desires as you focus on the task. The resulting happiness is a taste of the true happiness that is available to you all of the time.

Third, activities that you perform in Flow keep you in touch with your source of happiness. It is much better to work at a job that encourages Flow, than to work at one that continually strengthens the bonds of self-centered resistance and desire.

Unconditional Happiness Is a Step Along the Journey

Throughout this book, I am going to share ideas and practices that can help you find true happiness. Some of these practices have specific goals associated with them. Yoga and Buddhism both have the goal of complete liberation, or nirvana. The goal of devotional practices, such as those found in Christianity, is salvation and everlasting union with God.

In this book, I am interested in how these practices may also help you experience true happiness. It is not my intention to take anything away from the accepted goals of these practices. However, finding true happiness is a major step towards the final goals of all of these practices.

The goals of the various practices I discuss can be intimidating. If you are a Christian, heaven and final union with God may seem a long way off. It may not be something you expect to experience in life. In yoga and Buddhist practices, we aim for liberation and nirvana, which can take years — or lifetimes — to realize. I believe that true happiness is a significant step toward any of these goals. It may even be a requirement.

All the religious and philosophical practices I describe in this book have one common goal — to help you realize the Source of unconditional happiness. There may be only one Source, although it has many names. Each practice describes it differently and approaches it differently. Still, there may be only one. True happiness may be our experience of that Source.

Anything that increases your awareness of true happiness moves you closer to its Source. Rather than think of these paths as involving years of hard sacrifice, think of them as paths involving increasing joy. This is where these paths will lead. If you learn to turn your attention to unconditional happiness, you can move closer to the Source of happiness.

East Versus West

This book leans heavily on methods of finding happiness found in Eastern and Middle Eastern philosophies and religions. You might ask, what is wrong with modern Western ideas? Honestly, not many ideas about real happiness have come out of the West. Western thought usually revolves around conditional happiness and sense pleasures.

Note that I consider Christianity to be a Middle Eastern religion because Jesus lived in the Middle East. This religion is closely associated with the West, but its core wisdom originated in Israel.

The great sages and prophets figured out how to find lasting happiness thousands of years ago, and humans have not changed. The philosophies and techniques that came out of the East and Middle East worked then, and they work now. These are what I focus on in this book.

Western thinking has not much concerned itself with real happiness. The great Western philosophers seem mainly interested in the workings of the mind. However, happiness does not come from the mind. In fact, the mind can, and usually does, get in the way of real happiness.

Western psychology has focused on mental illness, not on happiness. Only recently has the new field of “positive psychology” begun to look at ways in which people can learn to live richer and happier lives. For example, the book *Flow*, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, represents this new approach. More recently, books such as *The How of Happiness*, by Sonja Lyubomirsky, provide guidance on simple methods that can increase your basic level of happiness. It is interesting that many of the practices in Lyubomirsky’s book, such as meditation, charity, and forgiveness, are the same as those advocated for thousands of years.

The primary difference between what I am talking about in this book and the techniques coming out of positive psychology may be the quality of happiness available. The goal of positive psychology may be to slightly increase happiness, to make “things” more pleasant through relatively simple techniques. Here, we are not so much interested in psychological boosters and soothers as we are in actually *finding the true Source of happiness*. This calls for a major shift in the way you approach the world, where the potential for happiness is far greater than we normally think possible.

Returning to Our Hero...

Earlier, we looked at Sisyphus, doomed to a futile existence of pushing a boulder up a mountain. Let us return briefly to our hero, straining against his burden. He is an athlete in his prime. His focus is complete as he forces maximum effort from his muscles. He cannot think of himself or his predicament. If he does, he will lose his footing and fail at his task.

As I think of Sisyphus, I think of a marathon runner, focused on movement, with no attention left for him/herself. If the runner loses focus, he or she might miss the pile of leaves, wet from the morning dew, and slip. Long-distance runners report the joy (the “high”) they get from racing. Even though their muscles may be “screaming with pain,” they push themselves to the limit. After the race, exhausted, they begin thinking of their next challenge, and the way they can go just a little faster. I can easily imagine that Sisyphus, like the runner, would experience the same “high” that comes from pushing oneself to the limit.

Let us picture Sisyphus at the top of the mountain. Just as he completes his task, the boulder thunders back down the mountain. Now freeze! Look at the face of Sisyphus as he stands there, exhausted. He sees the boulder rumble down the mountain and knows his toil will never end. Look into his eyes. What is he thinking?

We have now frozen Sisyphus in the space between the stimulus (the boulder rolling down the mountain) and his response. As Viktor Frankl said, his freedom lies in his power to use this space to choose his response. His freedom to be happy lies in choosing how to feel about what has happened. What will he do?

He can choose to feel triumphant, having succeeded once again in making it to the top of the mountain. He can start thinking about the next journey up. He can start wondering how to coax just a little more strength from his body to make the journey a little faster and a little better.

Alternatively, he can give in to despair. He can curse the gods who sit laughing at him as he drags himself down the mountain, once again, to face his endless task.

What would you choose?

Endnotes

Endnotes for Be Happier in One Hour

- [1] See Kahneman, Daniel (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- [2] See Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs, Bad Is Stronger than Good, Review of General Psychology, 2001. Vol. 5, No. 4, 323-370.
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- [5] Narang Ph.D., David. Leaving Loneliness: A Workbook: Building Relationships with Yourself and Others.
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- [7] Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (2008). Flow (P.S.). HarperCollins.

Endnotes for Finding Your Power to Be Happy

- [1] His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Locations 295-296). HarperCollins Publishers. Kindle Edition.
- [2] Achor, Shawn, The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology That Fuel Success and Performance at Work (pp. 21, 41, 42, 52). Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.
- [3] Kahneman, Daniel (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Kindle Edition.
- [4] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu.
- [5] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu.
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[7] Hanh, Thich Nhat, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* (Parallax Press, 1998), p. 104.