

Finding Your Power to Be Happy

A silhouette of a person standing on a beach, reaching out towards the sun as it sets over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and reflecting on the water. The person's arms are extended forward, and their hands are open, as if they are reaching towards the light. The background is a warm, orange-hued sky and sea.

**Seven Practices to Bring
Unconditional Happiness
into Your Life**

D.E. Hardesty

FINDING YOUR POWER TO BE HAPPY

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

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Preface

The peculiar thing about us humans is, we spend a lot of time working to find people and things that will make us happy. In fact, we seem to spend the majority of our time doing this. However, there is no guarantee that any of this effort will work. There are lots of people who have hordes of people around them, and who have lots of things, but have been unable to make themselves happy.

The truth is, happiness can be had with little effort. Have you ever been happy for no reason at all? Of course you have. Without anything changing in life, happiness just appears. We see it in young children all the time. In fact, we expect to see it in children. If you happen to ask a smiling child why he or she is so happy, at best the answer may be, “Because.” For an adult this may be an unsatisfying answer, but for the child it is the truth -- happiness exists “just because.”

As we age we seem to lose touch with happiness-for-no-reason-at-all. We see a world where everyone is striving for stuff, striving for popularity, striving, striving, striving. The natural fount of happiness we once enjoyed disappears as we join them. However, that happiness is not gone. All that happened is we lost our connection to it. This book is about recovering that connection.

We all grow up believing that if we work hard, and if we are good people, we will enjoy good relationships with others, good health, success and a long life. Obviously this is not true. There are a lot of rich old people who are not happy. What we have, what we do, and the other circumstances of our lives do not provide authentic happiness. Instead, happiness comes from inside of us, and all by itself enables us to have secure relationships, good health, more success and longer lives.

So, what is the secret of being happy? Being happy is a little like flipping a switch. When it's on you are happy and when it's off you are not. It's so easy. How else can you explain being happy for no reason. What you need to do is learn to turn it on, and keep it turned on. This book discusses seven practices that help you do that.

There is a lot of wisdom available about how to be happy. Most of it is thousands of years old, but some is quite new. The seven practices we will look at incorporate this wisdom to help you learn how to turn on happiness in your life. This kind of happiness does not require changing anything in your life. All you have to do is learn to turn it on.

* * *

I came of age in the seventies, in and around San Francisco, which was a center for many Human Potential Movements and practices. It was then that I had my first important experiences of a new way of being in the world. It was a different way of being than anything I had previously experienced. Many times, I noticed that my waking mind had stilled. As we used to say, the inner dialog had stopped. And when it stopped, it left a kind of excitement, peace, and happiness that I had not previously known.

These were memorable experiences for me because my ordinary way of going about the world used to involve a constant stream of thoughts involving doubts, dissatisfaction, fear, and anger. The sense I had of myself during these remarkable times stayed with me. It kept telling me that I had to find ways to repeat them.

Over the next forty years I learned how to regularly let my awareness settle into a place of simple happiness and joy. I usually did this in meditation. However, I also learned to bring this way of being back into my normal world of living and working.

When my daughter was in college, and beginning to think about graduate school and work, she was unsure of the direction she should take and asked for advice. As she and I talked, I began considering everything I had learned in a new light. I had found my path to happiness, and I was living it. She was just starting on that path. What should I tell her?

My first bit of advice to her was obvious. You should do what you are good at and what you like to do. It was the liking what you do part that was the stickler. What does one really like to do? I thought, if you can find your purpose in life, then you will probably like doing what it takes to accomplish that purpose. Then, I began to realize that, underlying all purposes is the desire for happiness. I began to see that if you can find happiness, the rest of your life pretty much sorts itself out.

If happiness is the purpose, then how do you “get happy?” This is obviously a question for the ages and there are myriad opinions. Still, I set it as my goal to find out what others have said about this. On the surface, nobody agrees on exactly how to bring happiness into one’s life. However, beneath the surface there is a common denominator in all approaches to being happy. This book describes what lies at the heart of those approaches.

In many ways this book is my own quest for the truth of happiness: what it is, what it is not, and how to welcome it into my life, and yours.

* * *

This book offers time-tested advice on how to find unconditional happiness. I do not

mean to give advice to anyone seeking help with a psychological condition. I am just a writer and a seeker of truth. I am not a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

* * *

I want to express gratitude to my wife Beth for patiently reading several drafts of this book, and providing her wise comments and criticisms. Beth and I have been on a long spiritual journey together and along the way she has learned much that I have not. Her input has been invaluable. Also, I want to thank my daughter, Rebecca, who provided much needed guidance on Western philosophical thinking, and whose original questions inspired this book. Thanks to Dr. Jeffrey Friedman, DC, healer and friend, who provided much needed encouragement and insights. Finally, thanks to Jo-Ann Langseth for her work in editing this book. Jo-Ann's knowledge of the subject matter and insights greatly improved the book.

D. E. Hardesty

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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?

Chapter 2

Unconditional Happiness

Everyone wants to be happy. In order to be happy, you first have to know what happiness is. You have to know its nature in order to aim for it. If you know what it is, and hold the thought of it in your mind, then this can help you find it. The Buddha said, “Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think.” ^[8] If you know the nature of unconditional happiness, you can bring it into your life.

When I say happiness, you’ll recall that I not mean sense pleasures. There is nothing wrong with pleasures of the senses, but they do not constitute true happiness. Real happiness is far richer and deeper than any sense pleasure. It comes from deep inside of you. It is always there waiting for you to experience. Sense pleasures, on the other hand, result from what happens to you in the world.

The kind of happiness we all seek is lasting. It is lasting because it is independent of circumstances. In other words, it is unconditional. It does not result from anything you do or that is done to you, and it does not go away. It is always there inside of you.

Another type of happiness is the kind that is not always there for you. Happiness of this kind is conditional and results from what happens to you in life. You feel this happiness only if the conditions of your life meet your requirements for happiness. Because your life circumstances constantly change, this happiness will go away once the required conditions are no longer present.

Learning to Experience Unconditional Happiness

In Chapter 3, we’ll explore how to learn to experience unconditional happiness. One need only turn their attention to it and accept happiness without conditions. Absent emotional attachment to desires for the “desirable,” attention may fix solely upon true and unending happiness.

Everyone Wants to Be Happy

If there is one thing in life that is certain (besides “death and taxes”), it is that everyone wants to be happy. Philosophers and religious leaders throughout time have said this. I cannot think of anyone who would disagree. People want numerous things in life, but most of these things are thought to bring happiness, which is what people want most of all.

Aristotle said that happiness, by itself, makes for a life that lacks nothing. It is, in his words, self-sufficient. ^[9] The Buddha said, “All desire happiness.”^[10]

Swami Satchidananda, in his book on yoga, said,

Who would not like to be happy always? Everybody wants that. ^[11]

St. Thomas Aquinas, the great religious philosopher, also noted that all men want happiness. He said man’s will or innermost direction in life is towards it. In theological terms, he said that to know and love God is to find happiness. He may be saying here that our natural will toward happiness is synonymous with, or because of, our desire to know and love God. ^[12]

Setting aside what these people have said, it is just common sense that everyone desperately wants to be happy. When you look past nearly all the possessions and circumstances that people want in life, happiness emerges as the true goal. If you ask yourself, why do I want this or why do I want that, it is usually because you believe it will make you happy.

There are other reasons, of course, for what you want in life. For example, people are happy at the idea of having children, but may also be impelled to want children for basic biological reasons. People want food and shelter for reasons that go beyond happiness. People also want sexual gratification. However, basic happiness is what people want most of all.

Wanting Things Because We Believe They Make Us Happy

Obviously, we strive for most things because they will be beneficial to our lives. However, much of the time we also want them because we think they will make us happy. Perhaps hoped-for happiness gives us the major motivation to acquire things or do things. Sometimes, however, it is the only motivation. Aristotle said:

Honor, pleasure, understanding, and every virtue we certainly choose because of themselves, since we would choose each of them even if it had no further result; but we also choose them for the sake of happiness, supposing that through them we shall be happy. ^[13]

Unlike other things, happiness is something we want only for itself. It is not the means to some other end. In other words, we do not want it because of anything else or because it will lead to something else. Aristotle further said:

Happiness, by contrast, no one ever chooses...for the sake of anything else at all... Happiness, then, is apparently something complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of the things achievable in action...we regard something as self-sufficient when all by itself it makes a life choiceworthy and lacking nothing; and that is what we think happiness does. ^[14]

Unconditional Happiness, Conditional Happiness, and Sense Pleasures

It should be clear by now that when I refer to happiness, I usually mean unconditional happiness, which is happiness that does not result from anything. Happiness is natural to you, and is waiting to be uncovered and experienced by you. I may refer to unconditional happiness as happiness, true happiness, real happiness, or lasting happiness.

References in this book to conditional happiness will always refer to the ephemeral, the circumstantial. Such happiness results from good things that happen to you in the world, all destined to fade away when their causes end. You might think of it as a glimpse of real happiness, or a taste of real happiness. Conditional happiness, however, always carries with it the knowledge that it will end. This knowledge can cast a bit of a pall over happiness.

Sense pleasures are the reactions of our senses and emotions to that which is physically pleasing in the world. Tasting something, for example, can give us a sense pleasure. We can sometimes mistake sense pleasures for happiness, as they often accompany feelings of conditional happiness. Sense pleasures do not, however, result in unconditional happiness.

The Nature of Unconditional Happiness

There is no single definition of happiness. However, by looking at the various descriptions that people have shared, we can get a sense of its nature.

A Deep and Lasting Sense of Well-Being

Happiness is a deep emotional and physical sense of well-being. Some describe it as a sense of human flourishing. Well-being or flourishing includes a sense of joy, satisfaction with life, contentment, tranquility, harmony, equanimity, and peace, coupled with the certainty that these feelings will remain indefinitely. This happiness is deep, fulfilling, and is present all of the time. Sensations will at times overwhelm this happiness, but it will still be there when the sensations are over.

Aristotle described happiness as a feeling of eudaimonia, which is the Greek word for “human flourishing.” He said anyone experiencing happiness has the best experience possible.

The Buddha described happiness as “what is good, pleasant, right, permanent, joyful, harmonious, satisfying, at ease.” St. Thomas Aquinas described happiness as “man's perfect good,” and “man's supreme perfection.” ^[15]

Unconditional happiness is not a mere sensation, such as delight or pleasure. Delight and pleasure can sometimes mimic happiness, and may even contribute to happiness, but

these sensations are transitory. They come and go.

If you fall in love, for example, the thrill of love will be your focus, and you will feel many exciting emotions. But even when passions cool, your experience of unconditional happiness can be there for you. It will help you build a rich relationship. As you settle into day-to-day life with your new spouse or partner, your ability to experience real happiness will help keep your relationship new and interesting.

If tragedy happens in your life, grief can overtake you. After a time, however, your experience of unconditional happiness can help create a place in your heart where you no longer grieve, but lovingly remember.

Unconditional Happiness Is Not the Result of Anything

Unconditional happiness does not result from reactions to physical and emotional stimuli. Chemicals can induce such reactions. Instead, unconditional happiness arises from within an individual and is always present. You know it as coming from yourself.

Happiness as an Advanced State of Awareness

God-consciousness, nirvana, self-realization, God-realization, liberation, and enlightenment, are all said to be advanced states of awareness. People describe all of these states as happy and joyful. Unconditional happiness is associated with all of these states of awareness.

Certainty That This Happiness Will Not End

A defining characteristic of unconditional happiness is the certainty that the feeling will not end. Real happiness does not depend on anything and does not result from anything you have. It just is. When you experience this happiness, you sense that it is endless.

As I sit in meditation, and experience real happiness, I get a deep sense that what I experience is something entirely different from everything else I experience in life.

As I go about my day, I have all kinds of feelings, some good and some bad. Underlying all of these feelings, but barely noticeable, is the awareness that they are temporary. My experience of unconditional happiness, especially in meditation, does not include any feeling of it being temporary.

Happiness as a Feeling of Satisfaction with Life

Unconditional happiness can mean a feeling of deep satisfaction about your life as a whole. It is not a feeling about anything in particular. Instead, it is a feeling of satisfaction with your life up to this moment, and about your expectations for life in the future.

The following are five standard questions used by psychologists to measure satisfaction with life. A person answers each question using a 7-point scale, with 1 being

“strongly disagree” and 7 being “strongly agree.” A higher overall score indicates a higher degree of satisfaction with life.

Satisfaction with Life Scale Questions

1. In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. [\[16\]](#)

To use this scale, add the responses to each question to come up with your score. Here is the way the scores translate to the degree of satisfaction with life:

- 30 - 35 — Very high score; highly satisfied
- 25- 29 — High score for satisfaction
- 20 - 24 — Average score for satisfaction
- 15 - 19 — Slightly below average in life satisfaction
- 10 - 14 — Dissatisfied
- 5 - 9 — Extremely dissatisfied. [\[17\]](#)

The Source of Unconditional Happiness

What is the source of unconditional happiness? The source is you. Real happiness comes from inside of you. It comes from deep inside of you and does not result from anything that happens to you. As it arises, you experience that happiness merely by allowing yourself to do so.

The experience of real happiness is always there. You can say that it is natural to you. However, your ability to experience it can be obscured or blocked. In both yogic and Buddhist philosophy, if you can eliminate what obscures it, what remains is real happiness.

As we will see in Chapter 3, what prevents you from experiencing unconditional happiness is that your attention may be hostage to your endless desires for what you mistakenly think will make you happy. Once you let go of these relentless desires, natural happiness emerges.

The Buddhists like to use the analogy of the teacup. When you pour out the tea, you reveal the empty cup. [\[18\]](#) The emptiness of the cup was always there; you just needed to remove the tea to see it. In the same way, happiness is always there, and to experience it you just need to remove from your life your obsession with desires for what you think will make you happy.

The Ultimate Source of Happiness

When I say that happiness comes from deep inside of you, I am speaking of the source of your mind and body's experience of happiness. That experience in turn has a source, which I call the ultimate Source of happiness.

That Source may express as the human body itself. The body may be able to be happy, all by itself. Alternatively, something other than the human body may trigger that experience. It may be the body's reaction to the Divine, God, or some other energy of the universe. Some people say there is one energy or Source, others say there are many. People have many opinions, but nobody knows with certainty.

The Buddha says we create or construct the experience in our minds, regardless of its ultimate Source. In other words, regardless of what our senses take in from outside of ourselves, our experience of happiness is the creation of our minds.

I talk about the ideas surrounding the ultimate Source of happiness in Chapter 5.

How Happy Can You Be?

Some psychologists who study happiness use the *Subjective Happiness Scale* (SHS). This measure of happiness is not the same as the Satisfaction with Life Scale, discussed earlier. Rather than asking about your satisfaction with life, the SHS presents four questions, each of which asks you (in different ways) to subjectively indicate your level of happiness. You measure your level of happiness using a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the happiest. In tests on many participants, the average scores ran from 4.5 to 5.5. Those scoring 4 or less were encouraged to seek testing for depression. A score of 5.6 or above, on the other hand, indicated a person who was happier than average. ^[19]

Do these levels of happiness show what is possible? Are most of us doomed to live at a level of happiness that is just a point above depression? I do not believe so.

Two thousand five hundred years ago, the Buddha observed that we live in a state of suffering, and we do not know it. People who thought themselves happy found out that they were not. Perhaps many considered themselves happy because they were happier than average. The Buddha introduced people to an entirely new scale of happiness. Measured against *his* scale of possible happiness, nearly everyone was indeed suffering.

In 2012, the *London Daily Mail* ran a story about Matthieu Ricard, a French-academic-turned-Buddhist monk whom the article called the "happiest man in the world." Scientists studied Mr. Ricard's level of happiness by examining the activity in his brain's left prefrontal cortex, which is an area of the brain said to reflect feelings of happiness. ^[20] His

readings were higher than anything previously reported.^[21] The monk's extraordinary level of happiness was attributed to regular meditation.

What the Buddha seems to be telling us, and what Mr. Ricard demonstrates, is that our potential for happiness is far beyond anything we can imagine.

Swami Satchidananda said, "The same world can be a heaven or a hell."^[22] Here the Swami may be saying that we have an extraordinary power to make ourselves happy. Likewise, Jesus hinted at happiness on Earth that is greater than any of us can imagine when he said that Heaven is "spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it,"^[23] and that "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."^[24]

Conditional Happiness

Temporal, conditional happiness is felt when something good happens in your life. For example, it is the feeling you have as a result of getting the job you wanted or having your girlfriend or boyfriend say "Yes" to a proposal of marriage. It is the feeling of watching your baby take a first step. Conditional happiness is about as close to real (unconditional) happiness as most of us get. However, it is not the real thing.

Conditional happiness seems to come when your mind says that it is all right to be happy. It seems that your mind has certain rules, requirements, or conditions for happiness. When you meet those conditions, you feel happy. Once those conditions no longer exist, the happiness goes away. Therefore, this kind of happiness is contingent upon time and circumstance. (The mind's rules and requirements for happiness are detailed in Chapter 3.)

Conditional happiness is not as deep as unconditional happiness. It is probably not as deep because some part of you knows it will end. As I said earlier, a defining characteristic of unconditional happiness is the sense that it will never end. This knowing makes for the deep sense of well-being associated with it. Conditional happiness, on the other hand, will end. As conditional happiness may have the same source as unconditional happiness, the awareness that it is temporary may be in the background. This awareness undermines the experience of happiness that you could have if it were unconditional.

The first time I saw my daughter walk was pure delight and pleasure for me. It was obviously delightful for her as well, judging from the huge grin she had on her face. I remember very well how happy I was. However, my happiness was temporary. For a moment, I allowed myself to be happy, and then the rush of everyday cares took over.

You can experience conditional happiness when you fulfill one of your desires. For example, if you believe that getting a certain job will make you happy, and you get that job,

you may be happy for a time. The job itself is not necessarily the cause of this happiness. Instead, because you got the job, you let yourself feel happy.

If you win the lottery, then for a time everything will seem golden. You will be happy. But it will probably not be because of the money. Perhaps you believe that you should be happy if you win the lottery, so you permit yourself to be happy.

The happiness you experience from getting a new job or winning the lottery will be temporary. Once you acclimate or adapt to your new job or your new wealth, you go back to your everyday cares, and happiness is gone.

In a sense, anything new and pleasant has the power to allow you to experience happiness because it distracts you from your ever-present unfulfilled desires. For young children, everything is new and has the power to distract them. For example, while you cannot talk a child out of being unhappy, every parent knows the trick of distracting a child. It is amazing how children can go from miserable to happy in the blink of an eye.

Anna, a seventeen-year-old girl, has a crush on a boy in her class. One day he smiles, says hello, and asks, “Would you like to go to a movie with me?” Her sense of happiness is immediate, because right then everything in life is perfect.

After you get used to something, you do not react to it much, one way or the other. It has lost its power to elicit a reaction.

For example, Anna and her dreamboat start dating, and for Anna the next three months are a dream. After that, her normal angst returns. Still, they are in love, and the boy has the power to make her periodically very happy. They marry. By the time she is forty, they are old friends and sometime lovers. Her husband’s power to give her ideal happiness is now gone.

As we age, most of what happens has lost its power to distract and delight us. If you are counting on the same-old-things to divert you and make you happy, you are out of luck. You are pretty much doomed to an existence of boredom, vague discontent, or actual depression.

It occurs to me that conditional happiness is like a new diet. A new diet can work for a while, but you adjust to it and then the weight starts coming back. Likewise, a new circumstance can bring you happiness, but once you adapt to it, you are back where you started.

Sense Pleasures

Most people, upon reflection, will acknowledge that sense pleasures are not the same

as happiness. Delight, pleasure, and excitement, produced by sensations, are sense pleasures and can all be wonderful. However, they are not real happiness because they do not come from inside of you, and because they are inherently transitory.

In this book, I am using the term *sense pleasures* to indicate physical and emotional reactions to those things that your six senses perceive. The six senses are sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, and mental perception. Notice the addition of the sixth sense, mental perception. All senses take into awareness what happens in the world, and mental perception is part of that process.

Sense pleasures include physical reactions to what happens. These reactions result from such everyday activities as eating and drinking, seeing, hearing, feeling, and smelling something. Sense pleasures also include emotional reactions resulting from your perception of things that happen. For example, if you see something funny you laugh with delight. If you see something romantic, you react with a feeling of warmth.

Many pleasures make your body feel good. The taste of food, the experience of sex, and the warmth of a fire on a cold night are all pleasurable. They all feel good, but they are not happiness. While happiness may accompany pleasurable sensations, it does not require such sensations. For example, you can feel happy even if your body is in physical pain.

The nature of what brings pleasure is very personal. For me, the taste of chocolate ice cream is extremely pleasurable. Other flavors are good too, but for me chocolate is the best. This feeling is mostly physical for me, but there is a mental component as well. I probably have old memories of happy times associated with eating chocolate ice cream.

There are biological reasons for the pleasure we feel, and there are probably scientific reasons for individual preference as well. But who cares? We all know that different things give different people pleasure. Individual differences are the spices of human life. If the same things gave everyone pleasure, everyone would be doing the same things.

By their very nature, sense pleasures start out great, but can turn to misery. Misery can result from them being indulged in to excess. A glass of wine is a wonderful thing, but seven glasses of wine can make you sick. Misery can also result from the loss of some pleasurable thing. A new toy for a child can be pure joy to him or her, but if the toy breaks, the child can be devastated. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna warns:

Pleasure from the senses seems like nectar at first, but it is bitter as poison in the end. Both in the beginning and at the end, this happiness is a delusion. ^[25]

If you give a baby something it wants, such as milk or a toy, the baby is content. A baby cannot tell us if it is happy in its contentment, but babies certainly seem happy when

they get what they want. Babies are highly reactive little beings. Their feelings are directly linked to what is happening to them RIGHT NOW.

Take something away from a small child and see what you get. A parent who denies something to a toddler may watch in horror as the child throws its little body to the floor, crying so hard you think he or she will burst.

The important thing to know is that temporary sensations (good and bad) result from your reaction to a stimulus. The child gets a toy, and the child is happy; the toy is taken away, and the child is miserable. These sensations are automatic. They are merely physical and emotional reactions to stimuli.

Comparing Conditional Happiness with Sense Pleasures

Let us compare the experience of conditional happiness, described above, with sense pleasures. Sense pleasures are pleasant physical and emotional experiences occasioned by stimuli taken in by the senses. They usually result from automatic reactions of your mind and body. For example, if you see something beautiful, taste something sweet, or read something you enjoy, you respond with pleasure. These are reactions.

Conditional happiness, however, results when you meet your mind's requirements for happiness. For example, if you acquire something that you desire, the world is for a time a great place, and you allow yourself to be happy.

Happiness Combined with Sense Pleasure

You can often feel moments of conditional happiness combined with sense pleasure.

For example, let us say you have a desire for ice cream, and the desire is so strong that you are dissatisfied and unhappy that you do not have ice cream. If you satisfy your desire for ice cream, you may be temporarily happy, as the satisfaction of a desire temporarily makes you feel that life is good. In addition, the ice cream also provides you with sense pleasure. You take physical pleasure in eating the ice cream. Therefore, you experience both conditional happiness and sense pleasure.

The fact that you can and do experience both conditional happiness and sense pleasure as a result of obtaining something you desire creates confusion about what makes you happy. This confusion can lead to the mistaken belief that sense pleasures can provide happiness. Little wonder that we keep seeking pleasure in the world. These are our futile attempts to find real happiness.

Real happiness does not result from the pleasures we find in the world. Real happiness is unconditional, and it is always available to us. Swami Satchidananda says:

We attach ourselves to pleasure because we expect happiness from it, forgetting that happiness is always in us as the true Self. [\[26\]](#)

The Happiness Set Point

To differentiate further between unconditional happiness, sense pleasures, and conditional happiness, let us look at the “happiness set point” (also known as “baseline happiness”). Psychologists describe the happiness set point as the general level of happiness (or unhappiness) at which you spend most of your time. You return to this level of happiness after experiences that increase or decrease happiness, pleasure, or pain. [\[27\]](#)

Think of the way you feel at those times when you are not experiencing any particular positive or negative sensations or emotions. The feelings I want you to imagine are those you feel most of the time. This habitual feeling is your happiness set point. This feeling is also the extent to which you experience unconditional happiness.

If something good happens to you, you may be happier, or you may experience pleasure for a while. After a time, you return to your day-to-day way of feeling. If something bad happens, you may be unhappy, or you may have the sensation of physical or emotional pain. But after a while, you return to your normal level of happiness.

Here is a graphic to help you visualize your happiness set point.

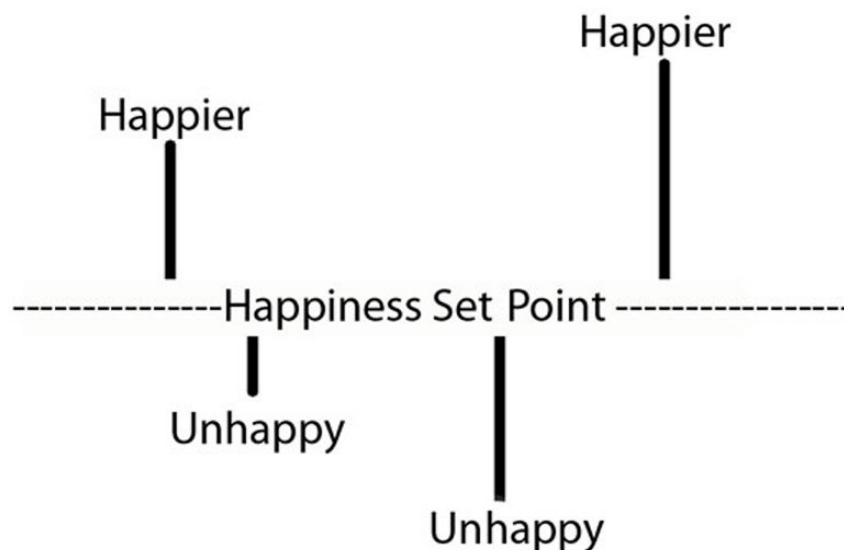


Illustration 1: Happiness Set Point

What happens in life will bring you temporary pleasure (or pain) and happiness (or unhappiness), but after a time you adapt and return to your happiness set point. In other

words, you always return to your level of experience of unconditional happiness.

For example, studies of lottery winners show a temporary spike in happiness resulting from winning, but within a relatively short period, they are no happier than they were before their win. Likewise, getting married can give you a rush of happiness for a while, but eventually you return to your happiness set point. ^[28] We will talk more about lottery winners and newlyweds later in the chapter.

If you can raise your happiness set point (increase your level of experience of unconditional happiness), you can go through your life feeling happier most of the time. What happens around you still affects you. You will still have times of increased happiness or pleasure (hopefully, many of these), and moments of pain (fewer, we hope). However, when nothing out of the ordinary is happening, you will go back to your habitual state of happiness.

Raising your happiness set point does not mean you are unaware of what is happening around you, and it does not mean you remain untouched emotionally when something out of the ordinary happens. Instead, it means that most of the time you will be happy.

Pursuing Pleasure and Missing Happiness

For most of us, our experience of unconditional happiness is not very high, because we focus too much on what we think will make us happy. In addition, our glimpses of conditional happiness are rare, since it is not often that the satisfaction of a desire makes us truly happy. Sense pleasures are much more frequent. Sense pleasures are poor substitutes for happiness, but most of the time they seem to be all we have. Therefore, we pursue sense pleasures, while what we really want is happiness. Unfortunately, the pursuit of sense pleasure can get in the way of experiencing unconditional happiness.

The law of cause and effect rules the rational world in which we live. The Buddha tells us everything occurs because of cause and effect. Even our thoughts obey the laws of cause and effect. In a rational world, if you want something you must pursue it, capture it, and keep it.

If an experience gives you sense pleasure, you naturally want to do it again. Will it make you feel good again? Maybe, and maybe not. Still, it is easy to see the connection between having an experience and receiving pleasure. Ordinarily, when you do something meant to give you pleasure, you feel pleasure.

As we have seen, unconditional happiness is not the same thing as sense pleasure and does not come from anything you do. It does not obey the rules of cause and effect. It comes

from inside of you.

If your mind focuses on doing things to obtain pleasure, this focus can obscure the happiness that is natural to you. If all your mind knows to do is look for pleasure in the world, it will miss happiness. In other words, you will keep looking for lasting happiness in the world of pleasure. And you will never find it there.

Looking for real happiness in the world of sense pleasures, because that is all you know to do, is like the old joke:

Man: I lost my keys in the street, and it's dark and I can't find them.

Woman: Why are you looking for them under the lamppost, if they are in the street?

Man: Because the light is better here.

Unconditional Happiness Is Not a Thing

The mind treats unconditional happiness as a “thing” to get, and then keep forever (or at least for as long as possible). As with all things, the mind believes that if you can “get” happiness, you can keep it. However, real happiness is not like a brass ring that you can, with a mighty reach, pluck on this merry-go-round of life.

The mind's concept of happiness as a “thing” is just another of the mind's concepts. Because it is a concept, it qualifies, under the mind's set of rational rules, as a “thing” to be pursued and won. In other words, the mind believes it is a thing of this world, and that we must comply with the cause-and-effect rules of this world to get it. You either have it or do not have it, and if you do not have it, you need to *do something* to get it.

You cannot pursue and win unconditional happiness, since it is a natural state of being. It is not something that results from anything, but is instead just the way you are. ^[29] You can pursue temporary good feelings, and you can pursue conditional happiness, but lasting happiness just is.

Here is the dilemma. You want to be happy. You have an idea about what happiness is, and you have some experience with what has made you happy in the past. Based on this, you may think you have all of the tools to pursue happiness. However, the harder you chase after real happiness, the more likely it is to elude you.

Your natural state of being is happiness, and all you have to do is allow yourself to be happy. If your mind focuses on the idea of finding happiness, and continually makes plans for doing things to make you happy, you are not allowing yourself to be happy. Your attention so focuses on your plans that you have no attention left for real happiness.

The Fallacy That Things Give You Lasting Happiness

You can find sense pleasures and conditional happiness by looking for them in the world, but lasting happiness will continue to elude you. Things do not make you happy, you discover happiness that is already within you.

Most of us believe that things make us happy because so often we experience happiness in connection with having a thing. It is important to distinguish between the things that we want in life and the happiness we experience in relation to them. Our minds may not make this distinction. Our minds may conflate a particular thing with the happiness experienced in connection with it. In so doing, the mind may mistakenly believe that the thing is happiness or has the power to make us happy.

For example, you may acquire something you desire, and you may be happy in connection with acquiring that thing. Your mind may connect happiness with that thing, and believe that it has the power to give you happiness. However, that thing has no such power. That thing is just a thing. Your experience of happiness is your own.

Why am I making the distinction between things and happiness? The answer is that you may not want a particular thing only for itself. You may not even need that thing. You may want it only because you believe that it will make you happy. You have to distinguish between wanting a thing for itself and wanting a thing because you believe it will make you happy. If you do not make that distinction, you will be running after things, believing that they will give you happiness, when in fact they do not have the power to do so.

The message I will impart repeatedly in this book is this: If you want happiness, then forget about things. Things will not give you lasting happiness. Aim directly for happiness itself.

The poem, *Richard Cory*, by Edwin Arlington Robinson, which many of us learned in school (or have heard Simon & Garfunkel's song based on this poem), illustrates the fallacy that things make us happy.

Richard Cory ^[30]

*Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.
And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,*

*"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.
And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.
So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.*

How We Adapt to What Is New

Acquiring things and possessing them can give you conditional happiness for a while. However, things do not create lasting happiness. The reason that things do not bring you lasting happiness is not only the knowledge that they could vanish at any moment, but that you adapt to them. Once you adapt to something, you revert to your baseline level of happiness (your happiness set point). Psychologists often call this phenomenon hedonic adaption. ^[31]

Getting a new job, more money, or a new relationship are all things that can make you happy. They are also among the many circumstances to which you eventually adapt. Once you adapt to something new, it loses much of its power to make you happy.

More Money

Most people think that more money is a good and quick way to get more happiness. Money can buy you pleasure, but you cannot purchase real happiness. There are a number of studies showing that money can add to happiness or satisfaction with life, but that it does not increase happiness for very long.

Studies of lottery winners have shown that a year after winning the lottery, they were no happier with life than before winning. Some even reported finding less enjoyment than non-winners did in such everyday activities as watching television or going out to lunch. ^[32]

Being poor can make you unhappy because you are subject to a lot of pain and stress that come from living in bad neighborhoods, being homeless, being overworked, not having enough to eat, and suffering the consequences of poor health care. In one 2010 study, researchers found that emotional well-being rises as income goes up. However, the study also found that once annual income reaches \$75,000, additional money seems to have little effect on happiness. ^[33] When you meet your basic needs, and you are moderately comfortable,

more money does not mean more happiness.

Better Job or School

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

For example, the first couple of years at the college of his dreams gave Adam some of the most exciting intellectual stimulation of his life. For a while, he was very happy there. Now, nearing graduation, he is fond of the old school, but day-to-day college life has become boring.

New Relationships

If your current relationship does not inspire the kind of happiness and satisfaction you are seeking, you can try a change. You can experience an increase in happiness from being with a new person. However, the happiness effect of a new relationship is ordinarily temporary.

For example, 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 baseline levels of happiness.^[34]

A new relationship may bring you conditional happiness. However, you cannot go after new relationships every time your current one begins to pale or get stale. People do try this, and perhaps some succeed after a fashion, but most of us lack the energy, the looks, and the money. In any case, humans crave relationships. It is the way we are. Continually pursuing new relationships is not really relating.

Food

There's no denying it — food is pleasurable! And yet, there is a limit to how much you can eat, and a limit to how much you want to eat. You cannot keep eating great food and drinking great wine. It can make you a fat person with a perpetual hangover. In addition, at some point, no amount of food or drink will make you happy.

Sowing the Seeds of Future Unhappiness

Although the money and the other stuff do not bring happiness, few believe this. Let's say that you like ice cream. If you get some, it will probably provide you with pleasure and may even make you happy for a time. Likewise, if you are miserable at your current job and you get a better one, you will likely be happy, for a time. You cannot deny that, at least in the short term, doing things and getting things makes us happy.

So, where is the problem in doing things to make ourselves temporarily happy? The problem is, when you seek happiness from things, you keep reinforcing the wrong ideas about where to look for happiness. In addition, you sow the seeds of future unhappiness.

For example, if your happiness depends on eating ice cream, you doom yourself to misery because you cannot keep eating ice cream, and even if you could, you would soon get bloated and bored. If you think about it objectively, you can see that you cannot sustain happiness through ice cream.

What holds true for ice cream holds true for anything that's external to yourself. These include a new relationship, a new job, money, around-the-world tours, or anything else that you can acquire.

Unfortunately, our day-to-day reactions to what we are doing often appear to suggest exactly the opposite. When we are doing something that makes us happy we are ordinarily not consciously saying to ourselves, "This too will end." As a result, the belief that doing things or having things makes us happy is ingrained in our bodies and minds.

Buddhist and yogic philosophies say that whatever makes us happy also contains within it the seeds to make us unhappy. For example, we all know that eating a single piece of cake can make us feel good, and that even the next piece or the next several pieces will make us feel good. However, eventually that cake is whittled down to one single wedge, and then, crumbs. Hello again, unhappiness! Alternatively, even if you do not run out of cake you may eventually get bored with it, and it will lose its promising allure.

And so it is with anything we do in this world. If you meet someone new, that person may make you conditionally happy for a while, perhaps years. However, that happiness can carry fear and dread within itself. For example, at times, while you are with this person you may feel anxious, and very unhappy, as you imagine him or her leaving you. For some, this feeling of anxiety can be unbearable.

Happiness that disappears when you run out of cake, or when someone leaves, is not real happiness. Just as nothing in this world is permanent, this kind of conditional happiness is not permanent. Even as we experience this happiness, we know this, and sense the bitterness and loss that the thing carries with it.

The Brain's Automatic Reactions

Psychologists and neuroscientists tell us that the brain diligently records in memory everything we do and everything we experience. We rely on automatic memory to guide us

in most of what we do. We do not think about it; we automatically do what has always worked to achieve whatever end we want. It is memory that motivates us. Sometimes it is not even conscious memory. Often the automatic impulse is triggered before there is any time to think about it, or question whether it is the best thing to do.

For example, if in the past, “X” happened and it made me happy, I will automatically seek out “X” again. What is interesting is that “X” may have made me happy just once, and each subsequent “X” did not have the same effect. The failure of “X” to work does not matter. If “X” was great once, then it has to be great again, and I will keep returning to it. The fact that “X” has stopped working somehow does not make an impression.

The brain’s automatic reactions keep us pursuing things that used to make us happy, but have long since lost that power. It is interesting that rats in a maze will eventually stop looking for cheese when they discover it’s not there. Some people never do. [\[35\]](#)

Chapter 3

Choosing Unconditional Happiness

We all want to be happy. It would seem, though, that few of us are seeking lasting happiness. Instead, we chase after things that bring us sense pleasures and conditional happiness. We desire these things because we think they will make us happy, and most of us do not know any other way to obtain happiness.

Instead of looking for sense pleasures and conditional happiness, you can seek lasting unconditional happiness directly. To do so, you must first accept that it exists within you, without cause. Then you need to turn your attention to it and away from what you presume will make you happy.

Finding Unconditional Happiness

To experience lasting unconditional happiness, you first need to accept the idea of happiness that exists without cause. Accepting this idea is difficult because the rational way to be happy is to do something to be happy. For most of us, the idea that you can experience spontaneous unconditional happiness is irrational and inconceivable.

To experience lasting happiness, you also need to shift the focus of your attention away from your desires for sense pleasures and conditional happiness, and refocus on the possibility of unconditional happiness.

To shift your attention, you have to let go of your emotional attachment to your desires for what you think will make you happy. Your attachment to these desires keeps your attention focused and fixed on doing things and having things as a means of being happy. This attachment prevents you from shifting your attention to unconditional happiness.

If you can shift in these three directions, accepting the idea of happiness without cause, turning your attention to unconditional happiness, and letting go of your emotional attachments to your desires, you can enjoy lasting happiness. Embrace and practice these three ideas, and you can awaken lasting happiness in your life.

It may appear difficult to do all of this, but a story told by Chuang Tzu gives us a sense of how easy it can be:

There once was a man who was afraid of both his shadow and the sound of his feet. He had the idea of running away from them, so he ran and ran, ever faster, but he could not escape them. He ran so fast and so long that he finally collapsed and died. He never realized

that, to rid himself of both his shadow and the sound of his feet, all he had to do was stop running, and sit in the shade.^[36]

Like this man, we are all running as fast as we can after things that we think will make us happy. To find the happiness we seek, we need only stop running. Stop running after things and learn to see that happiness is here and now, waiting for you.

Our Misdirected Desire for Things

In Chapter 2, we look at the desire for happiness, along with our striving for things that we believe will make us happy. We keep chasing after sense pleasures and conditional happiness when we should be seeking happiness directly. The “rat race” is all most of us know about finding happiness. How is it that we came to seek things to satisfy the need for happiness, and never thought to seek happiness itself?

How We Make the Mistake of Thinking That Things Make Us Happy

We seek things to make ourselves happy because that is what nearly everyone else in the world does. From the day we enter the world, we see everyone striving for happiness by doing things. Not only do we see this, but our early experiences in the world prove to us that happiness does indeed come from circumstances and things.

When a child comes into the world, he or she has a very basic orientation towards happiness. If a baby is hungry, it cries because it is uncomfortable. Once fed, the baby is content and usually goes to sleep. You can see how the baby learns quickly that the food takes away discomfort and makes it happy.

When a child can conceptualize its feelings, it thinks such things as:

If I could have candy, I would be happy.

If Janie would be my friend, I would be happy.

Some people never get beyond the belief that having things and favorable circumstances will bring happiness.

If I had more money, I would be happy.

If I were prettier, I would be happy.

If my husband loved me more, I would be happy.

If I could have a better job, I would be happy.

Even if we get past the idea that the things and relationships we have can make us happy, we may still fall prey to the mistaken notion that we would be happy if we ourselves were different.

If I were less insecure, I would be happy.

If I were less afraid, I would be happy.

If I were more trusting, I would be happy.

The Internal Rulebook for Happiness

The above statements about what it takes to be happy are a simplified version of the very complex rules we carry in our minds. We all have internal rules for what it takes to permit ourselves to be happy.

For example, your internal rules may say that you can relax and be happy if X, Y, and Z happen. Why would you permit yourself to be happy only when certain requirements are met? I have no idea! And as far as I know, it does not make much difference. It is important only to acknowledge that sometimes things happen and, as a result, you periodically permit yourself to experience happiness.

I want to emphasize here that YOU permit yourself to be happy. You do not do this consciously, of course. In addition, you do not do it anytime you please. You have your requirements for happiness, as we all do. Conscious or not, though, it is YOU who permits yourself to be happy.

Realizing That You Are the Source of Your Happiness

The most important thing to learn from this book is the truth that YOU make yourself happy. More to the point, you *allow yourself* to be happy. Some things can give you sense pleasure, but the feeling of happiness comes only from you. This truth is a hard lesson to learn, and may be a hard lesson to practice. However, knowing and practicing this truth is what gives you the key to unconditional happiness.

Why We Are Not Happy

Most of us seem to live in a constant state of dissatisfaction with our lives. Even those who say they are happy perhaps sense there is something much better. Some of us are not only dissatisfied — we are suffering, miserable, or depressed. The Buddha said that we all exist in a state of suffering whether we know it or not. By his standards, what we all accept as the paltry portion of happiness allotted to us in life is not close to what it could be.

It is not because of the normal ills of life that we are unhappy. The bad things that happen to us do contribute to unhappiness; however, some people are very happy who objectively should be very unhappy, and many people who have every reason in the world to be happy are not. A person in physical pain can still be very happy. On the other hand, a person such as the man depicted in the poem *Richard Cory*, can be handsome, smart, and rich, and still be very unhappy.

You can find sense pleasures and conditional happiness in what you do, but real happiness comes from somewhere else. If you are focusing all of your attention on doing and getting, then your attention is misdirected. You are looking for happiness where none exists.

The Birth of Dissatisfaction

Our drive for happiness motivates us to do things and get things that we believe will make us happy. The more we try and the more we fail to find lasting happiness, the harder we try the next time, always looking in the wrong direction.

After a time, the force of our desire for happiness may create in us a deep-seated craving, hunger, and thirst for things to do and things to have. We are likely to have an emotional attachment to these things. Our desires may be unthinking and reflexive, the mind ever focused on satisfying these desires.

Life may revolve around getting and having what we believe will make us happy. We may not be aware of this. We may be thinking only about getting and having, just for the sake of doing so. However, underlying all of this activity is a desire for happiness.

Constantly hungering for things to make us happy leads to dissatisfaction when we cannot get these things. Loss of that which we think makes us happy results in more dissatisfaction. Even the fear of loss causes dissatisfaction.

When we do get the things and circumstances we want, but they begin to pale, we are likely to get frustrated. We may feel cheated when all of our striving for things does not bring us the happiness that the world promised us. There may even be an unconscious fear that *nothing* we can do or have in the world will ever bring us the happiness we seek. This knowledge of the futility of what we do can fill every moment with dissatisfaction. We may feel that life constantly cheats us of the happiness we work so hard to obtain.

In summary, we are dissatisfied when we do not have what we want, afraid of losing what we do have, and disappointed when what we get does not bring lasting happiness.

This dissatisfaction can overwhelm our innate state of happiness. In addition, our desire for what we believe will make us happy can take up so much attention that there is none left for what we really seek, which is unconditional happiness.

The immediately preceding discussion of why we are dissatisfied and cannot *get happy* is based primarily on Buddhist philosophy, which is explained in Appendix 3.

We Do Not Permit Ourselves to Be Happy

If we fulfill our current desires, we are happy until new desires arise to replace them, and the cycle of desire, fulfillment, and dissatisfaction starts up again. Until we satisfy our desires, we do not permit ourselves to be happy. We allow the experience of happiness only

under certain conditions. Even though we have the power to be happy all of the time, most of us permit ourselves to be happy only if certain things happen or if the circumstances of our lives meet certain conditions.

Bad Things Make Us Unhappy

It is no surprise that if something bad happens to a person, the immediate reaction will usually be unhappiness. When something bad happens we react, and sometimes our reactions are so overwhelming that they draw our attention away from happiness. At these times, reactions so consume us that we have little to no attention left. The mind cannot find happiness.

For example, if someone close to you dies, you are going to be unhappy. You have to go through the grieving process that is natural to us all. As we know from Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, this involves denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.^[37] This process does not last forever, but while it does, it is hard to avoid the physical and emotional experience of grief.

Loss of Belief Makes Us Unhappy

Earlier, I said that we are attached to our ideas and beliefs. Sometimes the loss of belief can be as devastating as a physical injury or the loss of something or someone we hold dear.

For example, we all have ideas about how life should be. When tragedy strikes, such as the death of a loved one — especially before “his time” — we grieve for our loss. However, we also grieve for the “loss of the belief that it shouldn’t have happened at all.”^[38] The fact of the loss calls into question our fundamental assumptions about the way we think life should be.

In the film, *Gone with the Wind*, there is a scene in which Ashley is both despondent and nostalgic for the life that he and Scarlett O’Hara had lost. He says, “We’ve traveled a long road since the old days, haven’t we, Scarlett?...the golden warmth and security of those days.” However, Scarlett says, “Don’t look back, Ashley, don’t look back. It’ll drag at your heart until you can’t do anything but look back.”^[39]

Ashley suffers from loss of the belief that life can be good. This kind of loss is perhaps the hardest to get over. Wounds heal, but belief, once lost, is hard to get back.

The Way to Find Unconditional Happiness

To find lasting happiness you first have to learn that unconditional happiness exists. Then you need to turn your attention to real happiness. To shift your attention to happiness

you have to free it from its attachment to your desires for what you mistakenly think will make you happy. These are your desires for sense pleasures and conditional happiness.

Learning That Unconditional Happiness Exists

The most important single thing you can do to find lasting happiness is to learn and understand that it exists. As the Buddha said, “we become what we think.”^[40] You have to learn that unconditional happiness exists, and you need to learn how to permit it to come into your life. You have to learn that sense pleasures and conditional happiness cannot lead to the lasting happiness that you want.

Once you know the truth of happiness, and incorporate it into the way you approach the world, you can eliminate a huge amount of dissatisfaction from your life. Knowing that sense pleasures and conditional happiness do not give you real happiness will help you to overcome your desire for them. Knowing that unconditional happiness is there for the asking will encourage you to direct your efforts to finding it.

I discuss the nature of unconditional happiness in Chapter 2, so will not repeat it here. I will say, however, that once you come to know in your heart that it exists, you will have taken the biggest step on your path to happiness.

Turn Your Attention to Unconditional Happiness

Once you know that real happiness is not conditional, you need to begin turning your attention to it. You also need to choose it. Then you will find happiness effortlessly increasing in your life. You attend to it by allowing yourself to be happy without anything changing in your life.

One good way to practice turning your attention to happiness is to meditate on it. In meditation, you can learn to let go of your thoughts and ideas, and in the quietness that remains seek your place of happiness.

Many years ago, I started practicing an “unconditional happiness meditation.” Once in a meditative state, I would gently tell myself to “be happy, for no reason at all.” I must admit that during this meditation I often felt a deep sense of the irrationality of what I was doing. My mind could not make any sense of the idea of just being happy. I persisted, however, and found that happiness could arise all by itself. I did not have to imagine any good thing happening to me, and I did not have to imagine my life being any different from what it was. I could just be happy.

What I have just described is only one way to meditate on happiness. Another way is to do a simple meditation, such as watching your breathing and allowing happiness to come to you. It will come.

The more often happiness comes in meditation, the more familiar you become with how it feels to be happy. Your knowledge of it will deepen, and as it deepens, you will find it easier to be happy in meditation and in your day-to-day life.

It is important to learn that unconditional happiness exists, and to begin turning your attention to it. You need to do this first, because the next step, letting go of your desires for sense pleasures and conditional happiness, is hard. It is like giving up an addiction. You cannot give up these desires without first knowing that something better awaits you.

Letting Go of Desire for What You Assume Will Make You Happy

Once you know that unconditional happiness is possible, you need to turn your attention to it. To do this, you have to free your attention from your desires for what you assume will make you happy. You have to reduce the importance of them in your life. Reducing your focus on desires is hard because you may have built your entire life around getting and having things that you mistakenly believe will provide lasting happiness.

One way of describing this idea of turning towards happiness is to say you are redirecting your attention. You have a powerful urge to be happy. You need to take that power and redirect it towards happiness. (In Buddhist training, they refer to this as learning to redirect attention from unwholesome cravings to wholesome desires, such as happiness.^[41]) As you pull your attention away from desires and cravings for material goods, popularity, career success, relationships, etc., you turn more and more to the unconditional happiness you seek.

Unfortunately, if you are like most of us, your mind is attached to your desires for what you think will make you happy. The presumption that sense pleasures and conditional happiness will provide lasting happiness is extremely hard to overcome. Severance of your mind's attachment to its myriad desires is the path to happiness and eventual enlightenment in yoga, Buddhism, Taoism, and even in religious devotion.

Later in this book, you will find practices aimed at helping you free your mind of its attachments to desires so that it may turn its attention to happiness. The following summarizes these practices.

Mindfulness

To let go of desires and cravings, you need to be mindful, moment to moment, of what you think and do. We'll describe mindfulness in Chapter 8 as being aware of the moment, as well as how you are being in the moment. Just knowing what you are doing, saying, and thinking right now, moves you a giant step closer to happiness.

In Chapter 4, I also talk about the way you experience the world. That chapter can also help you to be mindful of your thoughts, words, and deeds.

Meditation

I suggest that you meditate regularly. Chapters 9 and 10 cover meditation. In the quiet of meditation, you can experience for yourself the true happiness that is available to you. You can also learn to control your attention so that it is free to seek happiness.

Acceptance

The desire that leads to dissatisfaction and unhappiness is usually that the circumstances of life be other than as they are. A big part of eliminating self-centered desires is to accept things just as they are. As we will see in Chapter 11, to accept something does not mean you have to be apathetic about it, or like it. You simply accept it as it is without judgment.

Nonattachment

Nonattachment, discussed in Chapter 12, is a way of actively engaging in life without your happiness depending upon the result of what you do in life. In other words, your happiness is not contingent upon what you do or what you have. You continue to care about what happens, but you do not allow events and ongoing circumstances to disturb your happiness, peace, and equanimity.

Selflessness, Charity, Compassion, and Forgiveness

Selflessness and charity are the opposite of the self-centered desires for what you think will make you happy. These virtues put the needs of others ahead of your own personal needs. As you practice these virtues, you weaken your attachment to desire, and move closer to happiness. We look at selflessness and charity in Chapter 13.

Compassion and forgiveness of others, which are the hallmarks of selflessness and charity, move you closer to happiness because these virtues take your focus off your personal needs and desires. We'll examine compassion and forgiveness in Chapter 14.

Ethical Living

All spiritual practices and beliefs emphasize ethical living, promoting the ethical life in a variety of ways, some positive and some negative. The negative is obvious: "If you sin, you will go to hell!" This negative approach perhaps works for adolescents. However, most clear-minded seekers prefer the positive incentive for ethical living, which is that this type of living helps you and others find peace and happiness.

In the appendices on Buddhism and yoga, we will look at the guidance for living that these practices offer. We'll see how ethical living weakens the self-centered desires that

make us dissatisfied with life.

For example, practicing the virtue of truthfulness is conducive to happiness in many ways. In addition to the fact that you relate better in life when you tell the truth, being truthful helps you be happy. When you are not truthful, your motives for lying are often selfish. Often the motive is greed. You lie to get something that you do not deserve, or you lie to avoid some punishment. Anytime you tell a selfish lie, you make it easier to lie the next time. You also strengthen the self-centered motives for lying. You cannot eliminate self-centered desires if your actions keep making them stronger.

The Self-Centered Self

Let me introduce you to what I call the “self-centered self.” Knowing this character may help you better understand the remedy for overcoming your attachment to desires for what you may mistakenly believe will make you happy. The path to happiness involves weakening and eliminating the self-centered, egoic self from your life.

If you can be mindful, whether in meditation or while performing some simple task, you can experience the self-centered self. This self is that inner sense of you that wants to live forever, avoid pain, be regarded as special, and get whatever it wants. (It is like a perpetual adolescent.) We all harbor one of these, even if we try to hide it. We all know people for whom the self-centered self is on full display.

I call it the self-centered self because it is not only conscious of itself, but is quite self-centered. Others may call it the self-conscious self, the ego, or the egoic self.

Qualities of the Self-Centered Self

The primary qualities of the self-centered self are fear of harm, fear of loss, fear of death, want, envy, jealousy, and frustration. These are all emotions that are inwardly generated and unreasoning. They are also, by the way, the negative emotions frequently seen in adolescents.

All of these are selfish qualities that come into play when you thirst for something that you do not have. Of course, you do not experience yourself as self-centered when you are in the midst of these experiences. The honest acknowledgement of your selfishness is a mature experience. When you are acting selfishly, your emotions are quite immature.

Exercise: Finding the Self-centered Self

Here is an exercise to help you gain awareness of the self-centered self.

To get a sense of this self, try sitting quietly with your eyes open, looking at some object, such as a flower or a picture. Allow that object to fill your awareness, so that you get

a sense of its existence as an object separate from yourself. Do this for ten minutes, so that you get a good sense of this object just being there, existing by itself and taking up space as a separate thing. Try to feel its solidity. Try to experience its realness.

While observing this object, try to be present. Also, without focusing on yourself, be aware of yourself as you experience the realness of the object. You may get a sense that you feel more real than you ordinarily do.

Once you are present, sensing the solidity and separateness of this object, turn your attention back to yourself. Try to be self-aware. Now go back to experiencing the realness of the object. Once again, try to be present. Then, go back to your self-centered self. Try to go back and forth.

You should get a sense of your self-centered self as a kind of separate consciousness. It may seem like a separate kind of thing within you.

What I am trying to get you to experience with this exercise is a sense of your “present self,” in contrast to your self-centered self. The present self sees and experiences an object. The present self is here and now. The self-centered self, on the other hand, does not directly experience the object. Its focus is your mind and memory and, by extension, the utility of the object. The self-centered self feels different because it is not present. It is a mental construct, accumulated over the years.

The self-centered self needs things, is afraid of things, feeds on compliments, wants to be right about everything, and is embarrassed when viewed in an unflattering light. The self-centered self flares conspicuously when aroused by one of its signature experiences: fear of harm, fear of loss, want, envy, jealousy, and frustration.

Loss of the Self-centered Self

Those who have rid themselves of their self-centered selves can function just fine without it. Its loss does not diminish the ability to function - and function very well. In fact, without the fear of failure or the greed for reward that accompanies the self-centered self, you are free to express who you *really* are. It is said that there is no greater joy.

Absent self-preoccupation, the only thing that seems to change is what you decide to do. When incessant personal desires are no longer your priority, and when you overcome your dissatisfaction with life, what remains is simply happiness, and compassion for others. Your goals in life change from concern for personal reward to concern for others.

Practicing Happiness

Once you see the source of real happiness, you can start to look to yourself for it

instead of waiting for something to happen in the world. This truth is a hard lesson to learn because it probably goes against everything you ever learned about being happy.

Knowing and believing that happiness is natural to you and that you do not have to do anything to be happy is a rare thing. Just knowing this truth is a huge step. The next step is to incorporate this knowledge deeply into the way that you think, and the way that you respond to the world.

Happiness and a Sense of Approval

Let us consider the approval of others. If you are like most of us, from the moment you were aware of other people, you wanted their approval. Having a sense of the approval of others makes us feel comfortable and safe in the world. If you feel comfortable and safe, chances are you will permit yourself to experience real happiness as well.

In modern society, it is sometimes difficult to confirm the approval of others. Some cues from others are objective and obvious, clearly communicating their judgments of both acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Sometimes, though, the cues that we receive from others are ambiguous.

There are thousands of little things that we pick up from others signaling what they think of us. These thousands of little cues can be difficult to read. In some complex fashion, all of the feedback, both subtle and overt, that you pick up from others must come together as one single gestalt in your mind, and if there are enough positive cues, you may permit yourself to feel approval.

This system for knowing whether you have the approval of others seems chancy to me. For any number of reasons you may misinterpret the cues from others, and feel disapproval. If you cannot permit yourself to be happy without their approval, then this is just one more thing in life that gets in the way of happiness. If you do not feel approved of, you can find it difficult to function in the world.

If you do not feel approval, what can you do? You need to stop thinking about it. Thinking about yourself in comparison to others, or thinking about how other people view you can be very destructive. Psychologists call this thinking rumination. When you ruminate about yourself, you only feel worse about yourself.

When you ruminate on thoughts of disapproval, there are emotions associated with those thoughts. These emotions give the thoughts great power. These thoughts and emotions set off a cascade of negative, destabilizing thoughts and feelings throughout your body.

You need to stop ruminating on disapproval. One way to do this is to try to shift your attention to a sense of unconditional happiness. Treat all of these thoughts of disapproval as

just thoughts. As in meditation (see Chapters 9 and 10), when thoughts of disapproval come up, just let them go. Turn your attention to happiness. Practice happiness by controlling your mind. Let go of thoughts and feelings of disapproval and move your attention to happiness. What you will find when you do so is the emotional power of your thoughts of disapproval simply disappears. You can now objectively consider your thoughts or impressions of disapproval without their sending you into a downward spiral of rumination.

If you cannot let the thoughts go, then pick yourself up and do something to distract yourself. It may be just going for a walk. However, it should be something physical that pulls your attention away from your thoughts. This advice, which comes from the book, *The How of Happiness*, is a great way to break a cycle of rumination in which you may be stuck. *The How of Happiness* has many good tips for stopping the process of rumination.

If you can move yourself to a place of happiness, you can see things clearly. Happy people function better in the world. In addition, happy people may be more likely to look for signs of approval. Being in a habitual sense of unhappiness, on the other hand, can cause you to see everything in a negative light. Learn to look inside for your unending source of happiness, and you may find yourself feeling approved of more often.

Remember that although it appears that the signs you read from others creates your feelings of approval or disapproval, this is not so. You read the signs and, based on your mind's wiring, create feelings of approval or disapproval. Because you create these feelings yourself, they are probably a poor indicator of the way people think about you.

You might say, "Wait a minute! Sometimes I feel disapproval. These feelings are real. I have to pay attention to these feelings!"

Do you really have to pay attention to them? Consider this. You create your feelings of approval or disapproval. You do this based on your mind's internal rulebook. Such feelings are subjective. How accurate are these feelings? Perhaps a word or raised eyebrow triggered in you a very old memory of past rejection, and your feelings of disapproval now are really your feelings of disapproval back then.

Certainly, you should acknowledge that you have these thoughts and feelings. However, relying on emotions can be a poor way to make judgments. If you can practice happiness, you weaken the power of emotion, and you can see clearly. Once you are happy, you can examine what triggered your sense of disapproval and make a better judgment about what to do about it.

When I was young, I worked in a very large firm. I do not recall any evaluations by supervisors, and I never knew how well I was doing. With no actual information about how

well I was doing or what they thought of me, I reacted both emotionally and automatically to whatever cues happened to stray my way.

I did not have any emotional sense of being approved of, thought well of, or anything like that. I left after a little more than two years. I made the decision to leave this firm based on nothing other than my emotions and insecurities.

Getting It, Getting It, Getting It

As you practice happiness, you will likely have many moments of “getting it.” What I mean by “getting it” is you will get (experience) the realization that you can be happy without doing anything at all. You will know (get) that you can simply move from wherever you are to a place where you are happy.

Getting this realization for the first time is a delightful experience. You may even call it an enlightening experience. Once, however, is not enough.

You are dealing with a mind that has billions of little connections, all coded with the idea that only “things” make you happy. For me, this coding seems “hard-wired” and “baked” into the way I think. But every time you get the realization that you can be happy without changing anything in your life, you may be weakening this coding a little bit. It takes time to change all of this coding, but every step moves you closer to happiness.

When I sit in meditation, some thought or emotion will often grab my attention and pull me into the old cause-and-effect way of thinking. Once I notice this, I move my attention back to happiness, and I realize once more that I can be happy for no reason. The realization means that I have retrained (rewired) a little bit more of my brain. I expect this process to go on indefinitely. However, every time I sit down in meditation, it gets a little easier to access and stay in the feeling of happiness.

Chapter 4

The World That We Experience

You live in the real world, but you rarely (if ever) see it. ^[42] Instead, you know only the version that you experience. ^[43] The physical world is whatever it is, but your experience of it is all your own. Part of finding your power to be happy is in knowing that your experience is your creation. You have the power to experience the world as a place of happiness.

Your experience of the world results from your perception of it. Because it is your perception, you are responsible for the way you see the world. In your mind, the world can be dark and loathsome, or it can be light and happy. It can be full of things that make you miserable, or it can be full of things that make you joyful. It can be heaven, or it can be hell.

Constructing Your World

The world that you see comes to you through your physical senses. In each moment of awareness, you internally construct your perception of the world based on the input from these senses. In other words, from the raw material of sense impressions, your mind constructs your world. From these perceptions, you build and maintain an image of the world in your mind.

Swami Satchidananda put it this way:

The entire outside world is based on your thoughts and mental attitude. The entire world is your own projection. ^[44]

You interact with your image of the world. As long as your image of the world is a more or less accurate reflection of the real world, you can successfully interact with it. Your internal model of the world, while not a perfect representation of it, usually enables you to get from Point A to Point B in reality without much trouble. ^[45]

It is important to understand that the world you know is in large part a creation of your mind. If you believe that the world, as you perceive it, is the way it is and is unchangeable, then you cannot change it. You cannot change it even if you mistakenly see the world as dark and unhappy, and sincerely wish it were otherwise. If, however, you understand that your perception of the world is largely of your own making, then you can change your experience of the world by changing the way you look at it.

When you realize that the real world is not necessarily the way you think it is, you are

beginning to know the truth of life. And the more you know the truth, the more you are aware of possibilities for happiness that may not currently be apparent to you.

A Filtered World

The world as you see it is a filtered world. You filter out of conscious awareness most of what happens around you. You do this because you cannot be aware of everything that is happening right now. This filtering process makes it possible to live and function in the world, without being overloaded by all of the images, sounds, and sensations that bombard you every second. However, filtering also limits your ability to see the world as it is, and casts doubt on the accuracy of what you think you know about reality.

A great illustration of filtering is the famous experiment described by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons in their book, *The Invisible Gorilla*. In this experiment, subjects were asked to watch a short film in which two teams, one wearing white shirts and one wearing black, passed basketballs among themselves. The subjects were supposed to count the number of passes made by the white-shirted team. They were supposed to ignore the players in the black shirts.

Counting the passes required focus, and the subjects filtered out much of what they saw. One of the things that many filtered out was a woman wearing a gorilla suit who appeared on the scene for nine seconds midway through the video. She thumped her chest in full view, and then left. While thousands of test subjects have watched this video, only about half were aware of the gorilla. They were so focused on their task that they were blind to everything else.^[46]

How do we choose what to allow into conscious awareness, and what to filter out? Most of the time, we take in what we expect to see, or what we are looking for, and filter out the rest. If you keep seeing and hearing the same things every day, it is probably because you are looking for them and filtering out everything else. For instance, have you noticed that your drive to work looks pretty much the same every day?

A World Created by Care

In his book, *Time and Being*, the philosopher Martin Heidegger sought to identify the essential “being-ness” of humankind. In other words, aside from the obvious physical characteristics, he wanted to know the essence of what makes us human.^[47]

What makes you human, according to his analysis, is the fact that things matter to you. You consciously care about things. The defining characteristic of your existence in the world is that you want certain things, you do not want other things, and as for the rest, you are

indifferent. In important ways, you define yourself, and you define the world in which you live, by caring. What you care about becomes the world you see. In addition, your self-image is in many ways the image of all of the things that matter to you.

Caring is so important that it creates the world you see. As you move in the world, you see most clearly those things you care about, and you disregard the rest. Even the distance or location of things depends on how much they matter to you. For example, if you see a friend across the street, that person is, in important ways, closer to you than the stranger standing next to you.

A Remembered World

The world that you perceive is not only filtered; it exists largely in memory. You create your perception of it mostly from memory.^[48] At any point in time, what you think you see of the world is not what you see right now, but what you remember of how it existed in the past. Let me illustrate this concept using this picture of a boy bouncing a ball.



Assuming the ball is not stationary by defying gravity or being attached to the boy's hand, it is either moving up or down — but which is it? Is it moving up or down? You can guess, but it is impossible to know. It is as if you are looking at one frame of a filmstrip. You can know if the ball is moving up or down only by looking at the frames before or after the one you are focused on.

The boy with the ball illustrates the dilemma of human perception. As you observe what is happening in the world, you see only one moment (frame) at a time. You see only “now.” It is impossible for you to see “now,” and the split second before “now,” simultaneously. So how do you know what is happening? Very simply, you see “now” and simultaneously associate “now” with your memory of the past.^[49]

If you see where the ball is now, and simultaneously examine your memory of where it was 1/100th of a second ago, you will know if the ball is moving up or down. While you may assume that you see the ball bouncing “now,” in reality you do not, because much of what you think you see now is what you remember from the past.

Let us expand the timeframe of the boy and ball, and assume that the frame you are now looking at is 15 minutes into a basketball game. As you watch the boy with the ball, your mind may be recalling what he did five minutes ago, or how he has played in other games. You may be speculating about what he will do next. Your mind is dealing with so much remembered information that what you see “now” may play only a minor part in what you perceive and remember of this moment.

Problems with Reliance on Memory

As the boy-with-the-ball illustrates, the way you perceive what happens forces you to rely on memory. Much of what you think you see comes from your memory and expectations. The world, as you see it, is not the world as it is. It is impossible to see the world as it is because you are always limited to seeing it frame by frame. Perhaps your memory of the previous frame is accurate, and perhaps not. Perhaps the world changed from what it was when you last looked at it; perhaps memory is faulty; perhaps you remember the world from another time or place.

Not only can your perception of reality be “off”; reliance on memory keeps your attention focused on the contents of memory rather than on the world itself. If you are looking at your memories, you are not mentally present. If you are not present, you have no chance of seeing the world as it is. I am not saying that the real world never reveals itself. If you smash your finger with a hammer, you are suddenly very much aware of what is happening. Most of the time, though, your attention is focused on the past or the imagined future.

When you are not present to see reality as it is, you limit your view of it to your mental construct of it. You may have a distorted view of reality that you cannot correct because you are not present to see it as it is. Distortions may be negative or positive, but they

are still distortions.

A Negative Bias

The mind seems to have a negative bias when it comes to interpreting and reacting to what we see. The bad things we see make more of an impression on us than the good things. Negative information is likely to have more impact on our final impression of something than does positive information. As we look at the world, it is not through rose-colored glasses. We tend to view the world as something more hostile than it is. For example, evidence suggests that, in close personal relationships, bad events have five times the impact of good ones. [\[50\]](#)

One of the few areas where the bias may not be negative is in our view of ourselves. Most people seem to remember and emphasize the good about themselves, and downplay the bad.

Some psychologists think that the negative bias of the mind is adaptive. In the jungles and plains of 100,000 years ago, missing an opportunity for something good usually did little harm. If you missed an apple on a tree, there would always be another. However, if you missed something bad, that very well could have been the end of you. For instance, you might have missed a snake lying quietly on a branch by an apple. You could have missed several apples, and still found another. But if you failed to notice the snake — mortal, or at least grim, consequences.

Therefore, we evolved to be more alert to the bad than to the good. It was an effective adaptation to a very dangerous world. Of course, it was a world in which nobody expected to live that long.

Today, we expect to live a long time. A mind biased towards the bad and the dangerous is no longer adaptive to current circumstances. Psychologists tell us that the mind that is constantly on the alert for danger is unhealthy in the long term. As we age, it contributes to the risk of heart attack, stroke, and hypertension. In addition, a negatively biased mind means that a long life will be, for many of us, an extended period of unhappiness.

A dog bit Joanie when she was very young. Whenever she sees a dog, an old memory stirs, and any dog looks vicious to her. She lives in a neighborhood with many dogs, all of which appear frightening to her. Joanie has a powerful emotional desire for things to change in her neighborhood, and this unfulfilled desire makes her unhappy. However, the distorted way in which she sees things causes the unhappiness she experiences, not the dogs.

Is Your Reality What You Think It Is?

Let us recap the discussion so far.

- Your perception of the world is based on your physical senses.
- You go about the world filtering out much of what you see.
- Most of the time, your attention focuses on the contents of your memory of the world.
- Your mind tends to focus more on the bad than the good.

Given the way in which you perceive the world, how much can you really know about it? I hope you can conclude that there is a lot more you could know, right now, if only you open yourself to looking, listening, and experiencing the world as it is. The indisputable fact is, things do not happen in the way you think they do. You experience only your perception of the world, which has profound implications for how you understand and interact with it.

That we have created and are now creating the world we see around us is a recurring theme of the Buddha. He said:

We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts; with our thoughts, we make our world.

He also said,

We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.

As mentioned in Chapter 2 — and I believe it can't be stressed enough — Swami Satchidananda echoes these ideas, saying that, depending on how you perceive the world, “The same world can be a heaven or a hell.” ^[51] He said that we all have a “magic wand” with which we can create our heaven (or hell) on Earth.

Jesus may have been referring to our inability to see the real world when he said, “The Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it.” ^[52]

Knowing that things may not be as they seem can provide insight into how to react to what happens around you. ^[53] It may cause you to doubt what you think you know about what is possible.

I believe that most people would be surprised to know the extent to which human perception changes the world that we see. My advice to them is the same as that of Hamlet, who said:

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. ^[54]

The Cage

The internal image of the world, which we create, is crucial to our survival. We evolved to create an understanding of the world so that we can know how to thrive in it, and predict what it will do. The problem is, our version of reality also *limits* what we believe we can do. Our version of reality is like a cage. It both protects us and locks us in.

When I see a car, I see a real car, but to understand what I see, I reference an image of a car that I keep in my mind. My image reflects my experience of all cars. When I see a car, or just part of a car, I can bring to mind a complete image of a car like it. I also imagine things that the car is likely to do, so that I can navigate around it. What I experience, therefore, is more my creation than the reality of the actual car. However, my ability to anticipate the movements of the car enables me to be safe and effective in the world.

While a mental model of the world is necessary, it can dominate and narrow the focus of our attention, making it impossible to bring into awareness anything else. After painstakingly assembling a detailed model of the world in the mind, we lock ourselves into it. We lock ourselves in to a mental cage.

One of the fundamental images about the world that we create is what you think of as ourselves (the self-image). Our self-image is necessary. As part of this self, we carry images of ourselves, perhaps millions of them. We have images for every age we were, and ideas about how we will be in the future. We have detailed information about how to do what we do. We remember how we have failed in the past, and have ideas about how we can avoid failing in the future. We remember the times we were happy in the past, and have beliefs about what it will take to make us happy in the future. We have information about thousands of things we like and do not like. We have millions of bits of information about our work or the subjects we study in school, our friends, our enemies, and everything else we need to know. We have “a take” on just about everything, and little inclination to do “double takes.” The mind is complex beyond imagining, and we carry all of this within us, referring to it constantly.

After creating this detailed image of ourselves, we lock it down. A fixed self-image is of course helpful for getting around in life. Life would be beyond difficult if we were to wake up every morning wondering who we were and what we could do. However, this self-image is also a cage, its imaginary bars are the images that we have created.

You need a strong self-image to be effective in the world. However, the stronger the self-image (the more impregnable the cage), the harder it is to change the way you see yourself and the world in which you live.

The stronger the focus on your image of yourself, the more isolated you are. In the play *Peer Gynt*, Henrik Ibsen observed this about inmates in a “madhouse”:

*Here we are ourselves with a vengeance;
Ourselves and nothing whatever but ourselves.
We go full steam through life under the pressure of self.
Each one shuts himself up in the cask of self,
Sinks to the bottom by self-fermentation,
Seals himself in with the bung of self,
And seasons in the well of self.
No one here weeps for the woes of others.
No one here listens to anyone else’s ideas.
We are ourselves, in thought and in deed,
Ourselves to the very limit of life’s springboard.* ^[55]

Mindfulness: Seeing the World as It Is

To see reality as it is, you have to learn to be comfortable with being in the absolute moment. Being in the moment gives you the power to see beyond the normal confines of your mind. Being in the moment allows you to break free of the limits of your everyday way of thinking. Without these limits, you can pull your attention away from the trap that is your mind, and shift your attention to happiness.

It is important to remember that the world you see and interact with is the image of the world that you have constructed in your mind. You cannot avoid this fact. However, by knowing and being steadily mindful of it, you can perhaps learn to see the world with fewer distortions.

At a minimum, you can learn to see the world as it is right now; not as you remember it to be, as you want it to be, or as you fear it might be. As I discuss in Chapters 8 through 10, you can learn to be mindful of the present moment through the practices of mindfulness and meditation.

In many ways, to be mindful is to see the world as a child, with all of the freshness and wonder that this entails. ^[56] Each sunrise is a fresh experience, and the stars at night are always new and bright. Your spouse or partner is always new and exciting. Your friends and children are always interesting, even when they repeatedly do and say the same things.

Changing Your Perception of the World

If you change the way you perceive the world, you will change the world that you experience. Merely by changing your perception, you can change the world from one that is dark to one that is light. You can change a sad world into one that is happy. You can learn to change your perception, and in so doing create the happy world that you want.

You change the way you perceive the world by changing your internal experience. For example, you may change that experience from unhappiness to happiness, or from selfishness to selflessness. These changes affect what you care about in the world. According to Heidegger, what you care about determines, in large part, what you see in the world.

A Christian mystic, Brother Lawrence, said, “God is everywhere, in all places.” [\[57\]](#) Brother Lawrence changed his internal perception of the world, and as a result, the world for him became a much better place.

Jesus said that heaven is all around us - and “within” — but we do not see it.

You can change your experience of the world by learning to shift your attention from your self-centered desires to unconditional happiness. You can harness the power of your natural desire for happiness, and aim it directly at what you seek.

By shifting your attention to happiness and letting go of self-centered desires, you change what you care about, and thereby change your world. The world you see will appear different to you because as you change what you care about, you change what draws your attention.

Brother Lawrence cared about God, and his attention focused on God in all things. Likewise, if I am in a positive mood, I see happiness all around me.

Creating the Substance of Your World

Some believe in a creator God or Divinity that created and continues to create the real world. In addition, some believe that each one of us is God and creates his or her own reality. Some hold that reality itself is an illusion.

I do not have any conscious experience of creation taking place, of willfully manifesting my own reality. Perhaps I create things unconsciously. However, my unconscious is unknown to me. I cannot say what kind of creative activity takes place in the deepest part of my being. Therefore, I cannot say anything about the creation of the world by a creator God, and I cannot say anything about my personal creation of the world.

I do acknowledge my personal responsibility for my *perception and experience* of the world. Regardless of how the real world comes into being, the world as I experience it is my creation. And because I create my perception, I can change my perception, and thereby

change my experience of the world. This power of perception is something you should not take lightly. Out of this power comes your ability to find lasting happiness.

I cannot say anything about creation of reality because it is beyond what I can consciously experience. In this book, I focus only on what we consciously experience. How substantial reality is created or changed I will leave to others to explore and discuss.

Chapter 5

The Source of Happiness

In this chapter, we explore questions regarding the ultimate Source of happiness. That Source may be the human body. It may be God, the Divine, or another universal power. I will talk about finding and experiencing that Source, and focusing on it. I will also talk about how beliefs about that Source get in the way of your experience of it.

In this book, I focus on what you can experience. I try not to speculate on what you cannot experience. In other words, I try not to talk about what you cannot verify through personal experience.

The question of the Source of happiness is a mystery, and we obsess about mysteries. Knowing the nature of that Source may not help you find happiness. However, nagging questions about it can get in the way of the search for and openness to happiness. Therefore, in this chapter we will talk about it.

The Buddha said that he could point the way to unconditional happiness, but the path is experiential. You have to walk that path yourself, and discover the experience for yourself. The direct route to happiness is through experience, not through knowing the nature of happiness and not through belief. This chapter can perhaps help you avoid too much focus on matters of belief and speculation, so you can devote your energy to finding the experience of happiness.

We will not revolve or resolve the question of the Source of happiness. However, perhaps in this chapter you can discover a way to think about it. Perhaps I can help you put aside questions, so you can focus on finding the experience of that Source.

Possible Sources of Happiness

There are at least three possible sources of happiness. Happiness can be a natural ability of the body and mind that has nothing to do with anything else. Happiness can be the experience of the Divine. Alternatively, happiness can be the experience of some other power or energy of the universe. Because of the limits of human awareness, we know little about whether happiness is natural or has some other source.

Happiness as a Natural Ability

The Source of happiness may be the human body. We may all have a natural power to

make ourselves happy by triggering various reactions in the body and/or brain. These reactions could trigger the release of chemicals that cause us to experience happiness.

Happiness might also be a natural ability to redirect attention to a place in the mind where everything is perfect and happy. Perhaps by shifting attention, we shut off that part of the brain and mind that is in charge of making us worry.

Happiness may have nothing to do with what is happening outside the body, but may be a natural human ability. We have the power to go to sleep, which is a mysterious power. Why should we not have the power to make ourselves happy?

A Divine Source of Happiness

Happiness may be the body's experience of a Divine Source. It may be an unconscious experience. When we allow a deep experience of the Divine to come into conscious awareness, we may experience it as happiness.

Some practices examined in this book assume the presence of the Divine, or God. For a long time, spiritual and religious thinking has associated real happiness with our experience of the Divine. At the end of this chapter, we'll look more closely at happiness as an experience of the Divine.

An Experience of the Energy or Power of the Universe

Happiness may be the body's experience of universal power or energy. Buddhist philosophy says that happiness comes from being in harmony with the universal truth, or laws of the universe, referred to as the dharma. Similarly, in Taoist philosophy, happiness comes from being in harmony with the Tao. Perhaps when we are in harmony with that energy or power, we experience it as happiness.

The Path to Happiness Is Through Experience

Our bodies have many experiences, but much that we experience may be unconscious. For example, some part of our bodies may experience skin cells growing, but this is not usually part of conscious awareness. Similarly, our bodies and minds may experience energies that lie beyond the human dimension of awareness. However, we are usually not conscious of these energies.

You have the power to experience the Source of happiness. To do so, you have to focus on the experience directly. Because of the limits on conscious human awareness, you may never consciously know the Source. The Source may be something that you cannot think about. If you try to understand or think about the experience of the Source, you may lose that experience.

Try Not to Name It — and Lose It

We commonly have fleeting experiences that we cannot identify. An experience may be vaguely familiar. It may be an unfamiliar feeling that is strange and enticing. These experiences can be fragile. If you try to figure them out, or name them, you can lose them.

When I have these experiences, they immediately capture my attention. However, when I try to focus on them and identify them, they disappear. Therefore, I try to stay with these experiences and avoid thinking about them too much.

Such feelings may be coming up from the unconscious. Perhaps your awareness has drifted into the unconscious. It seems that attention can go there, and when it does, you may not have the same mode of thought that you have in conscious awareness.

If you try to identify something within the unconscious while your attention is there, you may immediately pull yourself out of the unconscious, into conscious awareness, and lose the experience you seek to identify.

It seems the experience of unconditional happiness has its immediate source in the unconscious (its final Source may be something else). If you can have an experience of unconditional happiness, you need to stay with it, and not try to figure it out. Once your mind kicks into gear and captures your attention, your ability to hold onto the experience of happiness vanishes.

We Are Aware of What We Recognize

It can be difficult to turn your attention to the experience of unconditional happiness if you have not learned where to find it or how it feels. You may be experiencing the Source now, but if you have not learned to recognize it, the experience can merge with all other unknown experiences. The larger experience is the background “noise” against which what is familiar to you stands out.

Imagine standing in the middle of a dense wood at one a.m. Your senses are taking in what you see, feel, hear, and smell. However, unless you are in the woods at night often, you may not consciously recognize what you are experiencing. Unless you have learned to identify what is out there in the dark, your mind will not be able to build an accurate picture of your surroundings.

To bring something into conscious awareness, the mind needs to have some previous knowledge of it. For example, if you are familiar with the sound of a chipmunk rustling in the dry leaves, you may bring that image to mind when you hear that sound in the dark. Otherwise, it is one of the many unknown noises that is part of the background sound of the woods at night.

Noises that you recognize will stand out against the background noises. For example, even in the woods at night, most of us will recognize the sound of crickets or the cry of a coyote. We will recognize them because we have been previously exposed to these sounds.

All of us probably experience the Source of happiness to some degree. Perhaps some of us have learned to recognize it for what it is. For others, it may just blend into the background “noise” of the universe.

Finding It and Allowing It to Fill Your Awareness

Once you can start to identify the Source of happiness, you need to allow it to grow within you. At first, your sense of it may be subtle. However, if you stay with it over time it can grow to fill your awareness.

Some believe that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains, that the entirety of God can inhabit a fingertip, and the universe can exist in a dewdrop. According to scientists, 13.8 billion years ago, just before the Big Bang, all the physical matter of the universe existed in a single point.

Similarly, the endless experience of unconditional happiness can grow from your smallest inkling of its existence. You simply need to find it and let it grow within you. You need to find and nurture the experience. It is not your knowledge or conception of it that is important. You need to focus on the experience.

Another way of putting this is, the path to happiness is not itself happiness. It is helpful to know the path and understand the path, but to bring happiness into your life you have to walk the path.

Thinking Gets in the Way

It seems that humans want more than experiences. We want to understand experiences, talk about them, and remember them. We try to “humanize” an experience, to hold it safe in conscious awareness. However, as we will see, it is difficult to turn an experience into a thought that reflects its true nature. For the experience of unconditional happiness, it may be impossible to do so.

Despite the difficulty of turning experiences into thoughts and words, humans feel the need to objectify and share them. Even if the Source of true happiness is beyond conscious understanding, we still want to know that Source. We may try to create a belief about it. Unfortunately, humanizing and thinking about the Source can cause loss of the experience of it.

The Difficulty of Thinking About Experience

Words and images comprise much of conscious thought. It is difficult to think of something without converting it into words and images. Experiences such as happiness are elusive. You can be aware of an experience without identifying it and without connecting it with a thought. However, it can be difficult to think of an experience without wanting to attach it to a distinct thought.

Thoughts are the province of the mind. The mind is like a toolbox full of sounds and words that we know, and the images with which we are familiar. From these, we make thoughts. The tools we have are perhaps right for our day-to-day use. Using them, we can describe and think about most of what we find in the world. However, they may not be useful for describing what we feel or experience. They may be inadequate for understanding the Source of happiness.

To understand and think of an experience, and to be able to hold it in conscious awareness, we have to make it into a thought. We do this using the tools we have, regardless of whether they are up to the task. What we end with is a “humanized” conception of the experience we try to describe.

Humanizing experience masks the Source of happiness. Unconditional happiness can have its source inside the body, or it can have a Divine Source. We may not know the real Source because when we make it into a conscious feeling of happiness, that Source disappears. Turning the experience into something understandable can destroy the essence of the experience.

As our bodies take in raw experience, such as the Source of happiness, we try to humanize that experience. We try to bring it into awareness using our inadequate toolbox of words, ideas, and images, and from these tools make a facsimile of what we experience. We can grasp only what we have learned to see. If something is incomprehensible, then we may turn it into something we can understand. However, what we turn it into may be much different from what it is.

Frithjof Schuon shows the difficulty of understanding experience, especially Divine experience, when he describes how hard it is for God to communicate with humans:

It is as though the poverty-stricken coagulation which is the language of mortal man were broken into fragments under the formidable pressure of the Heavenly Word, or as if God, in order to express a thousand truths, had but a dozen words at his command and so was compelled to make use of allusions heavy with meaning, of ellipses, abridgements and symbolical syntheses. [\[58\]](#)

Limits on the Ability to Talk About the Source of Happiness

Some experiences may be beyond human power to describe. We have them, but cannot easily talk about them. Though it is difficult to put them into words, there may be a shared basis of understanding among those who have had the same experiences. For example, if two people come from the same culture, there is a shared basis of understanding that enables them to talk about issues that are important in that culture.

Some experiences are personal, and there is no shared experience that enables communication. The following dialogue shows how difficult it is to talk about something when there is no shared experience.

A turtle was sitting on a rock, at the edge of a little pond, talking to his friend, the fish.

Turtle: I just went for a walk.

Fish: You mean, you just went for a swim.

Turtle: No, I went for a walk.

Fish: Impossible, you were swimming.

Turtle: I swear, I went for a walk.

In this story, the fish has no conception of walking, and without some shared experience, the turtle cannot explain it to him. Similarly, the experience of unconditional happiness is difficult to communicate. We need shared experience of it, and such happiness is rare, so there is not much experience to share.

Putting a Face on the Source

Whatever the difficulties in thinking about and communicating experiences, humans still want to understand them and share them with one another. We want to think about and talk about the Source of happiness, the Divine, and all that may exist beyond the limits of our conscious awareness. People want answers. For many, even a bad answer is better than no answer.

For example, when it comes to the Divine, people often want a picture of a deity, and they want to know its powers. A person can easily hold in the mind an image of a deity or a description of its abilities. This way, the deity becomes approachable and familiar.

We want to put a face on the Divine. Many Christians, for example, imagine God in human terms. When Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel, he included many representations of God. He painted God as an old man. Perhaps it is just me, but when I look at this image, I get the sense of a powerful king or patriarch who is clearly *of this world*. I do not get the sense of a Divine Being.

Try Not to Worry About Defining It

Our ability to think about the Source of happiness is limited. We may never be able to describe that Source in words. My attitude is not to worry about picturing and describing it. Knowing its exact nature has no effect on happiness.

My advice is to focus on opening yourself as much as possible to the experience of happiness, whatever it is. Thinking about its nature keeps your focus in your mind. If your attention is on wondering just exactly what it may *be*, you cannot open yourself to the experience of it.

Beliefs and Happiness

In our need to think about what we experience, we have created many beliefs. Some people have had experiences they call Divine. We have many beliefs about these experiences, and the deities that inspired them. According to Webster's, a belief is "a feeling of being sure that someone or something exists or that something is true," even if the belief is not supported by facts.

An unsupported belief is not necessarily false; and a belief you cannot disprove is not necessarily true. Also, if a belief has no proof, this does not mean you should not live your life according to that belief. However, beliefs about an experience are different from the experience. Beliefs about the Source of happiness are not the same as that Source. Focusing on those beliefs rather than the experience can prevent you from experiencing that Source.

Beliefs Need Attention

The difficulty with unverifiable beliefs is they require attention to keep them alive. People obsess about their beliefs, perhaps because there is always someone around who wants to challenge them. For example, the existence of a stop sign in front of you needs no belief. A sign is there, you stop, and then you forget about it. On the other hand, for most of us, the existence of God requires belief.

If you focus on your belief about an experience, you are not focusing on the experience. Our experience of the Source of happiness may be in the unconscious. The same is true of our experience of the Divine. Beliefs, on the other hand, belong in the conscious mind. If you are focusing on belief about an experience, your attention is stuck in your mind and you cannot have the experience.

Fitting the Experience of Happiness into Our Beliefs

If you focus on your beliefs about happiness, you may be trying to fit the experience of it into your beliefs. In other words, in the search for happiness, a person might try to see it as something that fits within and supports a specific belief. Here, beliefs can get in the way of

finding happiness.

Unconditional happiness is so rare in this world that we do not have a vocabulary for it. We do not have a shared experience or ability to think about it. To bring it into your life, you may have to make room for something that is beyond your conscious experience, and beyond the experience of nearly everyone else.

If unconditional happiness is beyond most people's conscious awareness, any beliefs you have about happiness may not accurately reflect the happiness you seek. If you aim towards the particular kind of happiness in which you believe, then you may miss the real thing.

Beliefs Should Not Affect the Experience

You experience happiness in your own unique way. The beliefs that you hold should have no effect on that experience. You may be a devout believer, or you may be a committed nonbeliever. Whatever beliefs you have are fine. Your experience of happiness should remain the same. Your belief should not cause you to block or deny your experience of happiness. You should try to allow your experience to coexist with the beliefs that you hold.

Your beliefs exist in your conscious mind while your experience may be direct. You may have ideas about how and when you can let yourself be happy. When beliefs get in the way of happiness, just let those beliefs go. Your beliefs may be correct, but they are still beliefs. Belief is no substitute for a true experience.

I have my beliefs about the Source of happiness. When I go into meditation, however, I let them go. I leave myself open to the experience I may have and not an experience for which I seek. I am not inclined to spend much time speculating about what is beyond my conscious awareness.

The spiritual teacher, J. Krishnamurti, said that all beliefs are cages for the mind, and belief can never lead to happiness.^[59] I would not go this far. I think that belief can perhaps soften the edges of existence, and take away some of the fear and anxiety that prevent you from being happy. However, I agree that beliefs can limit what you experience, and what you think you can do.

Some believe that they must suffer emotionally for all kinds of reasons. For example, someone who has hurt another in the past may believe that he or she must atone for what happened. That person may believe that feeling happy is undeserved, and wrong. Belief such as this can destroy happiness.

To have an experience of the Source, you do not have to believe anything. The experience exists independently of whatever beliefs you have. If you are a believer, do not

try to fit your happiness into what you believe. If you are a nonbeliever, do not let your lack of belief deny the experience.

My simple message is, do not let your beliefs prevent you from being happy. To let real happiness into your life, you have to feel that you are free to have your experience. Try to allow your beliefs or lack of beliefs to coexist with your experience of the Source of happiness.

Jesus and the Buddha Never Tried to Explain It

The founders of two great religions, Christianity and Buddhism, walked among us long ago. If anyone could explain the nature of the Divine, the nature of heaven, or the Source of happiness, it was Jesus and the Buddha. However, they never did so.

You would think that if anyone could tell us all about the Divine it would be Jesus. However, instead of providing particulars, he taught mainly in parables. He may have been more specific in private when speaking with his disciples, but in public, he told stories to try to get his message across.

When his disciples asked why he spoke to the people in parables, he said the people would not understand the truth. He explained, “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.” He added, “The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven has been given to you, but not to them.” [\[60\]](#)

The Buddha refused to talk about anything beyond what one could experience in this lifetime. Buddhism came into a culture with many gods, and the belief in a soul that traveled from lifetime to lifetime carrying with it a debt of karma. What did the Buddha have to say about God and the soul? He said little, which disappointed some of his followers.

Buddha taught for 45 years after his enlightenment. In his teaching he stressed the practical methods of obtaining what he found, which was nirvana (nirvana is the greatest happiness that humans can feel). He taught how to experience firsthand the truth of existence. Speculating about or describing in detail what his followers could experience on their own would have detracted from the goals of their practice.

When asked directly a series of basic metaphysical questions, the Buddha said that he would not explain his thinking because the information was not useful. They asked him whether the cosmos was eternal, whether it was finite or infinite, whether the soul and the body were the same or separate, and whether a Buddha existed after death. He said that he would not explain any of these matters.

He explained that such questions did not relate to the goal, and were not fundamental

to the holy life. He said that knowledge of these matters did not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening, or unbinding. He said that what he did explain, and what was useful, were the Four Noble Truths, which was his first teaching and the core of his teaching for the rest of his life. ^[61]

Unconditional Happiness as the Experience of the Divine

In this last section, I want to talk about unconditional happiness as an experience of the Divine. I am doing so because this is something that many believe. I will refer to it as a belief since it seems impossible to know the truth of this, due to the limits of human perception.

We may transform our experience of the Divine into what we recognize as happiness. As discussed in Chapter 2, happiness is an experience that everyone wants. Many believe that union with the Divine is also what everyone wants. Perhaps we experience the Divine in our bodies as happiness, and the desire for happiness and the desire for union are the same. Since experiences of the Divine are generally not part of our everyday world, perhaps we interpret feelings associated with the Divine as happiness, which is the best feeling we know how to experience.

St. Thomas Aquinas said that, in life, we experience only imperfect happiness. Perfect happiness, he believed, comes from seeing God or the Divine Essence. “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.” Aquinas implies that a person’s “final end,” which is perhaps the final purpose in life, is the happiness of knowing God. He concludes, “God alone constitutes man's happiness.” ^[62]

The philosopher Boethius agreed with Aquinas when he said, “God is happiness itself.” ^[63] What these two philosophers imply is that the closer you are to God or the Divine, the happier you become.

The Bhagavad Gita, one of the most important Hindu scriptures, has a message that is consistent with Aquinas and Boethius. It says that the Divine leads to happiness. ^[64]

Someone who has explored the question of the human experience of the Divine is Bernadette Roberts, who comes out of the Contemplative Christian tradition of St. John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart. ^[65] The practice of Contemplatives is to seek divine union with God while still in this life.

Roberts says this about the human experience of the Divine: “All we can know and experience of the divine...is limited to our human dimension of knowing and experiencing.” Our “experiences of the divine are virtually experiences of ourselves — the unconscious self

as it touches upon the divine.” Though human consciousness has an “experience of the divine, the divine is beyond the knowing, experiencing dimension of [human] consciousness.” She describes the experience of the Divine as the “deepest joy and sense of true life.” [\[66\]](#)

In other words, any experience of the Divine that we may have is unconscious. When we are aware of the Divine, it is not the experience of the Divine itself but is instead the experience of our reaction to the Divine. The experience of the Source that arises from the unconscious may be feelings such as happiness, joy, bliss, and equanimity. However, it is still our human experience.

According to Roberts, we cannot know the Divine directly; we can only experience our reaction to it. Similarly, it may be that we cannot know the Source of happiness; we can only experience our reaction to it.

*But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
~ Wordsworth*

Chapter 6

Purpose and Happiness

In this chapter, we examine the relationship between life purposes and happiness. We look at questions such as: Do you need a purpose in life to be happy? If you have a sense of purpose, does that purpose automatically make you happy? If you are a happy person, does this make everything you do seem more purposeful?

We Give Meaning and Purpose to Life

From a human perspective, without the individual, there is no purpose. Without the individual, there is no meaning to existence. Without the individual, the universe is a giant clockwork, ticking and turning through eternity. It is human minds and emotions that supply meaning and purpose to existence.

Am I saying, as do some philosophers, that life has no final purpose? Am I saying that a purpose is something that we invent to give us a reason for living? No, I am not saying that. Some purposes may exist independently of humans. However, I am looking at the question as a human. Therefore, everything I experience has relevance to me only from my human perspective.

The universe may exist for many purposes that have nothing to do with humans. However, I am concerned with my purposes. I must supply the thought and emotion to make something purposeful for me. There is no master list of purposes that I can choose from to decide what to do with my life.

If there are purposes that exist independently of humans, I do not know their source. However, I do know that my recognition and acceptance of something as being purposeful comes from my own thought and emotion.

Life Purposes

I will not try to identify the nature of anyone's purpose in life. Everyone adopts his or her unique purpose. Finding and adopting a purpose is part of the journey through life. However, here are some ideas about life purposes, just to get us thinking about it.

Some Common Life Purposes and Sources of Purposes

Certain purposes in life are so pervasive that they seem natural to us. As I stressed

earlier in the book, nearly everyone strives to be happy. As Aristotle said, happiness makes life worth living. The purpose of most of what people do is happiness. The Dalai Lama went even farther, when he said, “The purpose of your life is to be happy!”

Having a family and children is a major purpose for most people. Having children and raising a family may be equal to happiness as a purpose for many people.

The realization of yourself (self-realization, enlightenment, liberation, or nirvana) is a major purpose in life for many people. This purpose may have a human tone, such as realizing your potential as a human being. It can also have a religious tone, such as knowledge of and union with the Divine.

To stay alive is a major purpose for all of us. Interestingly, it may not be at the top of the list of life’s purposes. People often sacrifice their lives for causes, which gives those causes a higher purpose than life itself.

Most religions espouse purposes ordained by a Higher Power. For example, in Christianity the final purpose is salvation and heaven. In various branches of yoga, Hinduism, and Buddhism, liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth is the purpose of life.

An authority figure, such as a parent, mentor, or teacher, may impose a particular purpose. A parent, for example, may influence you in deciding that your purpose is to become a doctor. Sometimes this influence can turn into pressure. I have heard of parents disowning a child for failing to go to medical school.

The society in which you live offers a wide variety of culturally acceptable life purposes. Getting rich may be an important purpose in life in some societies. In other segments of society, a life purpose may be performing charitable work or defending the country through military service.

Are Some Purposes More Important Than Others?

People hold strong opinions about the values of their own purposes and the purposes of others. Some purposes may seem more important than others. The question of whether some purposes are more important than others may concern you. You might say, I have a purpose or a goal, but is it sufficiently worthy? Should I be looking for something else?

I do not believe that any purpose is inherently worthier than any other. We cannot know all ends. We cannot know the full outcomes of what we do in life. Neither can we know how our doings will eventually affect our lives, or how they will affect the lives of others, or even the final destiny of the world.

For example, suppose a woman named Putlibai had decided to become a nun instead of getting married, having children, and raising a family. She might have thought, “I will

become a nun and devote myself to humanity rather than selfishly seeking my happiness as a wife and mother.” Had she done so, the person we came to know as Mahatma Gandhi may not have been born.

While his mother’s choice led to the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, what goals and purposes, large and small, led to his parents meeting and getting married? What about his grandparents and great-grandparents? Some had purposes we might say were worthy, and some we might say were insignificant. All of their purposes led to where we are now. Could they have imagined where their purposes and goals might lead? No, they could not have.

Because you may not be able to predict how your choices will affect your life, it makes little sense to spend time trying to judge the inherent value of your purposes. It is much better to think about whether they are ones that you can wholeheartedly adopt and pursue right now.

Adopting a Personal Purpose

To adopt a purpose means to make it your own. An authority figure may try to impose a particular purpose on you, but it is not your personal purpose until you adopt it. Also, society endorses many purposes. Not until you adopt a societal purpose as your own is it your purpose. Until you adopt a purpose, it remains an outside (extrinsic) purpose. You may follow the requirements of an extrinsic purpose, but it is not your personal (intrinsic) purpose.

John’s father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all soldiers, whose highest purpose in life was service to their country. John became a soldier to please his father, but never adopted service to country as his motive for doing so. He joined only to please his father. After his father died, John resigned from the military and became a teacher. He adopted as his purpose the education of inner-city children.

Purpose and Happiness

The key question in this chapter is, how does possession of a purpose affect your happiness? Some people have major purposes and others do not. Does having or not having a purpose affect your power to be happy?

How Does Purpose Lead to Happiness?

If a purpose leads to happiness, or at least contributes to happiness, how does it do that? For one thing, purpose can promote happiness if it reduces the number of concerns on which you focus your attention. It can also lead to happiness when your purpose involves

service to others, thus building empathy and feelings of unity with others.

A purpose reduces the number of matters in the world that may concern you. It narrows your focus of attention. If you narrow your focus, you can gain a better sense of control over your life, and can let yourself be happy.^[67]

For example, my primary purposes in life are family, learning, writing, spiritual practice, teaching, and taking care of clients. I focus my attention and concern on these. If they are all going well, I find it easier to turn my attention to happiness. I am aware of what happens in the world, but except for presidential politics, which captures my attention for a few months every four years, I focus on my purposes. I do not allow the rest to disturb my happiness.

Purposes associated with providing a benefit to society can have an especially positive impact on happiness. Working for the benefit of others is the path of selfless action. In brief, acting selflessly weakens your attachment to your self-centered desires, and fosters empathy. As you free your attention from these desires, you may find it easier to shift your attention to the experience of unconditional happiness.

Having a larger purpose in life provides a smorgasbord of goals to meet in accomplishing that purpose. In *The How of Happiness*, the author points out that having goals provides distinct benefits that contribute to happiness:

- It provides structure in our lives (as I said earlier, it narrows the focus of our concerns),
- Gives us a sense of control in our lives,
- Increases self-esteem,
- Can provide a temporary jolt of happiness, following the fulfillment of a goal.
- Helps us to look past our troubles during times of great stress. (For Viktor Frankl, they provided a reason to go on living - and growing — inside a Nazi concentration camp.)
- Usually gets us out among people, which contributes to happiness.^[68]

Does Purpose Always Lead to Happiness?

Many of us have one or more important purposes in life. Does having a purpose always lead to happiness? A purpose can contribute to happiness, but it does not guarantee happiness. We can all think of people whom we know or have heard of who had worthy purposes, but were not happy.

Must You Have a Purpose to Be Happy?

If you have no important purpose in your life, then there may be nothing to narrow the focus of your attention. Without this focus, every random event that comes your way may

concern, excite, or worry you. You may bounce from one worry or wild enthusiasm to the next, with little control.

To have no focus may be a bit like endless grade school. For me, life through middle school was one new challenge after another. My family moved a lot, so it was new friends, new schools, new academics, and new teachers, all happening while I had to deal with changes in my body. There was no way to focus, and little that I could do to control my life. Sometimes I was happy, but my overall sense, as I remember it, was a feeling of little control.

Purpose Can Mean the Difference Between Life and Death

Not only can the experience of having a purpose contribute to happiness, it can mean the difference between life and death. In his seminal book, *Man's Search for Meaning*,^[69] Viktor Frankl talks about how a prisoner's belief that his life had purpose and meaning could make the difference between living or dying in the Nazi death camps. Those holding on to a purpose for living could find the strength to go on living, despite the daily horrors of existence, while others gave up and died.

Few of us will have to test our strength of purpose in the way that Frankl did. However, having purposes and goals does contribute to happiness, and happier people are healthier and live longer. Therefore, while the effect of purpose on your life is unlikely to be as stark as it was for Jews in Nazi Germany (and elsewhere), it is no less real.

Happiness, Purpose, and Self-Centered Desires

In Chapter 3, I discussed the need to overcome self-centered needs and desires, and the wisdom of lessening your focus on conditional happiness to weaken its hold on your attention. When you are free of such control, you can turn your attention to experience lasting happiness. The question then arises: Can you have a strong purpose in life and still be happy? Is there some danger that such a purpose will dominate your attention, and prevent you from being happy?

As long as your happiness does not *depend on* achieving your purpose, and as long as self-centered desires are not behind the purpose, you can be happy. In other words, as long as your focus is not on conditional happiness and sense pleasures, you are free to find unconditional happiness.

If your purpose in life is to do something truly great and of benefit to humanity, you can be happy. However, you can be happy only if your happiness is not contingent on the achievement. If happiness does depend on accomplishment of something, and you succeed in

doing it, you may experience happiness, but the happiness will of course be temporary. After a time, you will adapt to having met your goal, and your happiness will fade, and eventually vanish.

If you have not learned to be happy regardless of what you do or do not achieve, you have not yet learned to tap the Source of lasting happiness. Your happiness depends on accomplishment and is inherently transitory.

For example, if your purpose is to have and raise children, then you can be happy as long as your happiness does not depend on how your family life turns out. You can and should hold definite ideas and ideals about the way your children should be and the way family life should be. At the same time, you cannot find happiness if it depends on life turning out the way that you want it. Even if life turns out well, the best you will get is temporary, conditional happiness.

John and Mary were the ideal couple in high school. When they married, John fixed his mind on strong, tall sons who would excel in sports, as he had done. Within a year, Mary gave birth to a beautiful daughter, Maggie. Because of complications in the pregnancy, John's wife could have no more children. John tried and tried to turn Maggie into a female version of himself, but she was not a competitive person, and preferred studying to sports. His repeated tries to make Maggie into a different person made them both unhappy. John and his entire family would have been much happier if his happiness did not depend on his dreams of reliving his glory days through his children.

Purposes and Goals of the Happy Person

A person who is happy right now can have great purposes and goals. Happiness does not reduce the motivation or will to meet goals. Where does the motivation come from if one has already gained the goal of happiness?

Contemplative Christian Bernadette Roberts says that when you find enlightenment, and lose all self-centered desire, what remains is compassion. And from that compassion comes the wish to help others.

After the Buddha found enlightenment and nirvana, he went on to teach for 45 years. People say that he gave up the bliss of nirvana out of great compassion for humankind's suffering. During the rainy season, he stayed in the monastery with his disciples meditating and otherwise recharging his energy. The rest of the time, he was on the dusty roads, going from place to place, teaching his truth.

A person can be happy while still being dissatisfied with various problems in the world. The Buddha was happy even as he looked at suffering humanity. If you see life

clearly, you know there is much that you can and should fix. However, you need not be unhappy with what is wrong. Your goal can be to fix or ameliorate what is wrong. You do not have to be unhappy as motivation to fix something.

Happy people can also have many purposes and goals unrelated to addressing what is wrong. Anyone who has long-term purposes or goals can be happy as long as the work it takes to meet their goals is absorbing and satisfying, and as long as happiness does not depend on these purposes or goals.

As I sit here writing this book, I am happy. I have been working on this book for around three years, and all of this time I have remained happy doing it. For me, writing is usually a *flow* experience (see Chapter 18, where I discuss flow), which is an innately happy experience. A good part of my motivation comes from the jolt of extra happiness that I get from writing.

I am not motivated to write this book from a place of dissatisfaction with the way life is. I am writing it because I love writing, I love learning, and I love solving complex questions. I am writing this book also because I think it will benefit others. I move closer to happiness as I try to help others. Even if I were not paid to write, I would still do it.

Comparing Purpose in Depressed and Happy People

In their book, *On Grief and Grieving*, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler describe depression as the fourth of the five stages of grief that eventually lead to acceptance of a loss. In depression, which is the exact opposite of the happiness we are seeking in this book, “the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming.” ^[70] They are saying that mood has a huge effect on whether an individual thinks an activity is purposeful or meaningless.

For a depressed person, little has meaning. Is the opposite true as well? Does a happy person find more meaning and purpose in everything he or she does? The authors do not address this point, but based on my experience I think that happiness does increase the sense of purpose in what you do.

In Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, we first meet Ebenezer Scrooge as a bitter old man whose attitude toward London’s poor is that they should “die and decrease the surplus population.” He was both greedy and grasping, but his lust for gold seemed more automatic than purposeful. Not long after, however, he was the happiest man in London, whose purpose in life had become to help Tiny Tim and the Cratchit family.

What changed? Not London and its wretched poor. Scrooge changed. His one night with the Spirits changed the entire way he looked at life. He found happiness, and out of this happiness he found purpose in becoming a benefactor to the poor. As Dickens said after

Scrooge found happiness,

“He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world.”^[71]

Purposes and Goals Driven by Despair

Sometimes people strive to achieve great goals because of the despair that they feel when they refuse to accept something that has happened. A writer may experience a tragic loss, and his refusal to accept the loss might result in a life of tortured but beautiful prose as he tries to work through his pain through writing.

In the film *Immortal Beloved*, there is a scene where Beethoven reflects on his Sonata No. 9 in A for Violin and Piano. He says his music has the power to show the audience the mental state of the composer. This particular piece, he explains, portrays the intense feelings of agitation of a man who could not reach his lover because his carriage was stuck in the mud.

Purposes and goals driven by despair may serve only to cause a person to wallow in the despair. On the other hand, if writing or some other form of art helps a person to work through the sadness, then perhaps such purposes can lead to eventual happiness.

Many of Us Are Looking for a Calling

Sometimes in life, what you do seems so purposeful and so fitting to your skills that you describe it as a calling. To have a calling means you are called or summoned to do something. The dictionary refers to a calling as a strong impulse or inclination to do a certain thing, follow a certain profession, or course of action. The term has strong religious overtones, sometimes implying a Divine source of the calling.

For example, a person may have a calling or vocation to enter the priesthood. Similarly, one may have a calling (not as conspicuously Divine, but Divine, nonetheless) to become a dancer or writer.

My calling has always been to learning and writing. I did not know this at first. At started my working career as a commercial artist. I had skill, but the work did not engage me fully. I went back to business school with the idea of working in advertising. There, I fell in love with math and accounting. Each new textbook was for me a wonderful mystery. I went on to become a CPA and consultant. I kept learning the whole time. Ten years into my new career, I started writing newsletters and small books for clients. Ten years after that, I published the first of my seven textbooks, and I began teaching. Unlike my work as an artist, my work in finance and writing has never stopped engaging me fully. Now, after writing

professionally for 15 years, I am tackling this book on happiness, which is my biggest challenge so far.

Are all of us looking for a calling? Should we be looking for a calling? I think that we are all looking for something to engage us fully. It does not have to be a lifelong calling. Different purposes suit people at different times in their lives. Even those who have served for years as priests and nuns have left their callings for other professions, as well as domestic life.

Are You Here for a Reason?

You and I may be on Earth for a reason. We may be playing our assigned roles in a great plan. Some have a sense that they are here for a reason, while others do not think about it. I do not recall ever feeling I had a destiny or part to play in someone else's game. If you think you are here for a reason but I do not, does this mean that you have a reason for being and I do not?

From what I know of his life, it seems Gandhi believed he had a calling to change the world. His mother gave birth to him, and so played a key role in the change that he brought. Does this mean that she had a calling as well? Before she had her child, did she know that she would be the mother of such a luminary? Perhaps not. Does it make a difference whether she knew? I do not think so.

You may be here as part of someone's - or a collective's — great plan, and you may not. There are many beliefs about this, but we cannot know with any certainty. Whether you know or feel that your life is part of a plan does not make a difference in whether it is true.

My advice is, do not stand around waiting for someone to hand you a “script” for the part you are to play in life. Take responsibility for adopting your own purpose. Even if you are part of someone's plan for the human race, the choices you make for your life will probably be right.

Follow Your Passion

People commonly say, “To be happy and successful in life, follow your passion.” Joseph Campbell, a noted authority on the myths of humanity, famously says, “Follow your bliss.” ^[72] When my daughter went away to graduate school, anxious about what she should do, this was my exact advice to her.

To follow your passion (or bliss) is not necessarily the same as following or accepting your calling in life, but it can be. To follow your passion is to have an intensity of purpose that narrows your field of focus, organizes your life, and gives you a sense of both control

and self-esteem. These effects of following your passion all contribute to happiness.

Happiness, Motivation, and Success

Some people worry that if they are too happy, they will not be “hungry” enough to succeed in life. A person might ask, “If I discover my power to be happy will I lose all interest in getting ahead in life?” The answer is a simple *no*. Studies have shown that happy people are more successful in life. Success does not always make you happy, but happiness can help make you successful.

Admittedly, people such as Vincent van Gogh and Edgar Allen Poe created great art in the depths of their despair. For most of us, though, unhappiness does not lead to great accomplishment; it just leads to a miserable and unsuccessful life.

Let us briefly examine the idea of “hunger” or misery as the great motivator. Here is a little story.

Joe Techy is in high school and has a huge crush on Debbi, a cheerleader. Joe is poor and has no chance with her. His unfulfilled desire for her makes him miserable. He believes that Debbi would make him happy. This belief motivates him to get into the best university, study hard, find a great job designing video games, start a company, get rich, and come back to get the girl.

Ten years later, Joe’s back in town, with loads of money from selling his company. He finds Debbi, who is, by happy happenstance, already twice divorced. Now better able to see his charm, Debbi consents to marry him and they’re happy for six months. Within a year, he cannot stand her and is miserable. In the divorce, absent a prenuptial agreement, Debbi takes half of his money. Joe is briefly happy to be rid of her, but is wondering how he is going to be happy now that the satisfaction he expected from her turned out to be a false hope.

Or, what if the story were to go like this?

Joe Techy is in high school and has a huge crush on Debbi, a cheerleader. Joe is poor and has no chance with her. Joe is a happy person, and though he longs for her, he eventually lets thoughts about her go. After high school, he gets into the best university, studies hard, gets a great job designing video games, starts a company, and gets rich. All of this time he remains happy and never thinks about Debbi again.

Think of yourself as Joe. Which story would you prefer to live?

Happy people do not just sit there being happy. They have goals. However, what they do may be quite a bit different from what other people do. Out of happiness - that loving cup that “runneth over” — often come great compassion and a desire to help others. In the end,

much of our motivation in life comes from the good feelings we get from helping others. These may be family members, friends, customers, or complete strangers. It is a well-known fact of business that companies prosper when they and their employees genuinely want to help their customers.

Selfless Purpose

Some of those who have found lasting happiness report that desire to help others becomes their overwhelming purpose in life. Where previously there was mainly the motivation to gain personal freedom and happiness, now the purpose is to help others find the same. Out of true happiness comes the desire to help others.

There is a well-known story of four monks who came upon a walled city. They all climbed to the top of the wall and gazed in wonder upon what they saw. Finding what they had been seeking for all of their lives made them overjoyed. Three of the monks immediately began to climb down the wall into the city. The fourth, however, climbed back down the way he came. When his friend asked why he was doing this, he said he was going back to show other people the way to the city. Because of his great joy in seeing the city, the monk had compassion for all of humanity who were still stumbling in the dark.

Similarly, when the Buddha found nirvana, he sat basking in its glory for days. He could have just stayed there, experiencing the best feeling a human can have. Instead, he got up, walked down the road, and started teaching. He taught for 45 years. Even in his last days, when he was infirm and in pain, he kept going from town to town, teaching. He kept doing this until he could no longer rise. Out of his great joy came compassion that moved the world.

Life with No Purpose

Many people go through life without embracing a unique purpose. Few, however, have no purpose at all. Trying to find happiness, having a family and friends, working towards self-actualization, and even staying alive are all purposeful. However, we may sometimes characterize some people as having no purpose. For example, a father might say, “My son does not have a purpose in life. He keeps drifting from job to job.” Does such a person have no purpose?

Suppose a person wants to find happiness, but does not know how to do it. Few of us know how to find lasting happiness, but most can find their way to temporary happiness. Some, however, cannot find even momentary happiness. They keep looking and looking, but

nothing does it.

In Chapter 2 we looked at how our minds seem to have specific rules for those conditions under which we let ourselves be happy. Everyone is different. Some people may have sets of conditions for happiness that are impossible to meet. There is a strong desire for happiness in everyone's heart. If the mind has conditions for happiness that are impossible to meet, then a person can bounce from one activity to another, searching in vain for what will provide the happiness he or she seeks.

The inability to find even temporary happiness in any activity is sad, especially when lasting happiness is always there for the asking. If you cannot find a purpose, then the journey towards lasting happiness that I describe in this book may be a journey to that purpose.

As you begin to find happiness, you may also find purpose in your life, where previously there was none. Once your happiness does not depend on what you do, it is easier to find purposes in life. If you do not burden what you do with the impossible task of making you lastingly happy, it is easier to take satisfaction in *everything* you do.

Chapter 7

Happiness and the Absurd Person

In the first chapter, I talked about Sisyphus, who was doomed to a pointless existence of pushing a boulder up a mountain. His was the human experience. Most of us keep pushing ahead, searching for happiness in the next activity, the next thing we buy, in the next relationship or the next pleasure, without finding that happiness. The unsuccessful search for happiness will continue, perhaps throughout time, until we stop, look around, and find that happiness was waiting for us the entire time.

In Chapter 1, I suggested that despite his hard life, Sisyphus could be happy. I hope that by now you are starting to believe that this could be true.

Camus and Absurdity

In his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*,^[73] Albert Camus tries to explain how we can live in what he describes as an “absurd” world, and still be happy. Camus wrote this while a member of the French Resistance. It was published in 1942.

While he was writing this essay, the world saw death and horror on an unimaginable scale, and many asked, “What is the point of all of this? How can we allow millions to suffer and die like this?” During this time, many thought that humans had gone mad.

In writing *Sisyphus*, Camus asks how we, as rational beings, can continue living in an irrational world. His answer is that we must choose to be happy despite the fact that a reasonable person, in the same situation, would be miserable.

Camus’ essay describes a particular worldview, that of the “absurd person.”^[74] The absurd person knows two things in life: that humanity needs to find order and reason in the universe, in terms that humans can understand — and that it is impossible to do so. Camus says that:

The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.^[75]

When Camus uses the word absurd, I do not believe he uses it in a judgmental sense. In choosing this word, he is saying that the normal approach to the pursuit of meaning and happiness does not work. The pursuit of ultimate meaning in the world, in terms that humans can understand, does not work. Seeking for happiness by doing things and having things,

does not work either. Our normal way of living is absurd, because it does not accomplish what we all desperately want. Because the universe does not work in the way that we expect it to work, the universe is absurd as well.

An apparently absurd universe confronts us. In the face of this absurdity, we have three options: suicide, denial of the absurdity by imagining order and reason, or embracing our fate and living life to the fullest. Camus opts to live life to the fullest. He makes his choice knowing that we have no idea whether anything we do in life has any ultimate meaning.

Humans Want Meaning in Life

The presence of meaning and purpose in life is crucial for all people. We know from Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*,^[76] that an inmate's belief that his life had meaning could make the difference between life and death in the Nazi death camps. An inmate who still had a reason for living could find the strength to go on, despite the daily horrors of camp life.

People desperately want to know what life is about, and why we are here.^[77] According to Camus, they want to know so badly that a person will accept even a bad reason, a bad explanation of life, rather than no reason. A world without reason and a life without reason are simply incomprehensible.^[78]

People want unity, and a sense that things exist for a purpose. People also want to know the universe in terms they can understand, that they can put in a book and that they can teach to their children. Any other kind of knowledge does not satisfy.^[79]

Camus says that this world is without any meaning that we can comprehend. A seemingly meaningless world confronted by humans who want meaning creates the absurd. In other words, the absurd arises from the clash between the human desire for meaning, reason, order, and clarity, and a world that appears to us to be unreasonable and irrational. We must all somehow confront this absurdity.^[80]

Confronting the Absurd

The despair of life without meaning can drive a person to suicide. There may be obvious suicides, such as by jumping off a bridge. Sometimes, however, if there is no purpose for living, the body just shuts down and dies.

Frankl writes about death of the spirit in the Nazi camps. When a person had no reason to keep on living, and could no longer see the point in enduring the pain and horror, the spirit died. The death of the spirit eventually led to death of the body.

Viktor Frankl talks about how one knew an inmate had given up when he smoked his last cigarette. Cigarettes were precious in the camps. If you had them, you kept them.

The only exceptions to this were those who had lost the will to live and wanted to "enjoy" their last days. Thus, when we saw a comrade smoking his own cigarettes, we knew he had given up faith in his strength to carry on, and, once lost, the will to live seldom returned. ^[81]

A second way to confront the absurdity is, as Camus puts it, to cancel part of the equation. If the irrationality of the world creates the absurdity, the answer is to rationalize the irrational. When the world does not provide meaningful answers, you can fill in the missing information with inspired answers, and then encourage people to believe them. Inspired answers form the basis of religion.

For example, since the world does not provide answers, you can just assume the existence of a God that humans can understand. ^[82] By doing so, you can explain what is impossible for us to know. Even if you cannot explain it, you can provide a reason to trust that all is well, despite the irrationality of much of what happens.

Organized religions provide answers, speaking of unity and meaning where none exist in the world. Camus disdains such answers because he cannot know them with certainty. In addition, answers that were beyond his experience did not mean anything to him. ^[83]

His choice was a life lived for itself, where a person acknowledges the absurdity of the world without flinching, and then lives life to the fullest. His message seems to be that we too should face this absurdity head-on.

Embracing the absurdity, according to Camus, is the choice of the absurd person. Many of us despair, and many of us turn to religion for comfort, but the absurd person faces the seeming irrationality head-on, lives life to the fullest, and perhaps finds happiness along the way.

The Absurd but Happy Life of Sisyphus

The hero of the Camus essay, perhaps the prototypically absurd person, is Sisyphus. You'll recall that Sisyphus angered the gods, and they set out to punish him. They condemned him to push a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll back down again. Sisyphus is doomed to eternal futility. Tragically, Sisyphus knows his fate. He knows that the rock will always roll back down the hill, yet he carries on. His appears to be a pointless, hard, and miserable life. However, Camus says:

The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must

imagine Sisyphus happy.

Rational people, looking at the situation in which Sisyphus found himself, would say, “He should be miserable. He should despair to be condemned to a hard and meaningless existence.”

Despite Sisyphus’s tragic existence, Camus imagines he is happy, though he does not fully explain why. So, let us try to understand how Sisyphus could be happy.

An Irrational Ability to Be Happy

Sisyphus remaining happy in spite of a terrible situation is the essence of absurdity. It is an unreasonable way to be. However, in an irrational world, doing the unreasonable thing is a way to resolve the absurdity. Embracing the absurdity of an objectively miserable situation is a way to be happy.

Camus seems to have believed in an irrational power to be happy. Reason demands that Sisyphus must be miserable. The fact that Camus imagined that Sisyphus was happy means that he believed in a power to be happy that does not obey the laws of reason. He seems to be arguing for an ability to be happy that does not rely on good things happening to us, but instead on man’s innate ability to be happy regardless of the circumstances.

I think that Camus is telling us that the absurd person is fully aware of the irrationality of existence, embraces it, and exploits that irrationality to find happiness where there should be none.

As stressed in previous chapters, your mind limits your ability to be happy. Making its home in the material world, your mind demands the rationality and reason that set up the dilemma of the absurd. Your mind enables you to get through your day-to-day existence in this world, but at what cost? It resists the irrational and feels threatened by the unreasonable. It seeks to hold your entire attention and trap you in the comforting illusion of a rational universe, when the real universe is irrational. It limits you to what the rational allows, and denies you the power of the irrational.

What is “rational” in our world is the pursuit of happiness through doing things and having things. It is not reasonable to think that you can have lasting happiness without doing anything to get it. In truth, you have the “irrational” ability to be happy even if your world is falling apart.

The absurd person embraces the irrational and finds there the power to live a full and happy life. He or she finds happiness where reason tells us there should be none. The absurd person finds power to be happy in choosing to take the irrational step toward happiness.

Living life as Camus would have it is living on the edge, without a net. You live this life without the comforting, but illusory, certainty of reason. He would have you admit what you know, and what you do not know.

One of the things you do not know may be the reason you are alive. He asks you to disabuse yourself of all comforting illusions, such as the existence of a “plan” that would explain the apparent chaos of living. He says that, even if there is a plan, you do not know what it is, and you cannot know what it is. So live life to the fullest with what you do know, and permit yourself to *not* know most of what makes the universe “tick.”

Although you may feel an urgent need to know the final meaning and value of what you do, you can still live well and happily, even if you cannot discern that meaning. You should not try to fill in all of the blanks of existence with comforting illusions.

Learn to Be “Irrationally” Happy

I believe that Camus would have you be absurd and irrational. I believe that he would have you be happy, despite everything. Camus does not tell us how to embrace the absurd and find happiness. However, the practices I suggest in this book have been providing the ways and the means for thousands of years. Using these practices, we can experience something that is beyond the limits of the human mind, and beyond the rational. What we experience does not explain the chaos of the universe or the persistent cruelty of humanity. However, what we experience has the power to give us the happiness we seek.

The practices I describe in this book do not ask you to comfort yourself with illusions. They invite you to learn to see beyond the rational, and beyond the mind. They “show you a way out” of your mind, beyond words and images, and in so doing find your power to be happy. This way of approaching life is the way of the absurd person.

Camus would have you limit yourself to what you know, and live within that knowledge. The practices in this book help you to know your experience. You do not have to believe anything. If you practice shutting off the words and stilling the mind, you sense something wonderful. You become happy, even joyous. This experience does not require believing any dogma, knowing any magic words, or having faith in anything. It is pure experience.

As you come to know the joy available in the practices described in this book, the anxiety of the absurd goes away. What you can find is the sense that you have everything you want and need. Feelings of want and need never arise, because all you experience is a sense of completeness. This sense of completeness comes, in large part, from releasing the hold

that the limited rational mind has on you.

The human mind mirrors the material world, and the world reflects what is in the mind. The world is seen as a realm of birth, death, and scarcity. Once you let go of the limits your mind imposes on you, anxiety about these things disappears. The need to know everything about the universe and everything that is going to happen to you creates feelings of scarcity, fear of death, hunger, and lonely disconnection. Once you are beyond the mind, these feelings disappear, and not knowing is no longer a source of concern.

The solution to absurdity, therefore, is to move your awareness and attention outside the framework of the limited human mind so that the despair of absurdity is no longer present. Seek the experience of what will always be beyond human understanding. In that experience, you will find the peace and certainty that you want.

Without a doubt, the core of your being is not rational, and you are beyond human understanding. Seek the experience of the place where human thought cannot go, and where it is impotent. That experience is your true home and your destination. That is where you will find your power to be happy.

Chapter 8

Mindfulness

In this chapter, we explore mindfulness, which is the practice of being fully aware of the moment in which you abide. To be mindful is to be conscious and awake to what is happening right now. As a person who is awake, you are not trapped in your mind. Your awareness of what is happening does not pass through the filters of the mind's thoughts, opinions, and emotions.

Mindfulness is a state wherein you attend to what you are doing and what is happening in this moment. Your attention is not on your memory, or your thoughts of the future, or thoughts of other matters. It is the moment to moment awareness of “now.” Because you are fully aware of “now,” and you are not lost in the mind's labyrinth of thoughts and emotions, you hold the power to choose your experience. With this power, you can choose happiness.

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness means being aware of the moment in which you exist. It is the practice of being aware of the world, your body, your mind, and your emotions, as they are right now. You practice mindfulness without commenting on or judging the way you find the world.^[84] When you are mindful you are intensely aware of what you are experiencing, and you are not absorbed in the self-criticizing, self-congratulatory, “narrational” part of the mind.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, who has written a lot on this subject, uses a sports analogy to talk about mindfulness. Being mindful is like watching a game on television with the sound turned off. You see the game, as it is, without the play-by-play commentary, and without the constant stream of opinion and analysis.

Mindfulness is seeing your life as it is, without your internal narration of your life. You observe your life without being absorbed in all of your opinions and analysis about your life.

Mindfulness is much like meditation, which I talk about in the next chapter. In fact, mindfulness is a goal of meditation. However, unlike formal meditation, which one normally does while sitting or lying down, you can practice mindfulness while walking, working, or performing any simple movement.

For example, when I am mindful while walking down the street, I allow in all the sights, smells, and sounds, as they exist “right now.” When being mindful I am not in my memory, I am not thinking of the future, and I do not imagine myself somewhere else, doing something else.

Mindfulness of the Body

To be mindful of the body is to be aware of everything the body is doing and feeling, right now. To be mindful, you should be aware of what you currently see, feel, smell, taste, and hear. You allow your body’s feelings and sensations to absorb your attention. For example, when practicing mindfulness in formal meditation, you may start by being aware of your breathing. Then you can expand your focus to include your entire body.

You can practice mindfulness while performing simple tasks, like showering, cooking, looking out the window, walking, and even driving. Whatever you do, you do it with your entire attention on the activity.

I used to meditate in the Zen Center of San Francisco. Walking meditation, a form of mindfulness, was one of the practices there. Slowly and silently, we walked along the four walls of a meditation room, focusing full attention on the simple act of walking, and not thinking of anything else.

I also performed simple tasks at the Zen Center, silently, with full attention. One task was to dust the meditation room. I went to each of the little meditation cubicles with a small duster, and silently dusted the sitting area and the walls.

These mindfulness exercises had a marked effect on the quality of my daily meditation. My meditation was deeper and more concentrated because of extended periods of practicing mindfulness.

* * *

Long-distance runners sometimes share their experience of focusing only on their bodies, with few other thoughts, and the resulting surge of happiness and contentment they feel. This is mindfulness.

* * *

One morning I took a 20-minute walk in my neighborhood and tried to be mindful the entire time. I allowed the sights, smells, and sounds to fill my awareness, to the point where I had no room left for thought. I remember walking past a neighbor’s house and seeing Mexican Sage on the strip between the sidewalk and the street. The color of the flowers was a brilliant purple. As I walked further, I noticed the beauty of the little brown leaves that had fallen with the coming of autumn.

Mindfulness of the Emotions

You can be mindful and aware of your emotions as they occur. Are you happy, sad, anxious, or peaceful? Mindfulness of the emotions involves noticing your emotions without judging them and without them catching you and drawing you in. You let your emotions be, and they let you be. If you begin to have thoughts about your emotions, just let the thoughts be. Simply be mindful of your thoughts, without allowing them to disturb you.

Mindfulness of the Mind

The nature of the mind is to talk. It talks to itself, talks to us, and talks to no one. To be mindful of the mind is to notice this constant chatter without it drawing you in and without judging it. By remaining aware of the mind's chatter, without it drawing you in, you can notice that its thoughts are just thoughts, and cannot control you.

Mindfulness of Dissatisfaction

In Appendix 3, where I discuss Buddhism, I talk about human dissatisfaction with the way things are. As you “go about your business” in the world, you can be mindful of the pervasive nature of dissatisfaction. You can be mindful of how dissatisfied you are with what happens in life.

Waking Up

Learning to be mindful and seeing things as they are is a lot like waking up from a dream. Most of us walk around with our attention trapped in our minds. As you will find in Chapter 4, we are not present here and now. Much of the time, we must keep attention in the mind. The mind carries within it an image of the world in which we live. To navigate the world, we need to focus on that image. It is like our internal map (or GPS) and guidebook to reality. But it is not the real world. It is an image of the world, and it enables us to move around in reality.

Living like this is a little like sleepwalking through life. Because we are not fully present in the world, we keep seeing and feeling the same things repeatedly. At times, we feel good, at times bad, but we keep experiencing the same good or bad feelings, replayed repeatedly. Living like this can make us dull, and can make life dull.

As you practice mindfulness, you can begin to wake up. When you do, you will find that life is a lot more interesting. You may also find that you have the power to be happy, without anything changing in your life. Living in the moment lets you tap into the natural happiness that is available to you. You can escape from the patterns of thinking and feeling that prevent you from finding happiness in the here and now.

The Continuous Experience of “Now”

Mindfulness is the continuous experience of each successive moment. It is the continuous experience of “now.” Your awareness is in the present when you are mindful. No part of your mind is thinking of something that is not here right now. No part of your mind is remembering something. No part of your mind is judging or criticizing or even evaluating the merit of what is happening right now.

As each new moment arises, you are present in that moment. You do not focus on the moment before, and you are not worrying about the moment to come. You focus your complete attention on each moment, as it presents itself to you.

The Power of the Moment

There is power in the moment. If you are mindful of the moment, you are free of the past and not straining to see into the future. You hover in the instant with the power to choose. You harness the power to choose by being present in the current moment. There is no such power if you focus on remembering the past, worrying about the future, or on anything that is not right here and right now.

Being mindful is finding what Viktor Frankl called the space between the stimulus and response. You can even make that space larger. If you are mindful, your responses are less likely to be automatic and unthinking. An automatic response to something closes the space to choose before you even know it exists. If you are mindful, and do not respond automatically, you find the space to choose. You may even hold that space open until you decide the best way to respond.

The power to choose, which you cultivate and strengthen through mindfulness and meditation, is the most powerful ability that you have. With that power, you can choose happiness.

A Continuous State of Happiness

Mindfulness can be a continuous state of happiness. When you are mindful of what is happening right now, this allows your natural state of happiness to arise. It arises because you do not let your attention focus on the many unfulfilled desires that cause dissatisfaction with life. When nothing is happening that prevents you from being mindful, you can stay happy indefinitely.

Self-Criticism, Self-Judging and Self-Praising

We comment on ourselves, all the time. We carry a little image of ourselves in our minds that we can, by turns, judge, criticize, and abuse, as well as aggrandize and embellish.

Often while we're doing something, we simultaneously see a little picture of ourselves doing it as well. It may be a pathetic little thing when it appears, or, at the other end of the spectrum, it may seem earthshakingly grandiose. In any case, our self-image is distracting and distorted - it is what we have made up about ourselves.

The mind grabs ahold of these images and starts torturing or praising us for what we did — whether wrong, or superlatively right. We are likely to replay in our minds images of what we did. We may fuss and worry about how we did what we did. Even if we performed admirably, our worry about future behavior can taint any fleeting satisfaction. We may replay conversations in our mind, cringing at what we said, and kicking ourselves for what we did not say.

Psychologists refer to the human tendency to self-judge and criticize as rumination. Rumination is compelling. The mind gives us reasons for fretting for hours, pouring over all of our faults, or threats to our self-image. Rumination is very destructive. The more we worry about our faults, the worse they will appear. [\[85\]](#)

To be mindful, try to avoid self-judging and self-praising. When you feel yourself starting to criticize or flatter your ego, tell yourself to come back to the moment. Fill your mind with the moment. Do something that takes your attention away from beating up on or inflating yourself.

Negative Self-Consciousness

To be self-conscious in a negative sense is to be uncomfortable, nervous, or embarrassed about how we think others see us. To be self-conscious about how others may see us is another form of judging or criticizing ourselves. Here, however, we do it through the eyes of others. Going through life in this way can be a constant torment.

Unless people tell us what they think of us, we cannot know how they see us. What we imagine are the thoughts of other people are just our own thoughts, projected onto them. We do not know what others think of us. The sensations we feel come mainly from our minds, not from other people. This is not to say we cannot intuit what others think about us. Obviously we can. However, what we get from intuition is mixed with our own fears, emotions, egoism and memories. We rely on intuition because we often must do so, but it is not the truth of how people think of us.

To be mindful is to shut off self-judgment and self-criticism, including the imaginary criticism (or praise) of others.

Mindfulness and Negative Thoughts

As previously discussed in the chapter on how we experience the world, our body-minds evolved to keep us alive in a once hostile environment. The world is much safer now, but our body-minds, have not let down their guard. Perceived threats may include dangers that currently exist, may exist in the future, or are simply memories of old injuries. To protect us, our minds allow negative thoughts about these threats to rise to the top. Our minds have a bias to notice and respond to the negative in life before thinking about the positive.

Mindfulness offsets the mind's tendency toward negative thoughts and allows you to stay in touch with happiness while you are moving about in the world. Mindfulness minimizes the hold that negative thoughts have on you.

Dropping Out of Mindfulness

Periodically, the mind can capture the attention and pull us out of mindfulness. Dropping out of mindfulness and being stuck in our minds is like falling down the fabled rabbit hole. When our thoughts and worries narrow our focus, we are not attending to what is happening right now, and we become subject to whatever we find. Many of our thoughts come from emotionally charged memories. These charges are what draw us to them.

With practice, you can learn to notice when you are no longer being mindful. You can learn to return to mindfulness and spiritual happiness. In addition, even if what pulls you out of mindfulness is an event that is unpleasant, you may be able to preserve some degree of mindfulness. If you can remain even a little mindful, you can lessen the pain of the event. As a mindful person, you have a frame of mind that lets you know, "This too will pass."

Escape from the Labyrinth

The labyrinth of Greek legend was an impossibly complex maze of passages. One could just walk out if one knew the way. However, it was built so cleverly that it served as a prison for the Minotaur.

The mind is also complex. It is a maze of thoughts and emotions that most of the time traps the attention, and prevents it from escaping to find happiness.

When our thoughts and emotions capture our attention, our vision of the world is subject to the distortions of the mind. If we are lost in our thoughts and emotions, we are in the labyrinth. We are also subject to the mind's negative bias and its mistaken beliefs about how to find happiness.

To find happiness, you need to free your attention from your mind's grasp. In freeing

your attention, you gain the power to look for happiness in a new way.

Mindfulness frees your attention. It does this by filling your awareness with all of your immediate sensations of “now.” You are no longer looking out at the world from deep within the labyrinth. You are quieting your mind and looking at the world directly. In this quiet, you find the freedom to control your attention. You find the freedom to be happy.

Body Mindfulness Meditation

Here is a meditation that explores mindfulness of the body. We examine meditation in detail in the next chapter, so you may want to take a look at that chapter before doing this meditation.

Sit or lie down in a meditative posture in a quiet place. If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes. Otherwise you can leave them open. Whether your eyes are open or closed, allow your gaze to be unfocused. Take three or four deep breaths to relax. Once you are relaxed, focus on what your body physically feels. Notice the feel of the air on your skin, the surface on which you are sitting or lying, and any sensations within your body. What you want to do is be mindful of your sense of feeling and touch while remaining still. After spending a few minutes focusing on your sense of feeling and touch, direct your attention to what you hear. For a few minutes be mindful of only the sounds around you and within you. Then turn your awareness to what you see. Allow yourself to be aware of what comes to you through your unfocused gaze, even if your eyes are closed. Now switch to your sense of smell. Be mindful of the fragrances or odors, regardless of how subtle, which come to you. Next, explore your sense of taste. Be mindful of the taste sensations within your mouth. Just be aware of them without moving your mouth or tongue. Last, be aware of your thoughts and emotions. Spend a few minutes being mindful of what you are thinking and what you are feeling emotionally. When you are finished, start over: feeling, hearing, sight, smell, taste and thought.

Cycle through your six senses a few more times. Then, when you are ready, start over, but this time do not let go of one sense when you turn to another. For example, after you spend time with feeling, ADD hearing, then seeing etc. Try to be mindful of all six senses at once. Here, the challenge is to allow a sense impression to come into awareness, without focusing on that sense. The mind will find it difficult to focus on more than one sense at a time; however, if you just allow yourself to be aware of each new sense, without letting go of the other, you may find yourself expanding your mindful awareness to include each new sense as it arises. Do not fret if you cannot experience all senses at once. Whatever comes

into mindful awareness is enough.

One way that I practice this meditation is by listening to a recording of Tibetan bowls. The one I like is by Karma Moffet, called “Golden Bowls.” In a meditative posture, with my eyes closed, I try to sense the sounds with full awareness — what they feel like, sound like, look like, and how they smell and taste. I then observe the thoughts that come up. After cycling through all six senses, I allow myself to experience them with all of my senses at once. In this full bodied listening, sometimes sound is featured in awareness, sometimes feeling, sometimes thought. I allow what comes into awareness to be there, while staying with the moment-to-moment awareness of the singing bowls.

Chapter 9

Sitting Meditation

One of the most important things you can do to find your power to be happy is to meditate. Meditation is an important part of Yogic, Buddhist, and Taoist practices, and a valuable addition to many devotional practices. Meditating regularly allows you to turn your mind away from your everyday cares. It lets you focus your attention in the place of awareness in which you will find happiness. Learning this focus takes practice, but the benefits are enormous.

Why Is Meditation Important?

In meditation, you learn to control your attention so you can let go of your day-to-day cares, and turn your awareness to that place where you can find your power to be happy. Without this control, your mind is at the mercy of whatever thoughts and emotions can command its attention. Unfortunately, many of those thoughts and emotions are negative. To be happy you need to be able to direct your attention away from the dark and painful, and towards the light and peaceful. Meditation gives you the ability to do this.

One should be watchful of the mind's tendency to pay more attention to negative and painful thoughts than to the positive. If left to drift where it will, the mind often gravitates towards the negative. The mind also has a self-centered bias and is drawn to personal fears and unsatisfied desires, which usually involve negative and painful thoughts.

The mind's biases are natural. They are in keeping with a primary purpose, which is to keep us safe and motivate us to get our needs met. Over the eons, to survive we had to adapt and evolve in such a way that we would automatically attend to the dangers around us and to seek what we needed. A mind so intent on survival is difficult to divert from its mission of watching, worrying, and planning. Even when you are safe and would like to know some peace and happiness in your life, the mind will not stop fretting. Worries about what happened today or yesterday, and what might happen tomorrow, continually draw the mind's focus.

I think you would agree that negative thoughts occupy too much of your time, especially at times when the only thing you can do is worry. Studies have shown that many of us live in a continual state of stress, a prolonged tightness of fight-or-flight readiness,

which makes us unhappy, and can damage our mental and physical health. ^[86]

As you practice meditation, you will learn how to control your attention. You will learn how to loosen the grip that your desires and fears have on you. You will learn how to turn away from negative thoughts and emotions and prevent them from running your life.

What Is Meditation?

Meditation is a practice during which you consciously still your mind by focusing all of your attention on a single object of meditation. That one thing may be your breath, a word or phrase, a physical object, or an idea such as love or compassion.

Meditation does not involve just concentrating on an object. The practice of meditation starts with concentration, but then certain changes take place in your mind and awareness, and true meditation begins. You reach a state in which your mind is peaceful, clear and one-pointed. ^[87]

Peaceful. Your mind is at peace, and there is a marked drop in conscious mental activity, or the activity recedes into the background;

Clear. Your mind is clear and awake to what is happening in the current moment; and

One-pointed. Your mind focuses only on the object of meditation.

In a meditative state, you may also lose your sense of time. The time spent in meditation will often seem much shorter than the actual time.

Using Meditation to Wake Up!

Some people think of meditation only as a way of learning to relax. It can be. Meditation can provide rest and rejuvenation for both the mind and body. ^[88] Meditation can be a way of recharging your spiritual batteries so that you can better deal with your everyday life. It can also increase the power of your mind to promote both spiritual and physical healing. ^[89]

While meditation does provide relaxation and these other benefits, it also does much more. It gives you the ability to be in the here and now. It enables you to be present in the moment. It gives you an opportunity to wake up spiritually. What you will find is that you can be relaxed but at the same time awake and aware of the present. I will focus on this latter aspect of meditation in this chapter.

When you are awake to the present moment, you loosen the grip that your endless desires, worries, and fears (your “inner dialogue”) have on your attention. When you are free of your inner dialogue, you can focus your attention wherever you wish. When your mind is

not constantly being sucked into a vortex of fears, worries, and desires, it can be free to know peace and the power to be happy.

Getting Started - Where, When, and How to Meditate

There are many videos on YouTube showing you how to meditate. They will show you postures for meditation, and provide guidance on how to meditate. I encourage you to watch them. You can also take meditation classes, and learn a method of meditation that suits you best. The following advice on meditation comes from my experience with what works.

Picking a Place to Meditate

Meditate in a place where there are no noises to distract you. You may need to pick a time of day to meditate that is the least noisy. Many meditate early in the morning when the world is the most quiet and peaceful. I meditate at this time. Among other things, the early morning has a fresh energy that, for me, is conducive to meditation.

If your space is not as quiet as it needs to be for meditation, you can compensate for this in two ways that I find useful. First, you can use a “white noise” generator. White noise is a continuous sound that masks ambient sounds, without drawing attention to itself. You may find white noise to be distracting at first, but in a short time, you will forget it is there, as it becomes part of your environment. I use a portable air purifier that produces a blowing noise that masks most ambient sound, and has the added benefit of removing pollen from the air. (Sneezing and runny noses during meditation are as bad as outside noises.)

The other way to reduce or eliminate surrounding noises is to use noise-cancelling headphones or earbuds. Like white noise, they mask sound. Good noise-cancelling headphones (or earbuds) use advanced technology to remove, or at least soften all the little noises that can distract you in meditation.

When to Meditate - Making It a Habit

It does not matter when you meditate, as long as you do it regularly and at a time when you can be alert and free of distraction. Regularity is probably the most important consideration. Any meditation is better than no meditation, but to be the most effective, meditation has to be a regular practice. To make it a habit, you need to find time in your day that you can reserve for meditation. This time should be one that you look forward to every day.

You should pick a time when you are alert. Remember, meditation is to help you wake up, not fall asleep.

I meditate early in the morning, about an hour after I get up and have eaten breakfast,

had a cup of coffee, and read the news. This time of day is best for me because I am relaxed but wide awake.

Each session of meditation is helpful. None of this effort goes to waste. However, regular meditation is the most effective way to practice.

Meditating Alone or with Others

You can meditate alone or in a group. Both work fine. There are pluses and minuses in meditating alone and in meditating with others.

Meditating alone can make it easier for your practice to become a regular part of your day. For busy people, it can be difficult to get up, get in the car or on a bus, and go to a meditation hall every day. You may often find there is something that prevents you from going. Meditating alone helps you make it a routine, which is important.

Meditating with others, on the other hand, provides support and encouragement. For a beginner, meditating with a group also puts him or her in regular contact with more experienced people who can share their advice. Finally, group meditation can generate positive energy that makes everyone's meditation a little bit better. [\[90\]](#)

Of course, you can always do both. You can meditate with a group when you can, and meditate alone when you cannot get to the group. Whatever you do, remember that to get the most benefit from meditation you need to make it a regular part of your day.

How Long to Meditate

If you are new to meditation, you should start slowly. Begin by sitting for ten minutes or so. Do not push yourself. After a while, you may find that twenty to thirty minutes a day is enough. What is important is *how* you meditate, and *how regularly* you meditate, not how long you meditate. If you can focus your attention for ten minutes, every day, that is a significant accomplishment. As you keep at it, you will begin to notice remarkable changes in the way you think and in your ability to focus.

In my experience of meditating with others, 40 minutes seems to be the typical duration for experienced meditators. You may take a while to work up to this, but when you are deep in meditation, 40 minutes or an hour does not seem like a long time.

Use a Timer

When you enter a meditative state, you will probably lose track of time, so use a timer. There are many wonderful meditation timer apps available for Smartphones and tablets. Many are free. The one I use rings a single bell when meditation starts and three bells when it is over. My timer has a feature that I recommend. Once the timer starts, I can turn off the screen. With no screen to look at, I am not tempted to glance over and see how much

time I have left.

Lower-tech devices for timing meditation include kitchen timers (a bit harsh, but they work) and timers sold specifically for meditation.

Meditation Postures

The most common posture for meditation is the sitting position. Lying-down positions are also common, and I will discuss those in the next chapter.

Some disciplines, such as Zen Buddhism, may have rigorous standards for meditation postures, depending on the teacher. However, some people feel that the posture in which you meditate is not important. You can sit in the classic lotus position; you can sit in a chair; or you can kneel. You can even lie down. It is all effective meditation. If you do it with focus and attention, it will work just fine. [\[91\]](#)

If you sit while meditating, you need to do so in a way that keeps your body in balance. When your body is in balance, it does not draw your attention and does not require you to adjust your position.

There are three common sitting positions: sitting on the floor with legs crossed and knees flat on the ground, sitting on a chair, or sitting on a kneeling chair. Following are illustrations of each position. The sitting-on-the-floor position is perhaps the most common, but each of these positions works fine as long as your body is in balance.



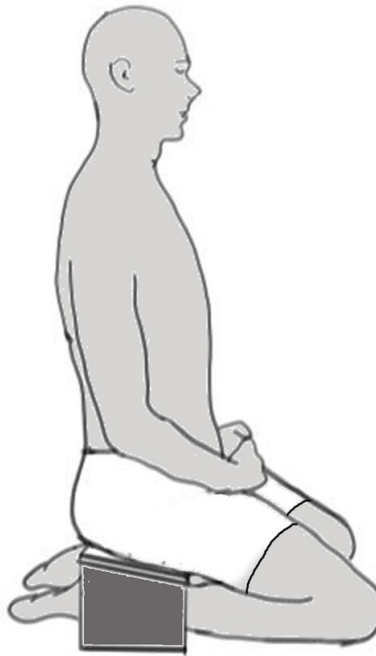
Sitting on the Floor

When sitting on the floor, the knees are touching the floor. In this position, the back is straight, the spinal column is erect, and the head is balanced over the body, with the ears over

the shoulders and the nose in line with the navel. An erect posture has two benefits. First, it helps prevent drowsiness. Second, in advanced stages of meditation it can improve the flow of energy throughout the body.

Often, people in this posture sit on a small round cushion. Many people do not have this flexibility (I do not), so they sit cross-legged with the knees not touching the floor. Sitting this way works fine as well, as long as you stay in balance.

Remember, balance is critical in meditation because you want to “sit like a mountain,” unmoving. If your body is still, it will not distract you, and you can keep your focus.



Kneeling Position

The kneeling position is a type of sitting position. The meditator often sits on a special kneeling chair. For some, using a kneeling chair can provide better balance and comfort than sitting on a regular chair. Once again, in this position, the back is straight, and the head is over the body.

Sitting on a Chair

When meditating on a chair, the key is to sit erect, with the back straight and the head balanced over your body. You may need to raise your feet off the floor to get the proper balance. You can do this by resting your feet on books or a cushion.

Eyes Open or Closed

Whether the eyes are open or closed during meditation depends on the type of

meditation you are doing. In Zen meditation (zazen), for example, the eyes often remain open.^[92] Whether the eyes are open or closed may depend on the object of meditation that you select. If it is a physical object, your eyes will usually be open so that you can see it. If it is a mental image, or your breathing, or a sound, then your eyes may be either open or closed.

Do Not Worry - You Cannot Do This Wrong

Once you have settled yourself in a quiet place and are sitting comfortably, you are ready to meditate. To do this, you simply focus on your object of meditation. In the next sections, I am going to talk much more about objects of meditation, and about the attitude you should have while meditating. For now, however, this is all there is to it.

You cannot do this wrong. If you can regularly just sit and focus your attention, you will eventually learn to meditate.

Object of Meditation

In meditation, you usually focus your attention on a single object. It should remain so focused for the entire period of meditation. Thoughts will come up; you may hear outside noises; your back may hurt, or you may briefly fall asleep. All of these things may happen, but your aim in meditation should always be to turn your attention gently back to your object of meditation.

What is a fitting object of meditation? Different schools of meditation may require specific things. For example, Zen meditation often uses the breath as the focus of attention. However, there are no practical limits on what you can use. Sri Patanjali provided the following guidance for choosing a focus of meditation. He says you can:

- Focus on the breath (controlled exhalation or retention of breath),
- Quietly observe any extraordinary sense perceptions that arise in meditation,
- Concentrate on the supreme blissful light within,
- Focus on a great soul's unattached mind,
- Make your object of meditation an insight received during sleep or dreaming, or
- Focus on anything else you choose that is elevating.^[93]

Perhaps the last thing to which Patanjali referred, something that is “elevating,” is the key to selecting an object for your meditation. It is not a good idea to attend to something that is disturbing, or some worry that is troubling you. Such an object can only pull you farther down the “rabbit hole.” That is not the direction you want to follow. You are looking for your power to be happy. You already know how to be miserable.

Bearing this brief guidance in mind, let us look at some different types of objects and

focuses of meditation.

Watching Your Breath as a Meditation

Meditating on your breath is a common and classic way to meditate. The breath is unique as an object of meditation because it has the quality of being both inside and outside of you. It is part of you and part of the world outside of you. As you focus on your breathing, you are, in a sense, placing your awareness at the boundary between you and the world. In this meditation, you have the opportunity of seeing the veil between “you” and the outside world disappear.^[94]

Ultimately, using the breath as an object of meditation can provide a sense that you and the world are one. Compare this to meditating on a physical object placed in front of you, such as a flower. With an object, you can get a sense of yourself and that object as being one, but it is perhaps more difficult to do this than meditating on your breath.

Physical Objects

A physical object is a great subject for your meditation. Using something physical helps you keep your focus. If your mind starts to wander, you always have the object in front of you to pull your attention back to the moment. You do not always have to leave your eyes open when using a physical object. Once the image of the object is firmly in your mind, you can shut your eyes and focus on your internal image of it alone.^[95]

I like to meditate looking at a rose. I place a bud vase holding a single rose on a stand, so the rose is about at the level of my chin, 18 or so inches in front of my eyes. I find this a comfortable location that allows me to keep my focus on the rose without any strain. As I look at it, the texture and aroma of the rose fill my mind, pushing out other thoughts. Sometimes I sense the rose with my body as well as my mind.

Mantras

A common object of meditation is a sound, or a word, known as a mantra. You repeat the mantra aloud or silently for the entire meditation period, with a steady focus. If the mantra has a specific meaning (not all mantras have meanings), then one can also speak it with a focus on that meaning. Each repetition of the mantra can be a reaffirmation of that meaning, and a reconnection to what the mantra means.

For example, people often use “OM” as a mantra. OM is said to be the name of God. It is also said to be a sound that always vibrates within us. The sound of it is three letters: A (creation), U (evolution) and M (dissolution). Taken together, OM represents the entire cycle of life.^[96]

Enumerable other mantras, or complete phrases, are common as well. One of the most

well-known phrases, chanted over and over, is *O? ma?i padme hū?*. There is no single translation for these words. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, however, this phrase symbolizes the six realms of existence: generosity, ethics, patience, diligence, renunciation, and wisdom. ^[97]

Concepts

Another object of meditation may be a concept. You might focus on love or compassion, or on a color, such as blue. ^[98] In this meditation, you do not think about the concept, you focus only on the feeling or energy associated with it. For example, compassion has a feeling or energy associated with it. You can try to attune to that feeling or energy as the focus of your meditation.

If you choose to meditate on a concept, it can be helpful to have a physical object in front of you to remind you of what you are trying to focus on. ^[99]

For a long time, I have meditated on happiness. During such meditation, my focus is on the feeling or energy associated with the kind of pure happiness that arises for no reason whatsoever. It is the pure happiness that arises from the tranquil mind. During long hours of meditation, I came to know that real happiness comes from within me, and not from anything I might do in the world to find it.

Swami Satchidananda says, “As you think, so you become.” If your object of meditation is a flower, then your mind may take the form of a flower. If your object of meditation is compassion, then your mind may exude loving- kindness, touching self and all others. If your object of meditation is pure happiness, then your mind may become that happiness.

The Mind Itself

Once you have learned to hold your attention on objects, mantras, and concepts, the next thing is to meditate on the mind itself. Here, you may reflect on the tranquil mind. This meditation can lead to both joy and bliss.

The One-Pointed Mind

To find your power to be happy, the goal of your meditation should be to break the hold that your thoughts, especially your negative thoughts, have on your attention. To do this, you have to develop a focus of attention that is “one-pointed.” In meditation, to be one-pointed means to have a mind that is capable of being aware of only the object of meditation, without directing attention to any other thoughts or emotions.

The idea is to limit the mind’s attention to one thing at a time. By doing this, you learn

to control the focus of your attention and avoid having other thoughts draw your attention. Once you can do this, you are well on your way to gaining the power to be happy. As you learn to develop one-pointedness, you will find that your negative thoughts have less power to disturb or distract you, and that you can maintain an overall state of calm and happiness.

To practice one-pointed meditation, gently keep your focus on your object of meditation. If your attention strays to other thoughts, calmly notice this, and then gently move your attention back to your object of meditation.

Everything should be tranquil and gentle. Do not force anything. Do not try to resist anything. If you try to resist thinking of something else, you are, in fact, thinking of something else. Everything you do is gentle and positive. [\[100\]](#)

You should always focus on where you want your attention, not on where you do not want your attention.

Other thoughts and feelings will come to you, and they may pull your attention away from your object of meditation. That is fine. Just notice it and gently move your attention back.

Do not focus on your worries or concerns, or anything you may want or need. If thoughts of these things drift into your awareness, and if they draw your attention away from your object of meditation, just notice this and gently move your attention back.

Remember that every time you move your attention back to your object of meditation, you choose to let go of other thoughts. Each time you do this, you strengthen your power to choose where to focus your attention. Eventually, negative thoughts will have no hold on you.

Allow all of your thoughts of self to subside. In meditation, you can come to know your true self without having to think about it. Allow yourself to disappear into your object of meditation. Allow yourself to lose your awareness as a separate self. As you become less aware of yourself, your awareness of your true self will come.

If you are new to meditation, try to remember that it takes patience. Random thoughts and feelings will capture your attention, just as they do in your everyday life. Do not be upset when this happens. Everyday life demands attention to your thoughts, and to the sounds, sights, and smells of the world around you. In meditation, these things still exist, but we do not attend to them. Ignoring these things takes getting used to, but you can do it.

Letting Go

In meditation, you may feel some anxiety about letting your normal thoughts come and go, without attending to them. You may have a nagging feeling that there is something

wrong in doing this. Because you are focusing so intently on a single object of meditation, and not allowing your thoughts (your inner dialogue) to hold your attention, you may feel that you are ignoring your life. You may feel that by ignoring it, your life may suffer, or fall apart.

In short, ignoring your everyday thoughts may feel unnatural. This feeling is understandable. Your normal way of life is constantly to attend to your inner thoughts and dialogue. Doing otherwise is going to feel strange at first. This feeling gradually fades as you get used to a new and better way of being aware in the world.

As you experience anxieties about not attending to your normal thoughts and inner dialogue, just remember that these anxieties are themselves just other thoughts that you can let come and go. Remember that when you sleep, you are usually not thinking about your waking life, yet when you awake, your life is still there, just as you left it. So too, during meditation you can just let everything go and focus your attention on your object of meditation. When you finish, you will find that you can go right back to the inner dialogue (whether you want to or not).

In meditation, you may also have the feeling that as you take your attention away from your passing thoughts, you start to lose your identity. To a certain extent, this is true. When you can let go of the inner dialogue, you are letting go of a large part of what you believe yourself to be. However, when you let go of what you think you are, you replace it with a sense of your true self. As you practice allowing your thoughts to come and go, while remaining focused on your object of meditation, you should find a sense of security in this. It is as if, as you let go, your true self catches you and sustains you.

Putting Random Thoughts in Perspective

Here is a way of putting in perspective the random thoughts that come up in meditation. When sitting in quiet meditation, Truth could be right at the edge of awareness. It could be staring you in the face. You may think I am a little over the top in saying this, but I am serious. If Truth is there for the taking, what other thoughts could you have that are worth your attention? It would be like standing in paradise and obsessing about whether you left the lights on at home.

Something that Carlos Castaneda wrote in his book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, has never left me. In this book, the shaman, Don Juan, advises Carlos to, “be aware of the uselessness of your self-importance and of your personal history.” He asks him to put things in perspective, by considering them in light of his certain death. He says, “How can anyone feel so important when we know that death is stalking us?” He refers to Death as the “only wise adviser that

we have.” [\[101\]](#)

Martin Heidegger makes the same point, perhaps not in these dramatic terms, in his book, *Being and Time*. Heidegger’s point is that one’s conscious acknowledgment that death can come at any time causes one to be an authentic person. The certainty of death reveals how shallowly we usually see ourselves, as well as what we commonly believe is important. Admitting the certainty of death gives one the possibility of being oneself “in an impassioned freedom towards death — a freedom which has been released from the illusions” of everyday life. [\[102\]](#) Faced with the certainty of death, one is unlikely to waste time in idle chatter or idle thoughts.

Sitting in meditation is not the same as facing imminent death. However, adopting an attitude that death could come at any time can send a message to your mind to preserve its focus, and let go of trifles.

Integral Meditation

To get the most from meditation, it is important for it to be integral - that is, with an approach to living that seeks to integrate body, mind, and spirit. This approach is emphasized throughout this book. Here we will look at how meditation does this.

Nonattachment

Meditation, when practiced with the right effort, and the right mindfulness, is the practice of nonattachment. In meditation, you focus intensely and single-mindedly on an object of meditation. At the same time, you do not attach your hopes to any result that may come from this effort. Your effort should be without both desire and purpose. You should not focus on expected benefits. This attitude in meditation is the essence of nonattachment. [\[103\]](#)

Doing something for a reason involves wanting or needing something that you do not currently have. It also involves time, in the sense that what you do now is for the sake of something in the future. Both needing and the future are the provinces of your everyday thinking. Focusing on your needs and the future pulls your attention out of the moment and sets you firmly down in the middle of your regular way of thinking.

You want to be here and now. To be here and now, you should have no purpose for meditating. You should not think of enjoying it, disliking it, benefiting from it, wasting your time doing it, or any of a hundred attitudes that you might have toward it. You should simply be here and now, with no attitude about it at all. If you go into meditation for no purpose, with no aim in mind, and without expecting to gain anything from it, you will have the right attitude. [\[104\]](#)

While meditation will move you toward happiness, you should not go into meditation expecting to find happiness. You should not attach any result at all to your practice of meditation. Meditation is just something you do. You should do meditation for itself alone. That is, like happiness, the practice of meditation is sufficient unto itself.

Of course, while meditating, your attention may drift into thoughts about your goals for meditation. You may focus on thoughts about finding your true self, finding God, receiving insights and answers about your life, or gaining new powers and abilities. These thoughts will probably come. If they do, notice them and let them go. These are just more thoughts. They are nothing special. You are free to think about your goals for meditation when you finish, but while in meditation try to keep your attention on your object of meditation.

Obviously, it can be difficult to focus all of your attention on an object of attention while ignoring any reasons you may have for practicing meditation. To meditate without an awareness of the reason for meditation, however, is the essence of nonattachment and the essence of not-doing.

You may have a reason for meditating, but while meditating, just forget that reason. Take a holiday from all your strivings! Chill! Try to be purposeless in your meditation. You can have an attitude that you are going into meditation for the sole purpose of being in a meditative state, and this attitude will help you to sustain your focus.

Doing something without conscious purpose can be difficult. Humans run on purpose. And, in truth, when you sit down to meditate you have a purpose for doing so. However, once you enter a meditative state, purpose begins to fade. You want purpose to fade as your field of awareness narrows to include only the here and now. In this sense, you can say that part of meditation involves letting go of your purpose for meditating. Logically, this must be so because purpose is inextricably linked to the future, and the realm of deep meditation is the present.

The Buddha's Teaching on "Right Concentration"

Three of the steps along the Eightfold Path, discussed in the chapter on the teachings of the Buddha, are right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation. These teachings are important for good meditation, so let us discuss them here.

You practice right effort when you have your awareness in the moment, attending to what is happening right now. You are not straining or forcing yourself to be present. You are just present, seeing what is happening right now, and gently ignoring your mind's stream of thoughts. Right effort is also doing what is appropriate to what you are seeing. ^[105] It is not

trying to force a square peg into a round hole. Do not try to force anything in meditation. Everything should be gentle and natural.

Right mindfulness means to see the world clearly, as it is right now. Your mind is not trying to interpret what you see, but allows you to see things as they are. Your mind does not desire that things be different from what they are. In right mindfulness, you are aware of what your mind and body are doing. You are aware of all states of your mind, including its emotional state. Whatever the state of your mind, you make no judgments about that state. ^[106]

In meditation, you are not aiming for any specific state of mind. ^[107] You pick your object of meditation, focus on it, and that is all you do. States of mind will come and go, and thoughts will come and go. What you do is gently remain focused on your object of meditation. While you “sit like a mountain,” thoughts come and go like clouds drifting by. ^[108]

In meditation, you should not try to stop thinking. Just attend to your object of meditation, while staying in the moment. Your thinking will stop (or it will not) all by itself. ^[109] Let your thoughts come and go while you stay focused.

Right meditation (or concentration) is focusing all of your attention on a single object of meditation for an extended period. ^[110] Your attention should be unwavering (at least as unwavering as it can be). As thoughts come up, you note them and let them go.

Exercising Control

When in meditation, you are focusing all of your attention on an object of meditation and you are disregarding whatever else your mind is doing. It may still churn out a stream of thoughts. However, if you keep your mind focused, these thoughts are tame, and they are fleeting.

It is worth examining what you are doing here. You are pulling your attention out of the normal stream of your everyday thinking life. You are pulling your mind out of the ongoing narrative of your life. This act is remarkable when you think about it. It is more than just taking a break from thinking about your responsibilities. It is taking a time-out from your entire life.

The ability to pull your attention away from your personal story is the essence of controlling your mind. To do so is to give first priority to what you consciously intend. This way of using your mind is much different from normal. Normally, your attention is on the inner dialogue, and just keeps flowing along with this dialogue. Periodically you have to choose, but mostly you are just along for the ride, as much of what you do and think is automatic, and reactive.

Your normal thinking life is like being in a car going down the freeway. Everything is

automatic. Only sometimes do you choose to change lanes, go faster or slower, or take an exit. To be present is to stop the car, get out, and spend the next hour enjoying the wildflowers growing along the side of the road.

The Experience of Meditation

Once you can sit in meditation, you are in the perfect state to become aware of your power to be happy. You are alert but not attending to your thoughts or the sounds you hear. Once your mind becomes still, and your attention is free from nagging thoughts, this power will come to you naturally.

You will experience joy, new knowledge, and peace. You will be in these experiences, and these experiences will begin to replace your normal self-centered way of thinking.

In the meditative state, you focus your attention on your object of meditation, and your everyday thoughts lose their power to attract and hold your attention. It is a little like being on a lovely vacation. For a little while, you leave your everyday cares behind and go to visit a wonderful place.

This is a place where you can peacefully rest your attention on your simple sense of being, and the feeling that, “This is sufficient. I do not need anything except this right now.”

Here is how the Bhagavad Gita describes the experience:

When meditation is mastered, the mind is unwavering, like the flame of a lamp in a windless place. In the still mind, in the depths of meditation, the Self reveals itself. Beholding the Self by means of the Self, an aspirant knows the joy and peace of complete fulfillment. Having attained that abiding joy beyond the senses, revealed in the stilled mind, [the aspirant] never swerves from the eternal truth. He desires nothing else, and cannot be shaken by the heaviest burden of sorrow. [\[111\]](#)

During your meditation, you may experience a kind of “aha!” feeling. This feeling may be the one you get when you have found the solution to a problem. This feeling, however, might not result from *finding* anything specific. The “aha” feeling may simply come from getting closer to knowing the truth of the current moment.

In deep meditation, when the inner dialogue and random thoughts subside, you may begin to sense a mind that is clear, silent, and seemingly eternal. You may have moments when you “get” the essence of your object of meditation — be it a word, a flower, a concept such as love — with complete clarity. These experiences come from an awakened mind.

In meditation, there may be a sense of disconnectedness from your normal sense of self, but at the same time being more aware of yourself than you have ever been. You have a

feeling of “getting” the essence of yourself.

In my meditation, I am aware of myself, and I am aware of my object of meditation, but I am not caught up in thinking about myself. I am aware of myself without thinking about the story or narrative of myself. I find that I can still exist without my story. I can still exist without having to think of the past or future. I focus my attention on only what I am doing. I am not splitting my attention between what I am doing, and how what I am doing relates to the rest of me.

Meditation can finally lead to *samadhi*, a Sanskrit word that refers to superconscious states in which the mind is absorbed in and united with the object of meditation. It is a state beyond all thought, speech, or words. *Samadhi* is also an experience of stillness and awareness that can lead to intuitive wisdom. [\[112\]](#)

In addition, at some point, you may see the possibility of endless bliss. You can see and experience the possibility that you will no longer inflict suffering on yourself. You can see and experience the ability to be always joyful. You can see and experience the possibility that you will create joy and happiness. You can see and experience the possibility of a quiet, peaceful mind.

Judging Progress

As you practice meditation, you will often have thoughts about how you are doing, whether meditation is worth the time, and whether you are doing what it takes to solve your life issues. Try to replace these thoughts with the memory and awareness of what you experience while meditating. Judgments made while not meditating come from your ordinary frame of reference, a frame of reference in which it is impossible to judge the value of meditation.

At some point, you may find it possible to judge your progress accurately. When you do so, however, it will be from a different place of awareness. You may not even bother asking yourself how you are progressing, since this place of awareness is one where comparisons do not matter.

Chapter 10

Non-Sitting Meditation

People commonly meditate in non-sitting positions. For instance, mindfulness is a type of meditation that one practices while moving around. Some people practice meditation while dancing. Others practice meditation while lying down. All of these are good meditation methods, if done with focus and concentration.

Lying Down

As long as you can stay awake and alert, lying down or reclining in some way is a good position in which to meditate. The famous statues of the Buddha, lying down with his head resting on his hand, are examples of meditation while reclining.

If you cannot sleep, you can take advantage of being awake and alert by meditating. Meditating in bed is a far better use of your time and much more beneficial than lying there worrying.

Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra (“yogi sleep”) is a form of meditation that reduces tension and anxiety. Yoga Nidra is a sleeplike state in which your body is effectively asleep, but your mind is awake and aware. It is considered conscious deep sleep.

The form of Yoga Nidra that I practice involves lying on my back, with my arms at the sides. I do a guided meditation, listening to a recording. The person leading the meditation asks me to be aware of every part of my body (“be aware of your forehead, your eyes, your mouth”... etc.). This part of the meditation lasts for half an hour or so. Then I am asked to follow my breathing up and down my body. Finally, there is a period of silence when I am asked simply to look within myself. [\[113\]](#)

What Yoga Nidra has in common with other types of meditation is its singularity of focus. The focus moves from one part of the body to the next, but is always restricted to a single part at any one time.

Performing Yoga Nidra, you will want to make sure you keep warm. Your body temperature will drop during long meditations. Getting cold will not harm you, but it may distract you. If you are lying down, you can use a light blanket.

Pranayama Breathing

Pranayama breathing is a form of yoga that focuses on breathing. People do not usually refer to it as a meditation, although it does have elements of meditation. Principally, a person practicing pranayama focuses exclusively on breathing. I find that pranayama has many of the same effects as regular seated meditation.

There are at least 50 different pranayamas. Here are just a few:

- Deep breathing alternating with regular breathing.
- Breathing through alternating nostrils.
- Breath retention.
- Making intake and outflow of breath equal in duration.

Chapter 11

Acceptance

To experience unconditional happiness you need to accept the way things are. You can work to change the way things are, but to be happy, you also have to emotionally accept them as they are right now. You have to loosen the hold of your desire for things to be different than as they are. Any emotional attachment to a desire for things to be different will hold your attention, and prevent you from finding happiness. If you make happiness contingent upon things being other than as they are, you cannot find lasting happiness.

Acceptance involves three separate actions:

- You need to know the way things are.
- You need to accept your responsibility for your experience of the way things are.
- You need to emotionally accept the way things are.

Knowing the Way Things Are

Acceptance of the way things are is difficult. Some of that difficulty arises from not really knowing the truth of things. It is hard to accept something if you do not know its nature. Often when we do not understand something, we fear the worst, and when fear gets involved, acceptance is difficult. Knowing the truth of things, through study, mindfulness, and meditation, can make acceptance easier. I talk about mindfulness and meditation in Chapters 8 to 10.

Accepting Your Responsibility for Your Experience of the Way Things Are

In Chapter 4, I talk about the way you experience your world, and how your experience of the world is your own creation. I do not say that you create your world. Some believe this, but I do not experience myself as creating the actual world, so I have nothing to say about it. I do acknowledge, however, that the way I experience the world is my own doing. It is my responsibility.

As I say in Chapter 4, quoting Swami Satchidananda, depending on how you perceive your situation, “the same world can be a heaven or a hell.” ^[114] Part of acceptance is recognizing and accepting your responsibility for the internal version of reality that you have created for yourself.

Emotionally Accepting Things as They Are

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of acceptance is emotional. To accept something fully, you have to emotionally accept it. For purposes of this discussion, emotional acceptance means not making your happiness depend on things “going your way.” In other words, your life need not be a particular way for you to be happy. Emotional acceptance is not allowing your happiness to be held hostage to the way things are.

An important aspect of being human is that we care about specific things. In addition, we have ideas about what we care about. Some center on the way life is going, and others on the way life should be going. Once we have our ideas, desires, and opinions in place, we do not like to change them. The self-centered self sits at the center of all of this caring, feverishly orchestrating.

Not only do we care about “things,” but we are emotionally attached to them as well. Most of the time we condition our emotional feeling of happiness on circumstances being a certain pleasing way. One of the Buddha’s central teachings was that the dissatisfaction with life that makes us unhappy comes from self-centered desires for things to be other than as they are.

Sometimes we consciously know that situations are not as we would have them be, and this makes us unhappy. Other times we may be unable to consciously see that things are not quite “right,” yet some unconscious part of our mind knows that they are not, and this makes us unhappy.

If you can learn to emotionally accept the way things are, regardless of how they are, you can allow yourself to be happy. Accepting things as they are, you allow what you care about to be as it is. You needn’t let go of your ideas about how things should be. You need only acknowledge the way things are, and then emotionally accept them.

Emotional acceptance is never easy. However, until you can do so, you may be dooming yourself to a life of frustration and unhappiness.

For example, we will all die. There can be only one way to deal with this fact: you have to emotionally accept it, and then proceed to live your life. Living with the certainty that death can come at any time, if fully accepted, will have a powerful and positive effect on your life. Learning to accept death may be the first and most essential step you take in accepting life as it is. Such acceptance is a major step toward unconditional happiness.

The following well-known part of the “Serenity Prayer,” generally attributed to the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), encapsulates a large part of what it means to accept something emotionally. You can find the entire prayer in Chapter 19.

*God, give me the grace to accept with serenity
The things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things which should be changed
And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.*

Changing What Should Be Changed, While Emotionally Accepting Things as They Are

If you find things unsatisfactory in your life, by all means work to change them. However, as you do so, try not to tie your happiness to the way you want your life to be. Adopt an attitude of emotionally accepting circumstances as they are, for as long as they are that way. Such acceptance enables you to remain happy and focused as you work to make things right.

Acceptance does not mean passivity or fatalism in response to a situation. It means acknowledging it for what it is, and not allowing personal happiness to be affected by it. You accept something as it is, and then if anything is wrong with it, you try to change it, all the while emotionally accepting the way it is.

In accepting something as it is, you can see it - and yourself in relation to it — clearly. In addition, by accepting something as it is, your emotions do not get in the way of what you want or need to do to change the way it is.

Let me illustrate emotional acceptance with the following example.

While Henry was in his second year of college, his father died, so Henry had to leave school to get a low-paying job to help support his mother and younger sister. He plans to return to school in a few years, after his sister graduates from high school. His low-paying job is unsatisfactory, but there is little he can do about it until his sister graduates.

Even though Henry is doing the right thing, he may not accept the situation emotionally. His happiness may be conditional upon being in college. Perhaps he cannot permit himself to be happy until he is back at school. In this case, his attachment to the idea that only being in college can make him happy results in his being unhappy.

On the other hand, he may fully accept the situation as it is. He can still have his desire to return to school, but he knows that he will be happy even if he does not do so. He takes the world as he finds it every day, and then works to improve it. His happiness does not depend on whether his efforts to improve his world succeed. He remains happy.

In the second scenario, Henry is more likely to get what he wants because, as indicated in Chapter 1, happy people are generally more successful than those who are not

happy.

True acceptance is acceptance without reservation, without holding back, and without dissatisfaction. You might ask, if you truly accept things as they are, are you not allowing a bad situation to stay bad, and possibly get worse? The answer is no. You can emotionally accept the way things are, without reservation, and still have it as your goal to change the situation.

As I said, this acceptance is emotional acceptance. You can maintain a goal to change things, but your motivation is the fact that things are not right the way they are. Your motivation does not come from a belief that change will necessarily make you happier.

We've seen how unhappiness and dissatisfaction are not very good motivators. Being miserable usually does not stir you to accomplish constructive goals. Nor do happy people just loll around being happy. They tend to be "achievers."

Harold has a new job working in a New York bank. He is exceptionally smart, but he went to a state university while his peers all attended Ivy League schools. He feels that these friends are excluding him, and this makes him unhappy. In fact, they often do exclude him. Mostly they do this unconsciously, but sometimes they consciously decide among themselves to exclude him from non-work activities, rationalizing that he may not feel comfortable or fit in.

Harold can choose to be unhappy about the situation. If he does, his unhappiness will affect his work and his chances of advancement. The better option is for him to emotionally accept the situation as it is, focus on remaining happy, and work hard to reach his goals in the company.

It is true that certain things are not acceptable, and unless you are a saint, you will likely react with distress. For example, if you are suffering from a painful illness, if your child is sick, or if you are being attacked, you will react emotionally. It is difficult to accept these kinds of situations calmly.

Most of the time, however, life's problems are not inherently harmful to us. When we are dissatisfied with the way things are, it is usually because they do not make us happy.

Perhaps we do not like the way we look, perhaps we think people do not like us, or perhaps we do not like our boss. These are not trivial matters, but they are not harmful to us. It is possible to emotionally accept them while at the same time working to change them.

Drawing the Circle Bigger

By its very nature, your own unique perspective has much to do with the way you see the world, determining the degree to which you can emotionally accept things as they are. If

your perspective is to view situations in isolation, then whatever is wrong will loom larger in your life than it actually is. But if you will “draw the circle bigger,” you can often put things in clearer perspective, so that you can easily accept them.

The Dalai Lama says:

...if difficulties come, they may appear enormous when you look at them closely, but if you approach the same problem from a wider perspective, it appears smaller. With these methods, and by developing a larger outlook, you can reduce your frustration whenever you face problems. [\[115\]](#)

Here is an example.

Jack is a nice-looking young man who is getting ready to go to a high school dance. Just before leaving, he spots a pimple on his chin. In his mirror, it looks enormous. He tries to cover it up, but it still shows. Self-conscious about the way he looks, Jack is made miserable by a single blemish. At the dance, his girlfriend has no idea what’s wrong. She doesn’t even notice the pimple. She worries that Jack is going to dump her.

Jack needs to draw his circle bigger. His blemish is a minor thing for everyone else, but because his focus on it is so narrow, it is a major issue to him. He just needs to accept it, and get on with his life.

Letting Go of the Emotional Need to Control Things

There periodically comes a point when everything seems perfect, yet one stands there with an anxious look on one’s face saying, “I don’t know — something’s just not right!” We do not know what that “something” may be, but it nags at us. We cannot let it go. We cannot accept things as they are, and we are not happy. Why is this?

I imagine a mother, just before her daughter’s wedding. She has been preparing this wedding for a year. Her daughter is happy and in love, the guests are happy, the father of the bride is happy, but the mother is not happy. She keeps looking for things that are wrong. She frowns at a place setting that is a little out of place. She notices that the waiter has a spot on his coat and that the room is a little warm. These things get fixed, but still she looks for things to be wrong. Why is she doing this?

The mother of the bride may be demonstrating her need to control the way things are. Even if nothing is wrong, she stands there, in control, waiting to do something or fix something. The last hurdle before acceptance is the latent desire to control what happens around you.

To allow things to be as they are, without feeling the emotional need to control them,

is a significant shift in the way of being in the world. It may feel like you are letting your guard down.

Periodically, we all have to make the final shift to the acceptance of the way things are. To find unconditional happiness, we have to give up control (or illusions of control) and allow things to be as they are.

You do not necessarily have to let your guard down in order to accept things. You just need to let go of your emotional need to control things.

Do Not Be Afraid to Be Happy

There is a strain of thinking in Western culture that says that too much happiness is not good. It may even be wrong to look for happiness. I suppose that some people subscribe to this thinking. Honestly, I have never met people like this, but I am sure they exist.

These people aside, almost everyone just wants to be — and enjoys being — happy. Therefore, this book is just about being happy for no reason other than the one that is most important: we want to be happy. The great success, better relationships, and longer and healthier lives of happy people are just bonuses.

Here is a little experiment. Try to imagine that you are happy right now, deeply happy. Imagine that you are happy without anything in your life changing. If you can imagine this, how does it feel to you? Does it feel a little odd? Does it feel a little crazy?

My belief is that it is crazy not to feel happy all the time. As long as you are not currently suffering a trauma, there is no reason not to feel happy.

I believe, however, that much of the time we cannot let ourselves be happy. We may hold back out of guilt about being too happy. Perhaps we feel that we do not deserve happiness, or that if we were happy, we might let our guard down for a moment - — just long enough for the world to come crashing down on us. We would then (the subconscious reasoning goes) be more unhappy than ever.

Fear of releasing one's guard is especially common among victims of trauma, such as abused women and children, and veterans with PTSD. Because of their experiences, they may feel, with good reason, that they can never let their guard down.

It is true that happy people are less alert for danger. Our genetic coding, inherited from primitive times, may link being too happy with being inattentive to threats to our safety. Living in a constant state of alert probably insured our survival in the jungles and plains of long ago.

Most people reading this book live in the developed world and in relatively safe

communities where they can afford to be happy, and relax. Yet they do not do so! Now, the anxiety that kept us alive 100,000 years ago can kill us. Stress-related diseases, such as hypertension, cause many deaths. On the other hand, attack in the night, which we may still be unconsciously on the alert for, is rare.

The unhappiness and stress of being constantly alert to danger used to be adaptive, and helped us to survive. Now it does more harm than good, while learning to relax and be happy is what can ensure a long and healthy life.

Chapter 12

Nonattachment

We all have strong desires in life. By themselves, they should not get in the way of your being happy. However, when you are so attached to them that you cannot let them go, or when happiness is contingent upon the satisfaction of these desires, they prevent you from being happy. To learn to be happy, you must learn to be unattached, both to things that you do not have, and to things that you do have.

Yogic, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophies all recommend the practice of nonattachment in order to progress toward spiritual happiness. Even devotional practices teach nonattachment to things of this world.

What is Nonattachment?

Nonattachment is a way of living wherein you actively engage in life, but your happiness is not dependent upon the result of what you do. You continue to care about what happens, but you do not allow it to disturb your happiness, peace, and equanimity.

To be unattached is not to be unaware, uncaring, apathetic, or unsympathetic to what is in your world. Quite the contrary! You can be very aware and can care very deeply. You do so, however, without losing yourself to the world, and without forgetting that your happiness does not depend upon what you do. You are, in a sense, “in the world, but not of the world.” [\[116\]](#)

To be unattached does not mean you lack motivation or are numb to the world around you. It means that your desires do not control your mind and actions. You can live a life that is fully engaged with the world, and you can have desires, but you are not addicted to that which you desire.

Likewise, to be unattached does not mean you should avoid pleasure in life. As you go through life, you should experience the happiness, pleasure, and joy that are natural to you. You should enjoy life. Food, music, art, sex, companionship, family, and friends are all wonderful, and you should enjoy them. Once your happy experience is over, however, you should not allow desire for yet another such experience, or regret about it being over, to make you miserable. Your desire for what you do not have should not be so powerful that it controls you.

There is a line spoken in a thousand movies and novels, which goes something like this: “I had to do it, because if I didn’t I would spend the rest of my life regretting not taking the chance.” It makes for a good story, but doing something because you are afraid you might someday suffer regret is not the best way to approach life. Regret is a sadness resulting from not doing something that might have turned out well, or from doing something that turned out badly. Implicit in regret is the attachment of emotional well-being to what has or has not happened. To be unattached is to savor the way life is now, without even considering how it might have been. Regret cannot take hold of a person who is unattached.

In addition, pain and loss are parts of life, and you should experience these things. If you see someone in pain, it is obviously right to empathize with that person’s unhappiness. However, as you go through life, fully experiencing the good and the bad, you maintain steady contact with your inner self and your inner happiness.

Nonattachment is also living in the world without being so attached to your experiences that you come to believe that what you experience is all that there is. There is a Hindi saying that seems to sum up the spirit of nonattachment: “Keep the heart in God and the head in the world.”^[117]

The archery master in *Zen in the Art of Archery* expressed nonattachment in the following way when he said to his student:

You know already that you should not grieve over bad shots; learn now not to rejoice over the good ones. You must free yourself from the buffetings of pleasure and pain, and learn to rise above them in easy equanimity, to rejoice as though not you but another had shot well. ^[118]

Desireless Happiness

The happiness that is available without attachment is sometimes called *desireless happiness*. What destroys happiness is attachment to your desire for what you do not have. When happiness is dependent upon the satisfaction of desire, you cannot experience the happiness that is natural to you. Another way of saying this is you cannot chase after happiness in the world.

To be happy, you need to eliminate your attachment to desires. It is your attachment to them that causes much of your pain and blocks your ability to experience lasting happiness.^[119] When you reduce your attachment, you can experience natural happiness. Some call this desireless happiness.^[120] Desireless happiness is the happiness that arises when you reduce the hold that your desires have on you.

If you give a child a treat, such as ice cream, the child will probably be happy.

Sometimes there is pure, unthinking happiness that for anyone is a joy to behold. But when the child finishes that treat, he or she may want more, and that desire can create misery equal in intensity to the joy previously experienced. Why? The child's attachment to the desire for previously experienced joy brings misery.

Are we not *all* this child, no matter how old we are? Why do so many of us “kids” not rejoice in the experience when it is there, and then feel tranquility when it is not? It is because humans are born to crave things.

Unfortunately, a child is stuck with being a child, and every parent knows what happens when you deny a child something he or she very much wants. As we mature, we develop a certain tolerance to unfilled desires without being miserable; this is more true of some of us than others.

The key to desireless happiness is the ability to enjoy something while at the same time remaining perfectly happy not to have it. If your happiness does not depend on having something, then not having that thing cannot block your natural ability to be happy.

Imagine you are sitting and talking with friends, and you are at peace. Then someone gives you a delicious piece of candy. You eat it slowly, savoring its taste, its smell, its texture, and its color. While you are eating it — perhaps letting it luxuriously melt in your mouth so that it will last longer — you immerse yourself in the experience. Then, when you are finished, you forget about it and go back to talking with your friends. You are still at peace. You do not have a desire for another bite of that candy. You remain at peace.

Let me summarize desireless happiness in this way. Your nature is to be happy. However, inevitably, you become attached to thoughts and desires associated with being happy, and these attachments make you want to do specific things to become happy. Often these are things that made you happy in the past, or that someone told you would make you happy. If you rid yourself of the attachments, you still have the desire for these things, but that unfulfilled desire does not block your natural ability to be happy.

Like the child first experiencing ice cream, you allow yourself to experience the joy of the moment, and when the moment is over, its absence does not disturb your ability to be happy.

The Mind's Attachment to the Personal Narrative

One of the most important requirements for practicing non-attachment is controlling your attention. To learn to be unattached you have to be able to put your attention where you want it, and keep it there. You need to periodically let go of the desires, worries, fears, and

obsessions of your mind. Your mind's attachment to these things is automatic, and learning to control your mind and your attention loosens these attachments.

Unfortunately, the mind resists control. Our attention is used to focusing automatically on the thoughts and perceptions that arise in our minds, and automatically attends to our ongoing story or narrative. This ongoing story involves sense impressions of everything happening around us and inside of us, in real time. The mind keeps track of our entire existence as best it can. It is firmly identified with the ongoing story of our lives. It is important to have times when you disengage from this narrative.

As we get older, we accumulate a history and an awareness of future possibilities. We accumulate a story of ourselves. Our attention becomes more and more involved in the story and less and less involved in the here and now. If I try to detach my attention from my ongoing story, my mind gets anxious. It is uncomfortable about letting the narrative go.

For instance, in meditation I may try to focus my attention entirely on my breathing or some other object of meditation. When I do this, my mind resists, much preferring to keep attending to the sounds around me, the feelings in my body, and the random thoughts that pop into my head. My mind "has a mind of its own" and does not want to go where I tell it to go.

Sometimes I sense a vague fear that if I disengage from my story, my life will fall apart. It is as if constantly attending to my narrative is what keeps it — and me — going. My fear of taking my attention off my personal narrative is analogous to a juggler spinning plates.

We have all seen the juggler who spins plates on sticks. She balances a stick on the stage, puts a plate atop the stick, and starts it spinning. She does the same with another, and another and another, until there are five plates spinning on their sticks. As the first plate starts to spin more slowly, she has to rush over and get it spinning again. Then she sets up another two sticks. She shoots back to three plates that have slowed down nearly to the point where they will fall and gets them going again. She puts up two more plates, and then another, so she finally has ten plates, all spinning. She cannot put up any more plates because she has to keep rushing from plate to plate, speeding them up so they'll stay on their sticks.

These are entertaining performances, but when I think of such "balancing acts," I cannot help but think, "This is a picture of my mind at work." Let me explain. We all construct our version of reality in our minds. It is not a static reality. It is a story or narrative, with scenery, players, plot lines, winners, losers, happiness, and sorrow, all set in motion, and kept in motion by our minds. It is much like the spinning plates. The ongoing drama that

represents what we call our lives is kept going, kept spinning, by us, and only by us.

The shame of it is, our minds expend a huge amount of effort keeping the story going. In addition to examining and analyzing what we are doing, as well as what other people may be thinking about us, we remember what we did, think about what we are going to do, and, at some level (not always conscious), worry about everything constantly. Much of this mental activity does not enhance our lives and does not make us happy. Perhaps if we were to focus on fewer things at a time, or even just one thing, we would live better and more happily.

Instead, our many thoughts and fears are like the spinning plates. They demand our attention, and they get it. Like the juggler, we zip from one thought to another. We feel that if we did not attend to a particular thought or worry, we would lose control, and something bad would happen.

But this is not so. You can often let go of most of what you are worrying about, and nothing will happen. After all, you do this every night when you drop off to sleep. Just let the story go! Unlike the plates, life will not come crashing down just because you are not turning to every little thought and worry that comes along. On the contrary, without all kinds of random thoughts and worries sucking up all of your attention, you are free to be who you really are, a peaceful and happy being.

Right now you are like the performer balancing spinning plates on sticks, trying to keep them all in motion so they do not come crashing down around you. To be happy, you have to pull your attention away from the story, at least for a while. You have to loosen the attachment that your ongoing story has on your mind's attention. Miraculously, the plates will keep spinning.

The Way Attachment Inhibits You

If you allow your happiness to depend upon the result of what you do, this can lead to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. It can also seriously inhibit your ability to succeed at what you do.

It seems that our numerous desires and fears can attach themselves to our skills and abilities, and prevent them from manifesting freely. It is as if these desires and fears had wrapped themselves around our talents and passions like the tentacles of some creature. In some cases, our gifts are so stuck and constricted that we can barely use them. For example, stage fright is an obvious case of fear preventing a talent from expressing itself.

Conventional wisdom says that a strong attachment to winning can be a powerful incentive to achievement; some self-proclaimed sages say that you need to be “hungry” to get

anyplace in the world. However, Chuang Tzu warns that the need to win (attachment to winning) can drain you of power.^[121] The way that this happens is illustrated in *The Way of Chuang Tzu*. In “The Need to Win,” the archer who shoots without pressure of an attachment to winning has all of his skill available. Once there is a need to win, his skill is greatly diminished, or gone.

When an archer is shooting for nothing

He has all his skill.

If he shoots for a brass buckle

He is already nervous.

If he shoots for a prize of gold

He goes blind

Or sees two targets—

He is out of his mind!

His skill has not changed,

But the prize divides him.

He cares.

He thinks more of winning

Than of shooting—

And the need to win

Drains him of power.^[122]

Nonattachment and the Self-Conscious Self

One of the things that keeps us unhappy and dissatisfied with life is our attachment to our ideas, ideals, views, opinions, theories, conceptions, and beliefs. We often make our happiness depend on having a good self-image, opinions with which others agree, and beliefs that are popular and considered meritorious. In other words, happiness is usually associated with the approval of others. You might call this need for approval the self-conscious self.

Attachment to the approval of others can rob us of our ability to do what we want to do. Nowhere is this more apparent than when attachment to the self-image prevents us from doing things that we fear may damage that image. For example:

Susan likes John and wants to ask him for a date. Susan is attractive and articulate, and is usually pretty good at charming people to do what she wants them to do. She is really nervous that John might say no. Finally getting up her courage, she walks over to him and tries to speak, but she cannot do it. Her mind has gone blank, and there are no words. Her

fear of rejection and potential damage to her fragile self-image have struck her dumb.

It's remarkable that when your happiness does not depend on the way you see yourself, you are free to exercise whatever skill you have to express and create. If you can practice nonattachment regarding your self-image, self-consciousness can simply disappear.

Interestingly, self-consciousness frequently disappears all by itself. Anytime you are engaged in an activity in which you are fully present, your self-conscious self may recede into the background. You probably do not notice it. When you do notice it in a situation where you would ordinarily be self-conscious, it can be a memorable experience.

When I was 24, not quite the peak years of self-consciousness but pretty close, I was a volunteer with an organization that gave seminars aimed at self-improvement. This group would hold guest seminars in which guests would be invited and informed about the full seminars. My role was to sit in the seminar, listen to the speaker, and then after the seminar talk to guests, answer their questions, and try to get them to enroll in the full seminars. Once, just as a guest seminar was ending, and I got up to speak, my self-conscious self entirely disappeared. I know this because I was usually quite awkward in talking to people and trying to persuade them to enroll. This time, my self-consciousness was entirely gone. The contrast between my normal way of being and this new way of being was dramatic.

This experience remains memorable for me because the dropping away of my self-consciousness was so sudden. The shift from full-time self-consciousness to no self-consciousness at all was like flipping a switch to reveal a wonderful light that I never knew was there.

Practicing Nonattachment

The mind desires many things, and it is all right to have such desires. You become unhappy and dissatisfied with life, however, when you attach your hopes for happiness to desired circumstances and possessions. When you are attached to desires, they trap your awareness so that you are not free to find the lasting happiness you want.

All of that stuff in your head about what you want and need demands your energy and attention, and probably gets it most of the time. Even if you are not doing anything, even if you are just sitting and trying to relax, or lying in bed trying to go to sleep, all of your endless desires demand your attention.

The practices in this book all serve to free your mind from its attachment to what you want. In all of these practices, you learn to still your mind so that you can free yourself from the desires and fears that crowd your mind. Yes, you will always have desires and fears, but

their hold on your attention will be less. You will be able to enjoy your days without your happiness being disturbed by the things that happen to you.

Chapter 13

Selflessness and Charity

Selflessness and charity play important roles in helping to bring happiness into a person's life. Selflessness emphasizes actions that primarily benefit others. These are actions performed without expectation of reward. Charity is a type of selflessness. Selfless and charitable actions are also fundamental to all truly spiritual practices. Yoga, Taoism, Buddhism, and devotional practices all stress their importance.

Selfless Desires and Actions

Selfless acts and desires reduce the focus on personal desires and weaken attachment to these desires. Absent strong attachment to personal desires, you are free of the dissatisfaction that comes with those desires. Even though you want the world to be other than as it is, if your aim is mainly to benefit others, such desire does not spawn the dissatisfaction that prevents happiness.

Engaging in selfless actions is one of yoga's four great paths to lasting happiness. If you desire to be a beneficent presence in the world, that desire cannot destroy your happiness. As long as you do not attach personal benefit to the fulfillment of the desire, and as long as your personal happiness is not primary, you can work towards your goal of helping others while staying happy.

Selfless Thoughts and Desires

Swami Satchidananda says, "Any desire without any personal or selfish motive will never bind you." ^[123] Certain kinds of thoughts and desires are painful and bind us, while others do not. Those that bind us and cause pain are selfish thoughts, but selfless thoughts leave us in peace. Swami Satchidananda encourages us to "cultivate selfless thoughts." He says, "That is our first duty." ^[124]

What is a selfless thought? A thought of love for someone is selfless. However, this must be love with no expectation of love in return. Such a selfless love can never lead to pain.

Compassion for the suffering of another is also selfless. Such compassion can bring temporary pain to you, but will ultimately give you both understanding and peace.

Joy at the success and fulfillment of another is also an unmistakable expression of

selflessness. As previously discussed, the human mind has a negative bias, and it is easier to commiserate and assist in hard times than it is to rejoice in the good fortune of another. In this sense, joy for the success of another is a truly selfless act.

The Bhagavad Gita says:

When a person responds to the joys and sorrows of others as if they were his own, he has attained the highest state of spiritual union. [\[125\]](#)

What is a selfish thought? It can be a thought about something you want, with the expectation that having it will make you happy. The happiness of others does not factor in to the selfish thought. A wish to keep something you have, if losing it will make you unhappy, is also selfish.

A thought of conditional love for someone that demands love in return is a selfish thought. Such “love” can lead to immediate pain, or pain in the future. Loving someone who does not love you can bring suffering if you are desperate for that person’s love. Loving someone whom you need, and who loves you in return, can be wonderful for a while, but what happens when that person stops loving you? If you need that person’s love, loss and jealousy will cause great suffering.

What is it about selfish thoughts that makes them so painful? Selfish thoughts dominate the mind. All of the attention is riveted on what you want, what you need, and what you want to avoid. The nature of selfish thoughts is that they will simply not let your mind be at peace. It is only when your mind is at peace that you can experience happiness. Selfish thoughts also involve very particular conditions under which you will permit yourself to be happy. Because your happiness is conditional and temporal, you cannot experience true and lasting happiness.

Selfless Actions

Selfless action is one of the great paths in yoga. The life of Mahatma Gandhi is a shining example of this path. When you renounce the fruits of whatever action you take, you reveal the value of selfless action. You may be passionately committed to a particular action or goal, but if you are not attached to the outcome of the action, your actions cannot bind you. If your happiness does not depend on whether you succeed or fail, the result of what you do cannot disturb your equanimity.

In his book on the Bhagavad Gita, Gandhi says you must renounce the fruits of your actions to be on this path. He makes it clear, however, that to renounce the fruits of your action does not mean giving up the reward for action. “Again, let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer.” Renunciation instead means only the

absence of attachment to a reward. Gandhi says that you can pursue your personal ends, and still be on the path of selfless action, as long as you are unattached to the results of your actions. He says, “He who renounces reaps a thousandfold.”^[126]

Selfless action and nonattachment go hand in hand, with one complementing the other. Swami Satchidananda says:

Once you are unattached in your personal life, you can serve others, and by doing so, you will find more and more joy. That’s why sometimes I say that the selfless person is the most selfish one. Why? Because a selfless person doesn’t want to lose his or her peace and happiness.^[127]

What Is Charity?

To offer true charity, you must give without expecting anything in return.^[128] Giving to others and expecting something in return is not charity, even if you expect only their appreciation. Giving without expecting or even desiring anything in return is hard to do, but this is the nature of true charity.

Suppose a person is charitable to all people, but does so mainly to receive blessings. Perhaps this person is counting on his good deeds to attract the favorable notice of God, and ensure a place in heaven. This kind of charity is obviously not selfless. Giving in this way is bargaining, not charity.

Let us relate this to your life. Perhaps you have someone in your life to whom you always give things — your time, your money, or your love. You give because this person needs what you have to give. Do you expect something in return, such as love or gratitude? If you do, maybe you are bargaining, not giving. If this person never gives anything in return, how does it make you feel? Do you feel resentful? If so, then you are not practicing selfless charity.

Try to imagine giving to someone without expecting or wanting anything in return, not even gratitude. The reason you expect nothing is not that you believe the person to be ungrateful. You give because that person is in need, and it never occurs to you to expect or want anything in return. You give from compassion, without needing anything in return, not even a thank-you. Does this seem an odd way to be? Those who are truly selfless might say that such compassion is the way of the universe.

What happens when you give and expect something in return, even if only a thank-you note? If you expect something, you cannot be happy unless you receive your reward. You feel slighted or resentful, or you feel like a fool, especially if the seeming ingratitude

persists over time. Yes, you are a fool, but not for the reason you think. You have attached your happiness to what another person does or does not do. Your happiness is a hostage to another's actions, and if that person does not respond appropriately, you cannot be happy.

You might ask, *should I not be happy if I help someone, and why shouldn't happiness be my reward for doing so?* Some would answer this question by saying that the world is synonymous with oneself, so if you help someone else, you are really helping yourself. Why should you be happy just because you are helping yourself?

However, my answer is this: you should be happy when you selflessly help someone. However, happiness is not your reward for doing so. Instead, selfless and charitable actions are expressions of the happiness that already lives within you. As it is your true nature to be happy, it is also your true nature to be selfless.

On the other hand, if you help someone, and in doing so expect to be happy as your reward, real happiness may elude you. You may experience conditional happiness as a reward for helping someone, but when you focus your attention on the reward, you move away from lasting happiness.

Chapter 14

Compassion and Forgiveness

The practices of compassion and forgiveness, like selflessness and charity, moves you closer to happiness. They pull your focus away from your self-centered desires, and in so doing reduces the power of those desires to make you unhappy. Compassion for others is central to all spiritual practices. In Buddhism, compassion and wisdom are the most important virtues a person can have.

Compassion leads to the ability to forgive. When you have compassion for another person, you are filled with the desire to ease his or her pain. That desire gives you the grace to forgive.

Compassion

The Dalai Lama, one of Buddhism's most influential spiritual leaders, says that compassion is the basis for human happiness. This lovely man probably knows as much about compassion as anyone living. In 1996, he gave an important lecture titled *Compassion: The Basis for Human Happiness*.^[129]

His Holiness says in that lecture:

As long as we are human beings, and members of human society, we need human compassion. Without that, you cannot be happy.

He goes on to say that we have to develop compassion and affection for others, in order to have the happiness we want, and to have happy friends and family.

What Is Compassion?

Compassion is a deep sense of caring about others. Merriam-Webster defines it as the “sympathetic consciousness of others' distress, together with a desire to alleviate it.”

In his 1996 lecture, the Dalai Lama says that compassion has to be based on respect for others. It depends on realizing that others have the same right to happiness as do you.

In addition, he makes clear that your compassion should not be directed only to other people. It should be directed inward as well. He says, “If we do not love ourselves, how can we love others?” To have genuine love and compassion for others, it “should first be directed at oneself.”

He says that real compassion is unbiased. The closeness and caring of real compassion should be the same for enemies as for friends.

In some ways, it is harder to have compassion for friends and family than for strangers. What we regard as compassion for friends and family may be actually more like attachment than compassion. In addition, there is always personal history with people close to you. Often, many grievances need to be forgiven, and the inability to forgive gets in the way of compassion.

In Confucian philosophy, the character of a superior person is built around four virtues. The first of these is compassion, which in this philosophy is the ability to identify with the joys and troubles of others. ^[130]

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.

The Practice of Compassion

The Dalai Lama says in his 1996 lecture that the Buddhist approach to practicing compassion is very simple. It is based on the belief that the lives of all sentient beings are as precious as our own. In Mahayana Buddhism, the ideal is the bodhisattva, whose compassion for humanity is so great that he or she has taken a vow not to enter nirvana “until the grass itself be enlightened.” One of the many titles given to the Buddha is “The Compassionate One.”

The compassionate choice of the bodhisattva is echoed by the contemplative, Bernadette Roberts. She says that charity or compassion is the hallmark of the egoless (unitive) state. The absence of a focus on the self “makes it a spontaneous, choiceless requirement.” She adds, “Charity or compassion is no longer something we practice; it is the deepest center of our being that arises automatically, spontaneously.” ^[131]

The practice of compassion is not limited to the religious community. The following well-known quote is from a letter written by Albert Einstein,.

A human being is part of the whole, called by us the “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Developing Compassion

Compassion develops naturally as you move your attention away from yourself and towards happiness. You can also work on compassion through meditation.

Compassion is frequently an object of meditation. Its power as an object of meditation comes from the fact that, as you focus on the feeling of compassion, you focus attention away from yourself. Whether you consider compassion for a specific person, for strangers, or for the world, your focus is outward and upward. As you pull the attention away from yourself, you may start to experience a tendency to abide in peace without having to worry about yourself.

Forgiveness

We live in a world where there is much to make us angry. If someone harms you, it is natural to feel pain and to react with anger. However, anger is an emotion that is harmful to everyone, especially the person who carries the anger. The harm that you inflict on yourself by feeling angry is perhaps greater than the hurt done to you by someone else. For one who strives for happiness, the only logical response to hurt from another is compassion and forgiveness.

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.^[132]

For someone in harmony with the laws of the universe (the dharma or the Tao), the natural reaction to a hurt received is probably going to be compassion. If someone harms you, rather than feeling angry, you may experience compassion for both you and the person who harmed you. It seems counterintuitive, but when you are in harmony, compassion for the other person seems like the only possible response.

Jesus said, “If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.”^[133] I believe He was telling us that if we would become like Him, our only response to any unkindness would be compassion. As he hung on the cross, Jesus prayed, “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.”^[134] He seems to have had little concern for himself. Instead, out of his great compassion, He prayed that those who were murdering him be forgiven.

Forgiving Others

There is a lot of wisdom in Alexander Pope’s familiar saying, “To err is human; to forgive, divine.” When you turn your focus away from yourself and toward others, as you do when you forgive someone, you orient yourself towards the Source. Forgiveness then moves

you closer to lasting happiness.

The psychological benefits of forgiveness are great. For a good discussion of forgiveness in this context, see Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky's *The How of Happiness*.

In forgiving someone, you practice both selflessness and compassion. As already discussed, selflessness and compassion weaken the focus on self and in so doing open the way to happiness. Forgiveness does the same thing.

Resentment and anger are among the emotions associated with the sense that things are not as you wish them to be. The resulting dissatisfaction can overwhelm all other feelings, destroying any chance of happiness.

If someone has hurt you badly enough that you continue to harbor resentment or anger toward that person, then the best thing you can do is forgive. The longer you carry the resentment or anger, the more damage you do to yourself, and the farther away you move from happiness.

The way that you go about forgiving does not seem to matter. You just need to remove all feelings of anger, resentment, and revenge that you may harbor against another. You may go to that person and forgive him or her, or you may silently forgive without confronting the person.

Of course, the one who harmed you may be devastated by feelings of guilt, remorse, and/or fear of reprisal. You practice compassion for that person if you express your forgiveness in person.

Forgiving Yourself

Forgiving yourself is as necessary as forgiving others — perhaps more so, since you're likely to have a lot for which you need to forgive yourself. You may feel guilty or angry with yourself for what you have done. You may be horribly ashamed. These are feelings associated with wanting things to be different from the way they are, and, as we've seen, they lead to dissatisfaction with life.

Forgiving yourself is hard, but you have to do it. Remember, you make the world a better place by being happy. You benefit the world by being a happy person. Forgive yourself and be happy.

Chapter 15

Ethical Living

There are all kinds of benefits from living an ethical life. The most obvious is that being ethical enables you to live as a valued member of society. However, I am not going to talk about the common benefits of living ethically. I will instead highlight how this leads to unconditional happiness.

Living ethically is a good thing, from both a societal and a personal point of view. From a societal point of view, when people live ethically, relations between them unfold more smoothly. When people stop following the norms, civil society breaks down.

From a personal point of view, ethical living seems to have the effect of minimizing your focus on personal interests and desires, which helps you shift your attention to happiness. Unethical conduct, on the other hand, is symptomatic of — and even increases — the self-centered desire for things that you mistakenly believe will make you happy.

As we will see in Appendices 2 and 3, Buddhism and yoga offer much guidance on ethical conduct, which is key to those practices. In addition, although I do not discuss specific guidance in Appendix 1, ethical conduct is the foundation of following the Tao. Likewise, I do not provide specific guidance in the chapter on devotional practices, but ethical conduct is integral to such practices.

Nonviolence

Both Buddhism and yoga teach the benefits of nonviolence. Obviously, this applies to all people. Buddhists make a point of teaching nonviolence toward any living being. The violence you do to another can have a terrible effect on you, and can destroy any chance of your learning to be happy.

The *Yoga Sutras* teach that violence is often a response to fear. Our inclination is to want to see someone harmed in order to protect ourselves. It is fueled by the delusion of importance of self over others. By giving in to violence, you are building an impenetrable wall around yourself, and making it more and more difficult to let go of the hold that self-centered self has on your attention. You make it more difficult to shift your attention to happiness.

Truthfulness

Dishonesty, like violence, is usually motivated by the self-centered self. It can be activated by the desire to get something, or to avoid pain. Every time you tell a lie, you are feeding the insatiable appetite of the self-centered self, and moving farther and farther away from happiness. Truthfulness, on the other hand, encourages you to acknowledge and accept the way things are. You deemphasize the self, which is never quite happy with the way things are.

Not Stealing

People often steal because they feel empty, and want things that are not theirs, and which they perhaps cannot get honestly. The self-centered self wants to take and keep what it believes to be painfully missing. “Criminals” steal by illegal means; smart people often steal legally. But it is all stealing, and every time you do it, you pander to and strengthen the self-centered self.

Do Not Be Greedy

The emotion of greed obviously comes from a desire for things one does not have, or wants more and more of. It is the very opposite of the charity and selflessness that promote happiness.

The Karmic Debt

The concept of karma plays a large role in both yoga and Buddhism. It is the belief that any volitional act you perform eventually rebounds to you in some way. Simplistically, it could be that if you steal from someone, then someone will eventually steal from you. If you harm someone, someone will eventually harm you.

It is difficult to find happiness when unethical actions are allowed to pile up a karmic “debt” that must eventually be repaid. At a minimum, the guilt in some part of your mind and spirit may keep eating at you and obscuring the peace and happiness you seek.

Chapter 16

Physical Practices

Several time-tested physical practices can help you on your journey toward happiness. These include hatha yoga, t'ai chi chuan, and aerobics. Many people commonly practice these disciplines purely for the physical benefits they impart. Here I want to talk about the psychic benefits.

Hatha Yoga

The yoga masters developed hatha yoga to aide in meditation and concentration. This discipline is mostly practiced now because it increases flexibility and strength, but its original purpose still holds. Long periods of sitting meditation are difficult to maintain if your body is not in good shape. Many of the poses in hatha yoga help you to relax and concentrate, two basic requirements for meditation.

T'ai Chi Chuan

As I discuss in Appendix 1, on the Tao, t'ai chi chuan was developed long ago as a way of increasing the ch'i, or life force, that a person has available. The physical exercises in this discipline are designed to draw ch'i into the body and unblock ch'i that is already in the body.

Aerobic Exercise

The repetitive nature and simplicity of aerobic exercise, such as jogging or riding on a stationary bicycle, make these perfect activities for practicing mindfulness.

My favorite exercise is a reclining stationary bike. Often I get on the bike, set the timer for 40 minutes, and then go immediately into a state of mindfulness. There is something about engaging the full body in an automatic activity that promotes intense mindfulness. For me, the mind gets really quiet and for long periods, I am aware of only my body.

Quigong

Quigong, like t'ai chi chuan, was originally developed by Taoists and has psychic as well as physical benefits.

Chapter 17

Work That Promotes Happiness

We all spend a lot of time working or going to school. The time spent in these activities should support efforts to find happiness. Too often, however, we do work that negatively affects happiness, and then have to spend much of our leisure time undoing these effects. In this chapter, we'll explore approaches to work and school that can enhance happiness.

Work That Precludes Happiness

Studies of depression in the population show relatively high rates of affective disorders in healthcare workers, social workers, and nursing home workers, among others. ^[135] Obviously, people in these professions are likely to experience both stress and tragedy on a regular basis. Some people can handle these situations emotionally, and some cannot.

If you are in one of these professions, or in any other kind of high-stress work, you may be carrying a lot of stress. If what you experience daily makes you sad, stressed, or anxious, you may spend much of your time and energy simply trying to cope with these reactions. They overwhelm your ability to learn to be happy.

To get an idea of the kind of stress someone may face on a daily basis, and its detrimental effects on happiness, consider the following scenario.

You are visiting the zoo with eight five-year-olds, all under your care. As you are explaining to the children that the panda cub in the enclosure is only three months old, you look around and notice there are only seven children standing around you. You count again, then you look around the area. When you realize that a child is missing, your reaction will likely be intense and overwhelming. Frantic, you may not be able to think of anything but finding this child. The stress and anxiety will stay with you until the child is found.

Imagine working in a profession where this kind of stress and anxiety is triggered in you frequently. Spending so much time at the mercy of your reactions, you may suffer insomnia, and have little chance of making yourself happy.

A high-stress job can be exciting at first, but after a time it wears you down. The excitement is gone, but the stress is not. High-stress jobs often pay well. However, can any amount of money compensate for your inability to find what you really want, which is

happiness?

If your goal is to be happy, you need to think about what you do. Does it promote happiness, or does it keep it at bay? Does the job permit the calm and clarity needed for a healthy and happy family life, or is it a job for which you need to be unattached from any family or group that needs your attention? Can you do the job, then go home and get a good night's rest? Can you relax after work and on the weekends without drugs or alcohol? Does the money you earn compensate for the negative impact of the job on your life? These are just some of the questions you need to ask yourself.

Work That Promotes Happiness

Finding work that fits your temperament and interests is important for job satisfaction, reduction of stress, work effectiveness, and success in life, both at work and at home.^[136] It is also important for finding lasting happiness. You cannot find happiness if every step you take in its direction is countered by taking two steps backwards because what you do for a living is wrong for you.

Many books offer guidance on how to find the right career and what to study in school. Aptitude tests can determine what you are best suited to do.

My favorite book about finding a career is, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* by Richard Bolles.^[137] It was first published in 1970, which is around the time I first read it. The book is updated every year. Right now, I am looking at the 2013 edition.

While happiness is not the focus of his book, he takes happiness quite seriously as one of the criteria for selecting a career. For example, in the section of his book that asks you to consider the amount of money you think you need to make, he mentions the 2010 study that I refer to in Chapter 2. This study suggests that once you reach \$75,000 per year in income, more income does not make you much happier. Bolles says that the effort needed to earn more than this amount starts to negatively impact the things that give us conditional happiness, such as spending time with friends, and the other pleasures of life.^[138]

Sections that follow will look into aspects of work that seem to promote happiness. Among these considerations are fundamental guidelines.

- Choose right livelihood (work that does no harm).
- Find work that meets your basic psychological needs.
- Focus on goals that are meaningful to you.
- Do what you love.
- Heed your purpose or calling in life.

- Serve others well.

You will notice that making money is not on the list. Of course, you have to earn a living. However, once you have found work that provides enough to satisfy your basic needs, you should then determine whether earning more money will further happiness.

You may not find all of these characteristics in the work that you do, but look for as many of them as you can. If your work does not have many of these qualities, and you cannot move to something better, then look for meaningful activities outside of work. One way or another, you need to fill your time with activities that are satisfying and promote happiness.

Choose Right Livelihood (Work That Does No Harm)

We have all heard the term “right livelihood.” This is an ancient concept from the Buddha’s first teaching. It generally means working at something that does not harm any living being. This is still good advice, because working at a job that hurts others will take a heavy toll on the psyche. It is difficult to find happiness if you carry a lot of guilt in connection with the job you do.

In the days of the Buddha, work was pretty simple. I cannot imagine any kind of work common to his time that carried the load of stress we find in some of today’s occupations. I believe that right livelihood today is work that not only does no harm to others, but also does no harm to you. If you are performing work that harms you physically, emotionally, or in any way whatsoever, this cannot be a right livelihood for you.

Find Work That Meets Your Basic Psychological Needs

Motivation is one of the principal requirements for success in any endeavor, including, of course, your work. Motivation can be driven by belief, expected rewards, fear of punishment, personal need, or anything else. Some motives contribute positively to mental health and happiness, and others do not.

About 30 years ago, Edward Deci and Richard Ryan came up with a theory about ways to encourage self-motivation. They called it Self-Determination Theory, or SDT. ^[139] This name is quite appropriate because it suggests that an individual’s activity is self-determined, and not determined by anyone else.

SDT says that success in pursuing goals depends, in large part, on people’s ability to satisfy their innate psychological needs as they pursue their goals. ^[140] While human needs are many and diverse, SDT identifies the three most important as *competence, relatedness, and autonomy*. These three needs have been shown to be essential for psychological growth,

integrity, and well-being. ^[141] Satisfaction of these needs also goes a long way toward promoting one's ability to be happy.

According to SDT, an individual's experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in what he or she does fosters motivation, while also enhancing performance, persistence, and creativity. In other words, you perform better when you do work that you *want* to do have a talent for, and which allows you to relate to others in a meaningful way.

Competence of course refers to being capable and skilled at performing a particular activity. Relatedness is an innate desire and ability to feel connected to others in loving and caring relationships. Autonomy refers to volition, to the will or desire to personally launch, organize, and sustain an activity, and to integrate that activity with one's sense of self. In other words, it means making what you do your own (i.e., owning the experience). Autonomy especially concerns the experience of freedom. This is the freedom to choose to do a thing, even if your choice is limited to what your boss is telling you to do. According to SDT, autonomy is an essential aspect of healthy human functioning. ^[142]

A woman decides to learn to play the piano for the pleasure she expects to derive. After some years of practice, she can sit down and get lost in the beauty and intricacy of a piece by Schumann or Chopin. Pleasure comes from a sense of competence, gained through many hours of practice. It also comes from autonomy. She is not paid to do this and takes pleasure in choosing what to learn and play. If friends come over, she takes further pleasure in that special bond that arises between a live performer and an audience. The experiences of competence, relatedness, and autonomy result in enjoyment of the activity, and contribute to her psychological health and ability to be happy. ^[143]

To be successful, humans need to be in an environment where they can experience competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Absent these conditions, it is difficult to sustain motivation and psychological well-being, unless the individual has sufficient inner resources to compensate for and override the lack. ^[144]

SDT also views humans as innately drawn to growth-oriented activities. If a person feels ineffectual, then that person will work to become more competent. If a person is lonely, he or she may seek out companionship. If one feels controlled or stifled, that person may seek out autonomy.

However, unmet needs are not the only forces that motivate people. When a person feels reasonably satisfied that his or her basic needs are being met, he or she will not necessarily remain idle. Instead of being passive until a need arises, the person may start to explore, without consciously intending to satisfy any basic need. One may start exploring out

of sheer curiosity or personal interest.

Objects of curiosity or personal interest may be new possibilities for work, new leisure activities, new or refined skills, or a different environment. The woman learning to play the piano is a very good example of a person being motivated by curiosity, and personal interest.

Focus on Goals that Are Meaningful to You

Closely associated with the concepts of Self-Determination Theory are those of intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Intrinsic goals relate to the satisfaction of your personal psychological needs. Extrinsic goals, on the other hand, relate to earning X amount of money, or to the need to comply with the wishes of others. Pursuit of intrinsic goals is positively associated with mental health, whereas pursuit of extrinsic goals may be unrelated or even antagonistic to it. [\[145\]](#)

For example, an intrinsic goal may be the recognition of your competence by your peers. Satisfaction of this goal meets two basic needs: relatedness to others and demonstration of competence. Satisfaction of these needs promotes your personal happiness.

A common extrinsic goal is making a lot of money. Ordinarily, performing an activity mainly for money does not bring the kind of enjoyment that an activity performed for pleasure or to satisfy basic psychological needs is sure to deliver. [\[146\]](#) This particular goal may or may not promote happiness. Whether it does or does not, depends on what you must do to earn the money.

Do What You Love

Conventional wisdom holds that if you cannot do what you love, then you should at least try to like what you do. This sounds like it makes sense, but does it?

If you expect to be effective and successful in what you do, you need to be fully engaged. You cannot be effective when you are using only some of your resources. To be truly successful in your work, you need to love what you do. You cannot just want to do it, need to do it, or desire to do it. You need to *love* to do it. Love, in this context, means the motivation to do something at all levels of consciousness. If you are motivated to do something at all levels of consciousness, you may bring all of your available psychic energy to the activity.

Nobody knows all of the potentials that humans possess. However, I suspect that regardless of the power you currently have, if you love something enough, more of the needed power will become available to you.

For example, you can make yourself study a subject you do not like, but you will not learn it as well as someone who likes it so much that he or she “lives and breathes” it. Learning is a 24/7 activity. If you love something, your brain is working on it all of the time, even when you are asleep. Many learning activities are unconscious, and beyond your direct control.

When you work in a profession, your entire body-mind needs to be engaged for you to be successful. Such engagement is possible if you love what you do. If not, then you are using only some of your personal resources.

I have for a long time worked in a service business, but I never loved selling services. I worked with people who were selling all of the time, and it was just what they did — naturally. That made them successful at it. I compensated for my lack of focus on selling by pursuing my love of knowledge. I became an expert in complex technical areas of practice. Pursuit of knowledge was my 24/7 occupation.

Never Force Yourself to Do Something You Hate

If you do not like doing a particular job, or studying to learn how to do the job, you are probably not going to be as successful as a person who loves the job. You can push yourself to perform, and you can perhaps enjoy some success, but at what cost? Doing anything you do not like triggers stress, which in turn increases vulnerability to diseases such as high blood pressure and alcoholism. [\[147\]](#)

The opposite of love is hate, and if you hate doing what you do, you cannot expect to do it well. You can force yourself to do something, but you will surely resist at deep levels of consciousness. This deep resistance may sabotage the work. It may also sabotage your mind and body, expressing as poor psychological or physical health.

As we learned from Self-Determination Theory, you get the most enjoyment from what you feel competent in doing. Measuring success broadly, taking into account performance, sustainability, health, satisfaction, life balance, and earnings, you must at least like what you are doing to be successful. If you do not like what you do, you cannot perform well without pushing yourself so hard that you sacrifice health, and life balance.

You cannot force anyone to do something that he or she truly does not like doing. For example, when employees perform badly at a particular task, bad managers sometimes send them to training. Training in this case may be futile. Sending the underperforming person to training to do more of what he or she hates doing is counterintuitive. A great line from the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, comes to mind: “You can’t put in what God left out.” If a person finds certain work distasteful, for whatever reason, there is not a lot you can do about it.

Apprenticeship Periods

Many career paths have education and apprenticeship periods that may be lengthy, and not very enjoyable. The fact that you do not like what you are doing during the apprenticeship does not necessarily mean that you will dislike what you'll be doing over the long term.

Where there is a long apprenticeship period, you need to look past what you are doing while apprenticing to see if what you will be able to do in the future is something you want. This is a kind of “eyes on the prize” approach to starting a career.

At the beginning of my career, I worked for a very large firm. I had a good education, but I just didn't know how to do anything practical. It was five years before I really felt competent. Pushing myself hard doing things I did not always enjoy, and feeling incompetent much of the time, I was stressed nearly all of the time. However, I was always in close contact with people who had become expert at their jobs, and I could see that what they were doing was what I wanted to do. When my apprenticeship period was over, I was quite happy in my career. I can honestly say that I loved it.

Heed Your Purpose or Calling in Life

For some of us, our sense of purpose is so strong that we feel a particular calling, or mission in life. Ideally, the work that we do will align with what we feel is our purpose, calling, or mission in life.

In *What Color Is Your Parachute?* the author explores the idea of mission in life in terms of the question, “What makes you unique?” [\[148\]](#)

The message here is, if you feel you have a calling or unique purpose in life, do not ignore it. Do not push it aside and do something else, telling yourself that it makes more sense to do this other thing. There is a biblical caveat, “You cannot serve two masters.” If you force yourself to do one thing, while your heart is telling you to do another, it may be difficult to succeed at what you think you should do. When I say succeed, I mean enjoying success at work, success in relationships, and good psychological health.

Earlier in the book, in the chapter on purpose and happiness, I spoke about Mahatma Gandhi. I am sure he felt a calling to do what he eventually did. His was a hard road, which involved many years in prison for civil disobedience. For many, the sensible thing to do would have been to employ his legal skills in building a successful practice. However, I believe that he could not have ignored his calling and done the seemingly sensible thing.

Serve Others Well

Few of us have careers in which we are not serving someone. The CEO of a big corporation is beholden to the shareholders, the customers, and the stockholders. The president of a country serves its people (in theory at least). Even if you work anonymously in the bowels of a great corporation, you indirectly serve its customers, and you directly serve both your immediate supervisor and those who report to you.

I can think of few jobs in which you serve only yourself. Day traders (people who trade stocks for their own accounts) come to mind as people who do not need to please either employers or customers.

Happiness can flow from service. In Appendix 2, we touch briefly on *karma yoga*, the path of service. This seems to have been the way of Mahatma Gandhi. On this path, efforts are aimed at serving the needs of others. Focus is not so much on oneself or personal needs.

If you adopt an attitude of serving others in your work, you will probably become more successful at what you do. You will almost surely be happier, and happy people are known to be more successful than unhappy people.

Chapter 18

Finding Flow in What You Do

This chapter concerns flow experiences, or flow states. It is good to learn to cultivate a state of flow in whatever you do. These are states in which you can experience deep levels of happiness. The more time you can spend experiencing self-created happiness, the closer you are to finding lasting happiness. Notice that I use the words “self-created happiness.” As we will see, that is, in a sense, what flow is.

Flow is a state of being in which we feel in control of our actions, and masters of our fate. It is an “optimal experience,” which most of us have had at one time or another in our lives. It may also be the state in which most of us are happiest.

The best introduction to flow is the book *Flow*, by a professor of psychology, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.^[149] The author describes a flow experience as “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.”

Flow is a state of consciousness wherein you lose yourself in a particular task, experience a sense of mastery, and from this experience emerge a more complex human being. It is usually a very enjoyable state, and for those who do not experience it often, a very memorable one. It is also an experience you create yourself. You create it because it is not a reaction to what you do, but instead results from the way you enter into activities.

Happiness and Flow

How can we call someone happy when that person experiences flow? I will let you answer this question yourself. Try to remember a time, however brief, when you were performing a challenging task, and at the same time you felt totally in control and confident. You forgot everything else in the world and focused all your attention and energy on that task. Perhaps you experienced a feeling of exhilaration. When you finished, you knew you did a great job, and that you learned something about both the task and yourself. You felt great! You also wanted that experience again. You were probably experiencing flow.

Does this sound like happiness? The author of *Flow* thinks so. He says that the optimal experiences that come with flow can add up to a sense of mastery or control over your mind. This sense of mastery “comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness as

anything else we can conceivably imagine.”^[150]

The professor also says that you cannot chase happiness. You have to create it yourself. Although the good things of this world, such as wealth, power, and sex, appear to make us happy, they do not ultimately improve the quality of life. Religion, philosophy, and the arts can provide reasons to be happy; but, according to the author, after a time they lose their power to sustain us. “Only direct control of experience, the ability to derive moment-by-moment enjoyment from everything we do, can overcome the obstacles to fulfillment.” ^[151]

The importance of flow, for the purposes of this book, is that the experience does not necessarily depend on what you are doing. It is, in a sense, self-created happiness. You can be in an enjoyable state of flow while doing work that others would call the most boring jobs imaginable, such as working on an assembly line.

Midway Between Conditional and Unconditional Happiness

The happiness that results from a flow experience is not exactly like the conditional happiness I have described in this book. It does not come from what you do, but rather comes from the way you do it. However, it does come from doing things, so it is not unconditional happiness, either. It is perhaps midway between the two.

The fact that flow may be midway between conditional and unconditional happiness makes it an experience that is important to cultivate. If you can regularly create an experience of flow in what you do, then you will clearly understand that happiness is always there for you, if you can learn to recognize and go with it.

Another feature of flow that makes it different from unconditional happiness is that it is usually an unemotional and perhaps unconscious experience. While people report happiness in connection with a flow activity, they do so after the fact. During the activity, there may be no sense of self at all, and the awareness of happiness does not arise.^[152] Unconditional happiness, on the other hand, is a conscious experience.

Controlling Consciousness

A flow experience depends on your being able to control your conscious awareness. To be conscious can mean many things, but for purposes of this discussion, it means having the ability to control your thoughts and sensations. Consciousness involves the intentional ordering of information, so that when we are conscious, the way in which we experience reality is the result of our own process of selection, ordering, and classification of information. The information I refer to is the experience of the phenomena inside and outside of our bodies. Through our intentionality, we construct from this information a personal

version of reality.

One particular component of consciousness is the concept of “self.” It is the internal image of yourself with which you identify, and what you usually mean when you refer to yourself as “me.” It is the ego. According to the author of *Flow*, the “self” is a very important aspect of consciousness. It forms from the contents of consciousness a model of the way things (including ourselves) work. ^[153] Those things that we are aware of, and turn our attention to, continually work to create the self. The self, in turn, determines what we choose to bring into awareness.

Implicit in consciousness is the intentional selection, filtering, and ordering of information. We consciously control what we allow ourselves to bring into awareness. We filter out of consciousness a great many of the events that happen around us and inside of us. The force within us that actively works with our raw awareness of events, to create a sensible reality, is our intention, or our intentionality.

The process of attention, or attending to certain things and ignoring or filtering out others, is the way we limit the information coming into consciousness to what we can make comprehensible to ourselves. It is possible, for example, to listen to someone talking to us in a crowded room, but only by filtering out all of the other conversations that we hear going on around us.

The ability to control our attention and awareness is not absolute. While the things that we think, feel, and attend to are not controlled entirely by biology, we are still creatures of instinct, and what rises to conscious awareness is often the result of genetic programming. However, we can to some extent override our instinctual reactions, and direct our attention at will. In other words, the content of consciousness, while to some extent controlled by biology, is not entirely under its control.

The author of *Flow* stresses that merely by changing the contents of consciousness a person can make him/herself happy, or miserable, no matter what is happening in life. ^[154] What the author seems to be saying is, within limits, a person can override the natural reactions to what is happening, and create a feeling of happiness, through control of consciousness. The book you are reading is, of course, entirely in agreement with what the professor is saying here.

Because controlling the contents of consciousness, by itself, can enable a person to be happy and content in virtually any circumstance, the invitation to happiness is constant. A person who can focus attention at will, and thereby control the content of consciousness, and who can concentrate on a task for as long as it takes to complete it, usually enjoys everyday

life.

Studies of individuals who report an above-average incidence of flow experiences indicate that these people have an unusual ability to control and concentrate their attention. Since one of the requirements for a flow experience is the ability to concentrate one's attention, those with this ability can derive increased enjoyment of life via flow.

Meditation, discussed earlier, is the practice of controlling one's attention and awareness. As you become more proficient in meditation, you will develop the power to focus your attention where you want it at other times as well. This greater ability to concentrate can, by itself, make you happier.

Entering Flow Through Control of Consciousness

You enter into flow through control of your conscious attention.^[155] In *Flow*, the author describes this as creating "order in consciousness." He says that order exists when an individual attends to realistic goals, and when his/her skills meet the requirements for those goals.^[156] Another way to think about creating order in consciousness is, it is a process of bringing the interior life, the life of the mind, into harmony, both within itself and with the world outside.

Two necessary components for a flow experience are skills and challenges. An activity must present challenges to you at a particular skill level. If the activity does not present challenges, you will quickly be bored, and you will not have the intense concentration necessary for flow. On the other hand, if the activity presents challenges well beyond your skills, then anxiety sets in, and again you cannot enter flow. Only when the activity presents you with challenges to your skills is there a possibility that you will experience the feelings of control, mastery, and concentration necessary for a flow experience.

The three other requirements for a flow experience are the ability to concentrate on the task, having clear goals, and experiencing immediate feedback as to whether you have accomplished the task successfully.

In summary, the requirements are challenge, skill, concentration, clear goals, and feedback.

How Does Flow Feel?

In his book, Csikszentmihalyi describes various people performing actions in flow

states. He pays particular attention to surgeons, who spend long hours in operations, immersed in flow states. The author discusses the “high” that many surgeons get, and how they are always eager to get into surgery because they want that “high.”

We have all watched shows about doctors on television, and perhaps tried to imagine what it must be like to spend eight to ten hours in complex surgery. What would it feel like? Obviously, to be effective, the surgeon must leave emotions outside of the operating room. The surgeon must be totally focused, and mentally present during the entire procedure. Aside from perhaps scratching an itch, the surgeon cannot think of himself or herself because that pulls attention away from the task. You could say that the surgeon must be “ego-less.” One of the attributes or requirements for a “flow state” is mastery of what you are doing. Certainly, the surgeon must be a master of the craft in order to enter into a flow state.

When the requirements for entering flow are present: [\[157\]](#)

- You can perform with a kind of effortless involvement in the task that permits you to forget about your everyday cares.
- You experience a pleasurable sense of control.
- Concern for self disappears. In fact, even awareness of self may disappear as you immerse yourself in the task.
- You may lose any real sense of time.

Flow and the Game of Go

Many years ago, a friend and I used to spend afternoons playing the ancient game of Go. The basic rules of the game are deceptively simple; however, it is quite a difficult game to master. We were evenly matched, and challenged each other. Sometimes I won and sometimes he won. Were all of the elements present for a flow experience? Yes, they were. The game was challenging, but I went into each game knowing I had the skill to win. We were both free to concentrate. The goals of the game were clear. Finally, because there was always a clear winner, we both had immediate feedback.

Was there a flow experience? Absolutely. I recall 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. I look back with great fondness on those games. They are, for me, treasured memories.

Autotelic Experiences

According to the author, Flow is the way people describe their emotional state when

they are pursuing an activity for its own sake.^[158] Pursuing an activity for its own sake is what the author refers to as an autotelic experience. For many, these are hobbies or leisure pastimes. They may also be paying jobs of a kind that one would be willing to do for free. (Autotelic derives from the Greek *aut* (self) and *telos* (end; goal)). An autotelic activity is one performed for itself, and not for any future benefit.^[159]

An autotelic experience is psychically valuable, and can result in an optimal emotional state. This is because the person is focusing on the activity itself, for its own sake, and not on some expected reward.

An activity is not autotelic if you focus your attention on its consequences, such as the money or prestige you can earn by successfully performing the activity. In other words, an autotelic activity is intrinsically rewarding in the present, whereas you usually perform other activities with an eye to future benefit.

Meditation is an autotelic experience if, while meditating, you attend only to what you are doing in the here and now. In other words, you perform the act for the sole purpose of being in a meditative state. If, on the other hand, you focus on the expected benefits, meditation may not be autotelic, and may not be terribly effective.

Flow and the Feeling of No-Self

In a flow experience, you are so caught up in the activity that you may forget about yourself as a discrete person apart from the task. Sometimes you may feel that you are “one” with the activity, and sometimes you may have no awareness of yourself at all. There is just a task, or an artistic expression, and you may not be aware of yourself performing the task or action. You may be aware only of the performance of the task.^[160]

You can pay attention to only a limited number of internal or external inputs at any one time. The expression, “He cannot walk and chew gum at the same time” may not describe many people, but it does humorously acknowledge limits on our ability to think of more than one thing at a time. How many accidents have been caused by someone trying to text while driving?

When you engage in a task that meets the requirements for a flow activity, you simply have no attention left over to think about yourself. It is a cliché, but an apt one, that if you want to forget about something, just lose yourself in your work.

Imagine sitting on a beach, all by yourself, looking at the waves coming in, and brooding about something critical that someone said about you the day before, which made you feel bad at the time. There is nothing you can do about it now, and there is no sense in

even thinking about it, but it is there, stuck in your head, weighing you down.

Now, imagine that you notice a wave far offshore that is just forming a crest. You focus on it and follow it all the way to the beach. Then you find another wave and follow that one in as well. Doing so is challenging, because with so much happening you can lose track of which wave is which, unless your attention is total. With complete attention focused on the waves, you can lose yourself.

After a time, you may notice that while watching the waves you completely forgot about everything else. Then for the next hour you sit, watching the waves, completely absorbed, not thinking of anything, just watching. Could such an experience be pleasurable? Most people would find that just being able to let go of worry is pleasure in itself.

Why This Works

What we know is that flow experiences are pleasurable and that we seek them, whether we know it or not. People often find flow experiences in their hobbies, such as golf, chess, model building, reading, rock climbing, and skiing.

When left to its own devices, the mind often seems to abide in a state of low-level anxiety. This anxiety is perhaps a survival mechanism, which kept us alert to the many dangers in ancient jungles, and keeps us safe now in the modern jungle. The mind is constantly reacting to surrounding stimuli, automatically remembering various bad things that happened in order to avoid them in the future. You may experience this anxiety as unhappiness or dissatisfaction, which does not go away as long as your mind is unfocused.

Flow experiences focus the mind, moving attention away from free-floating anxiety. This absence of anxiety is itself pleasurable (something like the pleasure associated with the removal of physical pain). As long as attention is not focusing on some new annoyance, threat, or danger, the result should be the kind of happiness that is natural to you.

People seem to get the most pleasure from pastimes that have the requirements for a flow experience: challenging, but doable; presenting clear goals; the freedom to let go of other concerns and concentrate on the activity; and immediate feedback. Sports, puzzles, and video games, for example, all have these elements. Some people are able to organize their work in ways that provide these elements.

As a professional writer, I can often enter a flow experience while writing. I have a quiet office, with few interruptions; writing is challenging, but I have the necessary skills; writing has clear goals; and I get immediate feedback when I read what I wrote.

Limitations on Pursuing Flow Experiences

While flow can make you happy, it has a significant limitation — it is tied to what you do and how you do it. It is an inherently short-term experience. If your flow experience comes from playing golf, or playing video games, you lose the experience when you stop. It is true that you can pursue such pastimes for long periods, but you also have to work, go to school, interact with your family and friends, and sleep. If you pursue only flow activities, you face the serious risk of burnout, and the possibility that the rest of your life will simply fall apart.

The practices in this book aimed at finding unconditional happiness provide a long-term alternative to relying on flow states. These practices teach you how to pull your attention away from the mind's idling state, that familiar state of low-level anxiety, and allow your mind to rest in a natural state of happiness. Such a state of awareness can even be your constant experience. It is not limited to periods when you are pursuing activities that lead to a state of flow.

Similarities Between Flow and Yoga

The author of *Flow* says that the similarities between flow and yoga are strong. He suggests that we “think of yoga as a very thoroughly planned flow activity,” requiring us to give up self-interest and personal desires. The ability to do this requires significant control over consciousness. The development of such control makes yoga a systematic way of falling into flow.^[161]

He says that most of the practices in yoga aim to train a person to control consciousness, which is exactly what flow requires. While yoga may lead to much higher states of consciousness, both flow and yoga aim at controlling consciousness. Such control enables us to realize flow-like states while practicing yoga.

The Flow of Sisyphus

Let us return to our hero of Chapter 1, Sisyphus. As you recall, his life is limited to pushing a boulder up a mountain. Imagine him bending his weight to the boulder, slowly pushing it up the seemingly indifferent mountain. Every muscle is straining; sweat runs down his broad back, and his face is tight with the effort. The slope is bare of vegetation, and he has nothing to distract him from the task. The task is challenging, requiring all of his attention. He is unaware of himself and unaware of time. He is aware of only the task. He is in flow.

Perhaps the experience of Sisyphus is not much different from that of a long-distance

runner, immersed in the flow of running. Distance runners often experience flow. I recall the unique feeling of flow that I experienced when I used to run for two or three miles.

The problem for runners and other athletes, who crave the high from pushing their bodies hard, is that the body wears out. In my case, it was the knees. They could not take the pounding, and my doctor said I had to do something else.

Sisyphus's legendary body probably never got older. This enabled him to push the boulder forever. For eternity, he might experience flow as he pushes the boulder up the mountain. After the boulder rolled back down, he could savor his victory as he made the long trip back down the mountain to begin his task again.

Find Flow in Your Life

We all have 24 hours in a day to fill, and humans are meant to do things. You should spend at least some of these hours in flow. Flow is something to look forward to each day. It is also a state that improves you and recharges your batteries.

Think about what you do during the day. Do you regularly experience flow? If not, can you make what you do into a flow experience? If not, can you find something you can do that has the elements of flow?

Any activity can be a flow experience if approached the right way. In *Flow*, the author talks about a man who worked on an assembly line. His job was to perform the same series of tasks on a unit as it passed his station. This man approached his task not as a tedious job, but as a challenge. He challenged himself to perform his task in the shortest time possible. He approached his task in such a way that it was a flow experience for him. The author reported him as still enjoying his job after five years.^[162]

If you cannot find flow in your work, and you cannot change jobs, look for flow in an absorbing and challenging hobby. Is there something you like to do that so absorbs you that you lose track of time? It can be building something, playing a game, playing a sport, or learning a new language.

A hobby that delivers flow can be anything, as long as it has the elements of flow. As you look for a hobby, remember these elements — challenge, skill, concentration, clear goals, and feedback.

Chapter 19

The Joy of Devotion

Believers in any faith can find unconditional happiness, peace, and joy in devotion to the God that they worship. The closer your relationship to God, the happier you will be. Practicing devotion helps you let go of your internal barriers to experiencing that closeness. Attachment to your self-centered desires creates those barriers. Devotion helps you turn your attention away from egoic obsessions and toward the loving presence of God.

Believers and nonbelievers alike, can find unconditional happiness by loosening their attachment to selfish interests. For believers, devotion to God provides a means of doing this. As your love for and devotion to God grows, your focus on your own self diminishes.

Higher Power

This chapter looks at devotion to “God.” When I speak of God, I am speaking of a “Higher Power.” A Higher Power is any creator, divine being, creative intelligence, or spirit that one may worship. A Higher Power may be central to a particular religion, or not attached to any religion. ^[163]

I use the word “God” because it is awkward to keep referring to a Higher Power. Just know that “God” also means any Higher Power, however a person may conceive of that power. I am trying to be as inclusive as possible.

The acceptance of the existence of a Higher Power is nearly universal among all people and throughout time. There is no agreement about what that Power is, or what its nature might be, but most of us seem to have felt its presence and believed in its existence. ^[164]

Looking for Strength Beyond Yourself

Previous chapters have stressed that we cannot look to the world around us, and our ideas about that world, to find lasting happiness. Our minds, which work with reason and the ways of the material world, are not up to the task of delivering lasting happiness to us. We need the help of something beyond the mind. We need to look beyond the world of cause and effect with which we are familiar. Believers can find in God the strength to go beyond the limitations of the mind and the material world. Through devotion, they can find lasting happiness.

Devotion

To come closer to God, Jesus said that you should devote yourself to Him with all of your heart, mind, and soul. This is a no-excuses message of devotion. The message of Jesus seems appropriate for any devotional practice. This kind of devotion is accessible to all believers but is extremely hard to realize. It is accessible because it is easy to understand. All

you need to understand is that you should devote your entire being to God. It is hard because you have to be “all in.” To do that, you have to give up your attachments to your self-centered desires.

As we learned in Chapter 3, letting go of attachments to our self-centered desires is difficult. The mind may see any attempt at letting go as a threat to its very existence. The fear of letting go can present a seemingly solid wall between us and God. In effect, if we focus our attention on ourselves and our needs, we place ourselves ahead of God.

Even if our own needs and desires are synonymous with His plan for us, it is our single-minded obsession with ourselves that creates the barrier between humankind and God.

The practice of love and complete devotion to God can enable you to move through the wall that the mind has created. The thought of God is something very clear on which you can focus your attention, so you know where you are going.

Devotion, Not Bargaining

Religion today, as commonly practiced, is sometimes more about bargaining than devotion. It seems that there is a lot of attention given to chalking up points by doing good works in order to secure a pleasant place in the next world or lifetime.

Devotion is not bargaining. One practices devotion selflessly. If we rid our hearts of selfish motives, and we devote heart, mind, and soul to God, then anything we do will be devotional.

Nonattachment as a Key to Devotion

In large part, the message of devotion focuses on giving up attachments to selfish needs and desires. If you focus exclusively on yourself, your problems, and your desires, you will have little or no attention left over for God.

You can search the world over for something that will make you happy, but what happens in this world cannot bring you lasting happiness. True devotion to God, on the other hand, can allow you to experience the happiness that is already there.

It is very hard to let go of our day-to-day concerns, as the mind, focused mostly on itself, is incredibly demanding. It does not give up easily on its mission, which is to keep us fed, clothed, alive, and special. To let go of our concerns and devote ourselves to God takes a lot of faith and trust.

Charity

Charity is, in many ways, the twin of nonattachment. If we love ourselves, our possessions, and our lives *above all else*, it is hard to part with any of it, even if there is someone in need. On the other hand, a person who is not attached to what he or she has (be it

possessions *or* reputation), is always willing to give freely of their time, energy, and goods to those in need.

As seen in Chapter 13, acts performed in the name of charity are not charitable unless they are selfless. A truly charitable person will always perform charitable acts. A selfish person, on the other hand, will always act selfishly, even while performing acts that appear to be charitable.

Love

A devotional relationship with God is also a loving relationship. Of course, this love is not limited to God. The Dalai Lama says:

...the main message of the Gospels is love for our fellow human beings, and the reason we should develop this is that we love God. I understand this in the sense of having infinite love. ^[165]

Humility

To be truly devoted, we have to be humble. As discussed in Chapter 3, as you turn your attention to the Source of happiness (which may be God), you turn your attention away from yourself and your self-centered desires. In religious and spiritual terms, this is the practice of humility. As a devoted person, your focus should be on God and away from yourself. Nowhere is this truer than in prayer.

Bringing True Humility to Prayer

Prayer plays a central role in devotion. I believe that its purpose is to move us closer in awareness to God. If you practice sincere prayer, focused only on God, with no thought of yourself and your needs, then you can truly quiet your mind and begin to hear God speaking to you.

Prayer should not be petitionary — asking for what we want or need. Jesus said, “Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” ^[166] Not only does God already know what we need and want, but if we make ourselves and our needs the focus of prayer, how can we hear when God answers us? That is, if our attention is on ourselves while we pray, we are drawing our attention away from God. In doing so, we deny ourselves communion with God.

Do not make prayer be about yourself or what you need, for that is self-defeating. Approach prayer with humility. Ideally, your humility should be so complete that it is as if you are not even there. Take a look at the guidance on meditation, in Chapter 9. It does not speak in terms of humility, but about letting go of all thoughts as they come up and

maintaining your focus on your object of meditation. Essentially, this is the way you practice humility. As thoughts of yourself come up, just let them go and keep your focus on God.

Humility Is Not Self Abasement

Humility does not mean we approach life or prayer with the thought that we are of little value, because that would be focusing on ourselves, and taking pride in our imagined humility. It is not by abasing ourselves or in acetic practices that we achieve humility. Instead, it is by not thinking of ourselves at all. It is by letting go of our incessant focus on ourselves.

Focusing on oneself as a humble person is obviously just another way of shining the spotlight back on oneself. In a sense, it is a way of exalting ourselves in our own eyes. Some go so far as to make a fetish of being humble. Their thoughts are, boringly, on nothing but their virtue and humility, and they exalt themselves over others who seem not sufficiently humble. This way of being is nothing but self-flattery, which draws a person farther and farther away from God.

If you have focused all of your attention on God, and away from yourself, then you are approaching life and prayer with true humility. As you remove your attention and awareness from yourself and your concerns, it will naturally move toward God. Anyone can practice this kind of humility, no matter how high or low he or she is held in the esteem of society. If you turn your thoughts toward God, this is true humility.

Acceptance

Acceptance of the way things are is a major key to unconditional happiness. The devotional path to acceptance and the elimination of self-centered desire is beautifully illustrated by the well-known “Serenity Prayer,” already referenced in Chapter 11. Here it is in its entirety.

*God, give me the grace to accept with serenity
The things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things which should be changed,
And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other..
Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardships as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,*

*Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen.*

You Do Not Have to Take a Vow of Poverty

It might appear that a devotional practice would call for the kind of spiritual fervor that denies everything except God. We see this kind of spiritual practice in India, where it is common to see monks who have renounced everything in the world. They give up everything except a simple robe, some sandals, and a bowl for rice. They beg for their daily rice and devote themselves to meditation. There are also Christian orders whose members take severe vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Is this level of denial necessary to follow the path of devotion? Must one take a vow of poverty to have any hope of completing such a path, and finding closeness with God?

Spiritual aspirants can live normally, have relationships with other people, get an education, raise a family, and do all of the things that people have always done. As with those who practice the way of the Tao, of yoga, or Buddhism, there is no need to live in a cave in order to follow the path of devotion.

Instead, if you keep your heart in God, while your head is in the world, you will move closer to God every day.

Prayer/Meditation

The guidance on meditation, in Chapter 9, applies equally to prayer. I will not repeat this guidance here. I do want to emphasize, however, that your prayer (or meditation) should be regular. You should devote a special part of every day to prayer.

Your prayer should not be the thirty-second “Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep...” kind of prayer. It should be a commitment of real time. This kind of prayer may not be something most religious people are accustomed to, but as with any spiritual endeavor, it is prayer and meditation that awaken one spiritually.

You may eventually work your way up to 40 minutes per day, which is the typical meditation period for devotees in yoga and Buddhism.

If you are going to commune with God for 30 to 40 minutes, then heed the advice in

Chapter 9 on meditation postures. For example, if you want to kneel, use a kneeling chair so that you can maintain your body in balance. Remember, the posture itself does not matter. Do whatever works to keep yourself still and in balance for long periods.

I doubt that you need to worry about the classic kneeling posture you adopt in church. This is fine for two to three minutes, but it probably won't work for long periods.

During your prayer, welcome God in with all of your heart, soul, and mind. Let God be your sole focus of meditation. Do that to the exclusion of all else. It is impossible to go through the rest of your day with attention focused on God, but during this time, you can.

You may say, *but I have problems, and I need God's help!* It is true that you have problems, but Jesus says God already knows all about them, just as He knows every solution and doesn't need your suggestions. So, you do not need to think about your problem and you do not need to ask for help.

Again, you may object, I cannot just forget about everything. What about my child who is sick, my husband who has lost his job, or the algebra test that I just flunked? What about all of that?

Just let these worries go during your periods of prayer or meditation. When you finish, they will be right there, exactly where you left them. Throughout prayer or meditation, just focus on God, and let everything else go.

Closer to God Every Day

With each day that passes, you will get closer to God. You will bring love and wisdom into your life. You will begin to feel God's presence as you turn your attention more and more away from yourself and toward God. As you practice devotion, you will bring down the walls that seem to separate you from God's presence.

[Introduction to Appendices](#)

Following are three appendices: *Living in Harmony with the Tao*, *Finding Happiness in Yoga*, and *The Path of the Buddha*. All of the previous chapters depend in large part on Taoist, yogic, and Buddhist philosophies. Most of the information in these appendices is already incorporated in the earlier chapters.

I am including these three appendices here for three reasons.

- First, it is useful to see the sources of much of what has been set out in the previous chapters. Readers may want to use these brief discussions of the Tao, yoga and Buddhism as starting points for further study.
- Second, some readers may be interested in exploring organized religious and spiritual groups, and these appendices can provide an introduction to them.
- Finally, these three philosophic views of happiness are all similar but also different. Reading these appendices can provide additional angles from which to view and understand what has already been discussed in this book.

[Appendix 1](#)

Living in Harmony with the Tao

One path to lasting unconditional happiness is living in harmony with the *Tao*, or “the way.” The Tao refers to a philosophy and approach to living focused on the natural order of the universe.^[167] It is an ancient philosophy, dating back to around 600 B.C.E. and the writings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, among others. Today, we find the fundamental philosophy of the Tao in Zen Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Zen is perhaps the closest to the spirit of the original teaching.^[168]

How does living in harmony with the Tao help to make a person happy? The best way to answer this question is to say that, at the deepest level, at the level where we are naturally in harmony with the universe, we are happy. In this book, I refer to this state as unconditional happiness. Of course, the word “happy” does not adequately describe our true nature. Some prefer to describe the natural feeling as equanimity, as being at peace with oneself, or joyous, but none of these words is quite right. So, happy will have to do.

According to the ancient wisdom of the Tao, in order to be happy one must simply discipline the mind to stop chasing after happiness and learn to turn the attention toward unconditional happiness, which can be had without doing anything.

What Is the Tao?

When asked about the nature of the Tao, both Chuang Tzu and Lao Tzu said, “He who knows does not say; he who says, does not know.”^[169] In other words, even these sages would not try to describe the Tao. We can talk about practicing the way of the Tao, but we cannot describe the Tao. Though we may not be able to describe the Tao, we can experience it, and learn to live in harmony with it.

Instead of speaking about the Tao, you have to know the Tao directly. Of course, the natural tendency is to want to describe it. To try to describe the Tao, however, would be a mistake. To try to describe it is to attempt to get it to conform to an image that is within human understanding, and when you try to do so, you not only distort its truth, but you distance yourself from it.^[170]

The mind, which deals only in finite images, thoughts, and ideas, cannot hold on to the concept of something that is not finite and is not a thing.^[171] Human language hones in on “things,” and the Tao is not a thing.

Instead, the ancient Taoists looked at how the universe seems to behave in a particular way. This way, the way of the Tao, is not the simple way of cause and effect, which represents the operation of the material world, but is, rather, something beyond that. The ancients knew not to try to understand why the Tao is as it is. Instead, they studied and wrote about how to harmonize oneself with this way. What they tried to do was teach people how to work with it, and to live life according to its rhythms and energies. [\[172\]](#)

Another way of looking at the work of the ancient masters is, instead of reducing the Tao to the level of human understanding, their teaching tried to bring human awareness into the Tao. That is, they taught and practiced moving awareness out of the limited confines of the mind, and into the limitless Tao.

In the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu spoke of the Tao in the following way:

*Something mysteriously formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
In the silence and the void,
Standing alone and unchanging,
Ever present and in motion.
Perhaps it is the mother of ten thousand things.
I do not know its name.
Call it Tao.
For lack of a better word, I call it great.
Being great, it flows.
It flows far away.
Having gone far, it returns.
Therefore, "Tao is great;
Heaven is great;
Earth is great;
The human being is also great."
These are the four great powers of the universe,
And the human being is one of them.
The human being follows the earth.
Earth follows heaven.
Heaven follows the Tao.
Tao follows what is natural. (Tao Te Ching, Ch. 25) [\[173\]](#)*

What the Masters Taught

When Buddhism migrated to China, it met with Taoist philosophy, and from this encounter emerged what is known as Zen Buddhism. Zen follows closely the original teachings of the Buddha. However, Zen also has many of the playful aspects of Taoist philosophy.

We know Chuang Tzu and Lao Tzu only by their writings. In their works, we do not find much in the way of explicit instructions on how to live in harmony with the universe, and we do not know how they taught. We know a lot, however, about how Zen masters have taught their students over the years. Because of the similarities between the Zen and Taoist philosophies, perhaps the teaching methods were similar.

Zen masters tend to use relatively few words in their teaching. They give their students few detailed instructions on what they want them to do. There are famous tales of students working for years trying to attain enlightenment, and then the Zen master raises a single finger, or hits a student with a rod, and all of a sudden, the student's mind opens. The book, *Zen in the Art of Archery*,^[174] describes one student's long years of trying to learn Zen archery, with only the most cryptic guidance from his teacher.

Perhaps the way Chuang Tzu and Lao Tzu taught was similarly cryptic. From their writings, it seems that their method was to help students learn to live in harmony with the Tao by giving them a goal to aim for, and then letting the students figure out how to get there. When you read *Zen in the Art of Archery*, you may conclude that this was the way the Zen archery master taught.

Let us see what the old masters said about living in harmony with the universe and the way of the Tao. The focus is on the way they suggest that we be, not so much on how to obtain that way of being. In other words, the focus is on the attitude or approach to life that seems to be in harmony with the Tao. Since this book is about finding lasting happiness, we will pay the most attention to what they said about happiness.

Being Happy Without Doing Anything

Chuang Tzu said, "You never find happiness until you stop looking for it."^[175] This statement is at once profound wisdom and down-home common sense. For example, after all of her adventures in Oz, what did Dorothy learn? She said she learned that "If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any farther than my own backyard, because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with."^[176]

Happiness is not something you go looking for, and it is not something you need to do

anything to get. Quite the opposite! It is not what you need to do to find happiness; it is what you need to stop “doing” in order to discover that happiness is always with you.

The way things seem to work is if you spend your time chasing after happiness, your desire to get the things in life that will make you happy can cause anxiety that makes life unbearable. Ultimately, your ever-present desire for enjoyment will make you unhappy, even when you have the things you wanted.^[177] You cannot enjoy what you have or who you are if you are always looking ahead for the next thing, the next experience, the next relationship, or the next lifetime to bring you happiness. You cannot find true happiness if your happiness depends on what happens to you, or how something or someone makes you feel.

Therefore, when asked how to find happiness, Chuang Tzu naturally said that there is no answer to the question of how to find happiness; but if you stop “striving for happiness,” the way to happiness will appear. He said that his “greatest happiness consists precisely in doing nothing whatever that is calculated to obtain happiness.”

You are probably saying right now, “OK, maybe chasing happiness doesn’t work. If I just sit here, though, doing nothing to make myself happy, how am I going to be happy? Also, reading this book is supposed to help me be happy, and reading it constitutes ‘doing something,’ so do you want me to stop reading?”

The answer is “No.” Reading this book will not make you happy in the sense that reading a novel or going to a movie will make you happy. The purpose of this book is help you eliminate habits and ways of being that get in your way of being happy. You are already happy, and with this book I am only trying to help you discover that.

Not-Doing as the Key to Happiness

Chuang Tzu said, “Contentment and well-being at once become possible the moment you cease to act with them in view, and if you practice not-doing (wu wei), you will have both happiness and well-being.”^[178] Understanding “not-doing” is the key to understanding the way of the Tao. The ancient masters said, “Do that which is not done by doing. Make that which is not made by making.”^[179]

The concept of not-doing underlies both the ancient teaching of the Tao and modern Zen Buddhism. In the context of happiness, it means going through life, doing what you need to do, pursuing your schooling or work, raising a family, cultivating your friendships, being the best you can be, and generally enjoying life, while at the same time not doing anything with the intention of it making you happy.

Chuang Tzu said that if an archer is shooting for no reason at all, all of his skill is

available to him. Once a shot matters, however, once he is shooting for a prize or fame, “the need to win drains him of power.” ^[180] The desire for something in the future makes you incapable of living in the present. ^[181] This desire robs you of power and may take away the happiness that is natural to you.

Here is how Lao Tzu expresses the essence of not-doing:

The sage relies on actionless activity;

Puts himself in the background, but is always to the fore.

Remains outside, but is always there.

Is it not just because he does not strive for any personal end

That all his personal ends are fulfilled? ^[182]

In Japan, there is a long tradition of archery as a Zen practice. In *Zen in the Art of Archery*, the author seems to describe an archer practicing not-doing while shooting. He describes it as a frame of mind “in which nothing definite is thought, planned, striven for, desired, or expected, which aims in no particular direction and yet knows itself capable alike of the possible and the impossible, so unswerving is its power...” ^[183] The author quotes his teacher as saying, “The right art is purposeless, aimless! The more obstinately you try to learn how to shoot the arrow for the sake of hitting the goal, the less you will succeed in the one and the further the other will recede.” The teacher goes on to say, “You think that what you do not do yourself does not happen.” ^[184]

This advice for shooting any arrow applies to being happy as well. All of us believe we must do something in order to be happy. In fact, doing nothing is the key. As Chuang Tzu said, “Contentment and well-being at once become possible the moment you cease to act with them in view.”

Not-doing involves being unattached to what you expect to achieve and to what you have achieved. As discussed earlier in the chapter on nonattachment, to be unattached does not mean you are indifferent or uncaring. To be unattached means your lasting happiness (equanimity) does not depend on what happens. In *Zen in the Art of Archery*, the author’s teacher says, “You know already that you should not grieve over bad shots; learn now not to rejoice over the good ones. You must free yourself from the buffetings of pleasure and pain, and learn to rise above them in easy equanimity, to rejoice as though not you but another had shot well.” ^[185]

Not-doing may seem confusing, but it is quite simple. You have probably already experienced not-doing. Think of a time when you were so involved in an activity that you did not notice that you were doing it. You just did it. You might have been playing a game or

performing a task at work. Try to remember one of those times when your involvement was so complete that you did not think about the outcome. You were fully engaged in the activity, and the activity had a purpose, but you were not attached to that purpose emotionally. You were probably engaged in not-doing.

For most of us, periods of not-doing are infrequent at best. To live in harmony with the Tao is for your entire life to be a continuous flow of not-doing.

Conserving Tao

One school of thought holds that each of us has a certain supply of natural Tao, and that it should not be wasted. That is, you should use your allotted Tao efficiently. Not-doing is supposed to use as little Tao as possible to get done what you need to get done. What needlessly wastes Tao is friction of any kind. Here I am talking mainly about psychic friction. This could be friction arising in interpersonal relationships or personal emotional friction.

This way of thinking about the Tao reduces it to an energy or substance that we can control. In this sense, the Tao is referred to as ch'i, which literally means "breath" — and all energy. ^[186] Tao masters of old might not approve of such thinking, if taken literally. However, it is perhaps useful to visualize the Tao as a distinct substance.

Try to imagine that you have a finite amount of "Tao energy" or ch'i available to you. Then imagine friction arising from emotions or interpersonal conflicts that use up that energy. Internal emotions might be strong desires, uncertainties, or fears. Notice the way friction uses energy but accomplishes nothing. Now, imagine how your actions would be without this friction.

Chuang Tzu describes the kind of friction that wastes ch'i. In his verses titled, "The Need to Win," (see Chapter 12) he describes how an archer who needs to win loses power, but one who shoots for nothing (is not-doing) conserves his power.

Some Taoists believe you can obtain more than your allotment of ch'i through certain practices. The body movements of t'ai chi chuan are employed to draw ch'i to you from the outside, and release blocked ch'i that is inside of you. Meditation techniques similar to those of raja yoga are used to increase the amount of ch'i available to you. ^[187] I am not going to go into these practices, but it is worth noting that they exist and have many adherents.

Finding Happiness When You Stop Looking for It

In the words of Chuang Tzu at the start of this chapter, “You never find happiness until you stop looking for it.”^[188] The farther and faster you go, trying to catch happiness, the farther away you will be from the happiness that is natural to you. The mind has many elaborate ideas about what will make you happy, and those ideas pretty much run our lives. Chuang Tzu says, if you stop “doing,” happiness naturally arises. Perhaps we would be better off if there were no concept of happiness, so we could stop worrying about looking for it.^[189]

The Mind’s Rules of Happiness

Your mind has many rules about what makes you happy. Of course, the more specific the rules, the worse off you are! For example, Chuang Tzu says that if you have refined tastes, so that only the most exquisite things are good enough, refinement creates a barrier between you and happiness. Your desire for things creates a cage. Your happiness is held hostage to the need for luxury.^[190]

Even if you do not need luxuries to make you happy, the mind’s insidious fixation on specific circumstances that make you happy can prevent you from being happy. The mind always targets the *next* thing, even the next little thing. It is the way we are. We are planners, always focusing on the future. All too often, however, we sacrifice the present for the sake of the future.

Just as your mind has rules and provisions about what makes you happy, it also has rules about the things that make you unhappy. Perhaps your mind dictates that you cannot be happy if your friend is unkind to you. This kind of rule is reasonable in a world where pleasing situations make you happy. If situations and other “things” have the power to make you happy, other things make you unhappy. And if the mind focuses on things that make you unhappy, attention is stuck in a morass that prevents you from enjoying your life.

Chuang Tzu identifies two types of obstruction that can get in the way of happiness — those on the outside and those on the inside. He says, if things in the outside world obstruct you, you should learn to ignore them. On the other hand, if they are *inside* of you, you must learn to control your mind so that they do not control you.^[191] Your mind’s rules for happiness are probably limiting your present ability to be happy. Following the advice of Chuang Tzu, you should learn to control your mind, ignore its rules, and turn your attention to happiness.

Enjoy What You Are Doing — Right Now!

Even if you are not frantically pursuing happiness, your mind's natural tendency to look to the future can preclude happiness at any time.

I remember driving home one cold rainy afternoon, and thinking about the nice cup of coffee I planned to make when I got home. My desire for coffee, though not overwhelming, was strong enough to capture my attention. Suddenly, I noticed that my desire for coffee was drawing my attention away from the valley through which I was driving. I was missing the thick gray clouds gathering on the surrounding hills, the deep green of the wet grass, the dark trees, and the ducks sitting quietly in the pond beside the road. I was missing all of this, and all for want of a simple cup of coffee. After coming to this realization, I forgot about the coffee and just enjoyed the drive.

Learn to enjoy every moment. If you always focus your attention on enjoyment planned for the future, you cannot enjoy what is happening right now; you can barely be aware of what is happening right now.

The Ego and the Tao

We all have a self-image, with which we are intimately familiar. This self-image (ego) is a kind of do-it-yourself affair, created by each of us as we go through life. The ego is not a real self. However, when we try to see ourselves, this may be all that appears. The fact that we can usually find only an ego-self leads some to believe that there is no real self. ^[192] There may be some validity to this argument. Certainly, the Tao masters tell us that as we draw closer to the Tao, we begin to leave our individual sense of self behind, and at some point become one with the universe.

Very few of us will get to the point of merging with the All, at least not in this lifetime. However, it is clear from what the masters tell us that the way to harmonize with the Tao is to allow our desires, aversions, and self-image (ego) to recede into the background, and even at times disappear from view. This guidance is not theoretical - it is practical. As ego recedes, the happier one becomes.

Conversely, the more we obsess about ourselves, the more miserable we become. ^[193] In addition, Lao Tzu notes that the more self-centered we become, the more we limit ourselves. ^[194] Perhaps by this he means that to the extent that we identify with ego-self, we ignore the true self, which is immeasurably greater.

Learning to Practice the Way of the Tao

In theory, the way of the Tao is simple. It is a smooth and straight path. However, your mind is not simple, and rather than lead you straight through, it constantly tortures you with thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and desires that can lead you astray. While the way of the Tao is easy and straight, the mind is a labyrinth.^[195]

People may avoid the direct path of the Tao because it is hard. This path can be hard because it requires us to act differently from the way we all usually behave. We must learn a different way of going through life. Flowing with the Tao can be the task of a lifetime; but “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”^[196]

The texts that have come down to us, the *Tao Te Ching*, by Lao Tzu, and the writings in Merton’s *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, provide guidance to help people rise to the level of the Tao, to meet the Tao on its terms, to experience it directly rather than try to understand it. In their writings, the Tao masters aimed to guide their students to a direct experience of the Tao through teaching that was very subtle and indirect, offering no definite methods or practices for arriving at the goal.

Rather than speak about the Tao or speak about the truth, the ancient masters led their students to the Tao, and then let the truth speak for itself.^[197] Much of the teaching describes how people should be in the world in order to come to know the Tao directly. The goal of spiritual practice was to come into harmony with the Tao and to become “one with the subtle essence of the universe.”^[198]

The requirements for experiencing the Tao, for being “one” with the Tao, are rigorous. To be in accord with the way of the universe is a single-minded pursuit.

According to Lao Tzu, you must eliminate all that contaminates your mind by “practicing selflessness and extending virtue to the world unconditionally.” In this way, you both eliminate the accumulated contaminants and make possible the restoration of your divine nature as an integral universal being.^[199] “Be calm, happy, and content with your being, and live only according to your nature.”^[200]

Practicing the way of the Tao does not require a solitary monastic existence, or a vow of poverty. In fact, quite the opposite is true. While some people think that to progress spiritually you have to renounce the world, and spend all of your time in quiet meditation, this is simply not so. Hiding from the world can lead to a very narrow life and a limited experience of the Tao.^[201] The Tao masters would have you be in the world, learning the way of desireless happiness and not-doing.

Not-Doing and the Virtuous Life

Living a virtuous life can result in the blessings of happiness and eventual enlightenment. Most religions hold that a virtuous life can result in blessings even greater than these. However, you cannot receive these blessings if you are forcing yourself to behave virtuously. As discussed in the chapter on charity, if you perform an act of charity in order to receive blessings, you are not expressing the virtue of charity at all, you are just bargaining.

Truly virtuous actions come naturally from the way you are, not from a selfish motive. ^[202] If you are truly kind to people, it is because you are a kind person, not because you want to appear kind, and not because you believe kind acts will result in blessings. If you are not kind, it does not matter how virtuously you force yourself to behave; your actions do not make you virtuous. If you are virtuous, acts of virtue flow naturally from you, and virtuous actions become a form of not-doing. These actions only express who you are, and you do not perform them with strain or the thought of benefit. Lao Tzu taught that in order to realize the Universal Way of life, it is essential that one take no thought of the personal benefit that will result from one's virtuous behavior. This is the way to fulfill one's own universal nature. ^[203]

[Appendix 2](#)

Finding Happiness in Yoga

Yoga refers to philosophical, spiritual, and physical practices aimed at helping you realize your true Self. The underlying belief of yoga is that a naturally joyous Self exists within you.^[204] Most of us do not experience this Self, and yoga tells us why this is and how we can reconnect with the true Self.

The ultimate goal of yoga is spiritual liberation, or nirvana. Liberation is living in the world in a state of permanent knowledge, peace, and bliss. In a spiritual sense, it means freedom from the continuous cycle of death and rebirth. One of the milestones on the path to liberation is happiness.

The goal of this chapter is to introduce the yogic way of moving towards happiness. I will talk about the yogic belief that you have lost touch with your Self, and how losing touch prevents you from being happy. I will also describe the yogic practices aimed at helping you reconnect with your Self.

I will not emphasize the system of physical exercises and postures that we most closely associate with yoga. This system of postures (asanas) is known as hatha yoga, which originated long ago to complement yoga's philosophical and spiritual practices. Nowadays, however, most people practice hatha yoga for health and fitness.^[205]

Yoga can be a part of spiritual and religious practice, but need not be. Yoga is an important part of Hinduism and Buddhism, among other religions. However, as you will see later, only one of the four major paths of yoga is essentially religious. By religious, I mean a practice that involves belief in and devotion to a deity.

Both believers and nonbelievers can practice yoga to great benefit. You can incorporate yoga into any religious practice, or you can practice yoga outside of a religious context.

Yoga and Happiness

Yogic philosophy says that we have a natural ability to experience happiness, peace, and joy.^[206] However, most of us cannot find these experiences in our lives, and for many people life is only suffering. This is because true happiness comes only from experiencing the true Self, and most of us have lost touch with true Self. True happiness does not come from what happens to us in the world.^[207] Yoga aims to help us reconnect with (realize) the

Self. [\[208\]](#)

According to yogic philosophy, the Self is far greater than the limited material mind and body with which we are familiar. However, we do not know this because we have lost touch with our true Selves. We believe that we are limited to our minds and bodies and that the only place we can look for happiness is in the world that we see around us.

Getting back in touch with the Self is not a matter of simply learning about and believing in the Self. The mistaken beliefs that we are limited to our material minds and bodies, and that happiness comes only from what happens to us, are deeply ingrained. We cannot correct these beliefs with mere information. These beliefs form the very basis of the way we think. As we “go about our business,” everything we do, and everything that we think, reflects these mistaken beliefs.

Yoga aims to change, at a fundamental level, the way we think. You might call this rewiring the mind. Fixing the way we think is no mean feat, because the mind acts as if happiness is something we have to find in the world. The goal of yoga is to change the way we think and act so that, instead of running around the world looking for happiness, we simply allow ourselves to experience the joy and happiness that is natural to us.

The way that yoga looks at happiness and what prevents us from being happy is essentially the same as what I describe in Chapters 2 and 3. We’ve seen that unconditional happiness is always available to us, and that sense pleasures, ego strokes, and possessions are not necessary to make us happy. In yogic philosophy, unawareness of these facts is called ignorance.

According to yogic philosophy, the mind is grounded in the material world, in which every effect appears to have a cause. The mind assumes that the world and the things in it are the sources of happiness. It believes that the only way to be happy is for something to happen that causes happiness. This belief comes from ignorance of how things are, and ignorance of our true nature.

Here is how yoga understands the way things work, and describes the practices we can use to discover our true nature. [\[209\]](#)

- We believe that in order to be happy, something good has to happen to us. However, true happiness does not result from what we do in the world. Our mistaken belief that happiness comes from doing or having (our “ignorance”) results in endless attempts to find happiness by doing or getting something.

- True happiness comes from reconnecting with the Self. Another way of saying this is, to find true happiness you must find and realize the Self.

- Our attachment to desires and aversions (ego attachments) obscures the Self, making it impossible to realize the Self. In other words, the attachment to having and experiencing good things and avoiding bad things, based on the mistaken belief that this is the way to happiness, prevents us from realizing our true nature.

- To realize the Self, we need to learn to control the mind, and let go of ego attachments. When we let go of ego attachments, we reconnect with the Self.

- Through meditation, ethical living, study, and selfless service, yogic practices teach us how to control the mind and let go of ego attachments. The devotional path of bhakti yoga also includes worship of a deity.

Unhappiness and Suffering

The goal of yoga is to help us end our unhappiness and suffering. When suffering ceases, what remains is happiness.^[210] Suffering comes from not being in touch with your Self.^[211] The Self is the source of happiness and joy, and to lose touch with it is to suffer. We can find substitutes for true happiness, such as food, comfort, sex, toys, human companionship, and success. However, these do not last and are not truly satisfying.

Learning to know and experience the Self, and learning to build a strong awareness of it is what prevents suffering, even if you have physical pain. While you are in the world, you will never be completely free of the presence or threat of physical or emotional pain. Things happen in the world, despite anything we do to prevent them. If you lose your job, you feel bad; if a family member is in trouble, you worry; or if you are in trouble, you feel frightened. If you are injured or sick, you feel physical pain. These are natural and unavoidable reactions to life. However, if you know your Self, these afflictions do not have to make you suffer.

To suffer when you are experiencing physical or emotional pain means there is nothing but the pain. You have nothing but pain if your happiness is solely dependent upon what happens to you in the world. Even when the pain is gone, the mind remembers and relives the pain, fears the return of the pain, or harbors anger against someone who caused the pain.^[212]

If you can remain in contact with your Self, you have awareness that life is good and joyful, even when you are in pain. This awareness prevents you from suffering. You may experience pain, but you can see past it through to your Self, which is untouchable and wholly without pain. In addition, when the pain is over, it is over. You do not have to keep reliving it, fearing its return, grieving for yourself, or raging against those who contributed to your pain.

The Self

According to yogic philosophy, you are probably not who you think you are. If you are like most of us, you identify with your self-image. In other words, you believe that you are what you imagine yourself to be. Yoga says, however, that this is not the real you. The real you is the Self.

The Self is the seer or experiencer of all that happens in your life. The Self is what sees and experiences everything in the material world, but is itself not seen.^[213] Whatever you do, the Self remains above the fray. It watches everything, but nothing affects it. It remains pure and unsullied.

Definition of the Self depends upon whether you look at it from a religious or nonreligious point of view. From a Hindu point of view, the Self is Brahman, which is “the supreme reality underlying all life, the divine ground of existence, the impersonal Godhead.”^[214] The Godhead is the essence of God.

God, by contrast, is seen as the Godhead personified.^[215] For example, in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna refers to Himself as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.^[216] We learn much about the Self in this respect in the Bhagavad Gita.^[217] In the Gita, 15:7-10, Krishna (God) says that he sends part of himself into every person, and that part becomes the Self of that person. When the person dies, the Self departs.

Outside of a religious context, the Self is not necessarily God, or the personification of the Godhead. It is eternal and knowable, but is not definable.^[218]

The ancient metaphor of the chariot can help you understand the way the Self relates to your life.

Imagine a chariot owner riding in a chariot. This person stands behind the charioteer, serenely watching the charioteer, the chariot, the horses, and the passing countryside. The chariot owner is the Self. Your body is the chariot; the charioteer is your consciousness, and your mind is the reins held by the charioteer. The horses are your five senses. The charioteer is the master of the chariot and directs the horses. The Self, which is the master of all, remains serene as it watches the action.^[219]

Whatever its true nature, the Self is free of the beliefs and desires that cage our minds and limit us, causing us to keep doing and thinking the same things over and over. It is the Self that is free of the attachments that are the source of suffering in this world.

The reality of the Self is the underlying premise of yogic philosophy. It is the understanding that you are much more than your brain, your body, or your emotions. It is

also the premise that you are eternal.

Yoga practices can give you tools to begin to sense the Self, and open yourself to embrace it. Yoga teaches you how to control your mind, bring your awareness into your limitless Self, and experience the endless happiness that is natural to you.

The Mirror Metaphor

Yogic philosophy holds that we cannot experience the Self directly, but if our minds are clear we can experience it reflected in our minds. In other words, we cannot see the Self directly because it is the seer. While we cannot see the Self directly, the mind can reflect the Self like a mirror.

You cannot see your face directly, but you can see your face using a mirror. If the mirror is dirty or distorted, the image you see of your face will not be true.

Likewise, you cannot see the Self directly but you can experience the Self as it is reflected in your mind. Like a mirror, however, if your mind is clouded with selfish concerns, desires, fears, and ignorance, then it does not reflect the Self clearly. If you know your Self only as reflected in the mind's mirror, you cannot know yourself when that mirror is cloudy.

When you clean the mirror by ridding yourself of ego attachments and ignorance, you can see yourself clearly. Then you can find your power to be happy.

Mistaking the Image of Yourself for Your True Self

Most of us mistake the image of ourselves for our true Selves. ^[220] All we know is the image of ourselves (the ego). If all you know is your image of yourself, then that is who you think you are. What else can you be when that is all you know? Yoga can help you come to know your true Self. Yogic teaching can, in the words of philosopher Alan Watts, help us “get rid of the hallucination that each one of us is a skin-encapsulated ego.” ^[221]

When you focus on only your ego and its related desires and aversions, you become attached to it, and at its mercy. The ego exists in a world of scarcity, where whatever you have is never enough. It is the source of all negative human traits that we suffer: fear, anger, envy, overwhelming desires of every sort, and greed. The ego cooks up any number of reasons to dish out fear, anxiety, physical pain, sadness, despair, and all of the “thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.”^[222] The stronger the attachment to and identification with the ego, the less chance there is of knowing the Self.

The original metaphor for the birth of the ego and the loss of knowledge of the Self is the story of Adam and Eve, in Genesis. When they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they

became aware of their separateness, and they lost union with God. ^[223] The essence of the ego is its identification of you as a separate human being. When you strongly focus on your separateness (your ego) and its imagined superiority or inferiority, you lose touch with your Self (or Godhead).

It is true that you need an image of yourself in order to survive in the world. You need to know who you are in the world, who people think you are, what you can do, and what you cannot do. You need a strong ego and sense of individuality to survive in the world. The trick is to maintain a working image of yourself in your mind, without becoming so identified with it that you lose touch with your true Self. You need to have a version of reality, the coordinates of which make it possible to navigate the world, without forgetting your Self. ^[224]

Stilling the Mind and Finding Your Self

Yogic philosophy maintains that ignorance of your true Self is the cause of all suffering. You cannot override ignorance simply by reading the truth in any book, although reading may be helpful. There is no description of your Self in a book. You can only experience it. To experience your Self, you need to free your attention from its usual attachment to the material world in which you live, and from your self-centered desires and aversions. ^[225]

Freeing your attention is difficult. The mind is constantly busy, trying to follow the guidance of its interior instruction manual on how to make you happy by doing things. You have spent your entire lifetime paying attention to what is inside your head, and you may not know how to do anything else. You have probably had inklings of your Self, and perhaps it has sometimes peeked through and given you glimpses of the unbounded joy that is available. If you are like most people, however, these instances have been rare.

The stuff that is in your mind is seductive, and it never stops demanding attention. Overcoming the demanding nature of the mind-stuff takes practice. It takes focus. It takes, in short, learning to control your mind so that you can still your thoughts. Only then can you begin to experience your Self.

There is hope, though. Once you begin to sense your Self, you will know with certainty where you want to go. The sense of Self should feel light, full, happy, safe, fulfilling, full of knowledge, and loving. By comparison, the feeling of the stuff clogging your mind is often sluggish, dull, heavy, and depressing.

As you begin to sense your Self, it should begin to act as a magnet. It should begin to pull you to it, and the more you sense your Self, the stronger the pull will be.

If your method of stilling the mind is meditation, you may initially feel that meditation for forty minutes or an hour each day is a burden, boring, and pointless. However, once you begin to get a sense of your Self, and it begins to pull you toward it, you may find that meditation is the best part of your day.

Yoga Practices

Yoga teaches four major paths to the realization of your Self. All of these practices support one another and help you find the source of true happiness. Here they are:

- The yoga of knowledge (jnana yoga)
- The yoga of devotion (bhakti yoga)
- The yoga of selfless action (karma yoga)
- The yoga of meditation (raja yoga)

I will explain each of these in turn. Before I do, I want to talk about three areas of practice that are common to all four paths: meditation, virtue (ethics), and the physical practices of hatha yoga.

All four paths involve meditation to one degree or another. The fourth path, raja yoga, focuses almost exclusively on meditation. Virtue (ethics) is also a requirement for all four paths. Hatha yoga teaches postures that are important for good meditation.

Meditation

Meditation serves as a frontal attack on ego attachments. It is like telling the mind, which is incessantly chattering about what you do or do not want, “Shut up already!” Meditation is a conscious effort to still and control the mind. Although there are many different ways to meditate, most of them aim to shut off the words and still your mind by intentionally focusing all of your attention on a single object of meditation.

Meditation is all about intentionality. It is about, for want of a better description, mind control. Instead of allowing your attention to drift where it will, captured by the swirling and incessant activity of your mind, you attempt to focus. As you learn to do this, you find that your mind does not have to be captured by your thoughts and emotions. It does not have to be sucked down the rabbit hole of worries, desires, and fears. Instead, you can learn to turn your attention to what you want to think about, and keep your attention focused there.

In meditation, you challenge your mind for control of your attention, and once successful, free yourself of the limitations imposed by your mind on your ability to be happy. By gaining control of your mind, you move one step closer to sensing and perceiving your

true Self, and your power to be happy.

If your mind can be still in meditation, so that its activity ceases to capture your attention, you can see things as they are and see yourself as you are. This is how you find your Self. [\[226\]](#)

Virtue

A virtuous life can help lead you to realization of Self and happiness. Virtuous qualities are discussed at length in the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. [\[227\]](#) These virtuous attributes are nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-greed. [\[228\]](#) When practiced for their own sake, these virtues express as selfless thoughts, words, and deeds, which benefit you and others, and harm no one. They strengthen and purify the mind, and can help align what you do in life with your Self.

In this section, as we touch upon the virtues, we will also look at the ego. What I mean by the ego is our attachments to self-image and its related attractions and aversions. In other words, I am referring to the wanting, needing, selfish, and fearful aspects of the mind that prevent us from freeing it to find the Self. My use of the term differs from the way psychologists use it, but it is sufficient for my purposes.

Nonviolence

The *Yoga Sutras* tell us that violence is a reaction to fear. Of course, fear is the province of the ego, and when we are fearful, we are deep in the clutches of the ego - trying to survive, trying to keep what we have, and trying to avoid pain. Our reaction is to want to see someone else harmed, or diminished in some way. If we give in to violence, it leaves a scar in the psyche that is difficult to heal. Practicing nonviolence can sometimes take tremendous courage, but it ultimately benefits us and those around us. [\[229\]](#)

Truthfulness

There are many ways to look at the virtue of truthfulness. Here I want to focus on the benefit of speaking the truth to yourself at all times, so that you are always clearly perceiving what you are doing in the world, and always speaking the truth to others, as long as you can do so without hurting them in any way. Always expressing the truth helps to keep a clear mind, which is necessary in the arduous quest for the Self. It keeps you free of the guilt associated with lying, and frees you from the emotional toll of a guilty conscience.

Of course, dishonesty, like violence, is a quality of the ego. Dishonesty is usually motivated by desire to get something, or to avoid pain. Of course, practicing truthfulness at all times is a far cry from what your self-centered mind wants you to do! This, in itself, is

probably a good reason to be truthful!

Non-stealing

The *Yoga Sutras* speak of non-stealing, which is a funny kind of word. Obviously, it means that you should not steal. People steal because they want things that are not theirs, and which they perhaps cannot get honestly. Others, rich or poor, steal for the “thrill” of it — of successfully “pulling off” a heist of some kind. Some people steal from a sense of emptiness, trying to fill the void with ill-gotten “gain.” Wanting experiences and things is what the ego does. For the ego, all happiness comes from the material world, and from having things and relationships (of the easy, flattering kind) in the world. We know that lasting happiness does not come in this fashion, but the ego does not know this. So stealing panders to the ego; it strengthens it. In addition, as with lying, stealing leaves most of us scarred and guilt-ridden, thus hogging the attention that could have been focused on being happy.

Continence

The virtue of continence, or moderation, aims at both overcoming the ego’s hold and conserving energy. The ego wants more and more, but having more or doing more does not lead us to happiness. Try to discern when enough is enough, and do not give in to the ego’s craving for more. In addition, the *Yoga Sutras* speak of conserving energy so that you can focus your attention on the practice of seeking your Self. The point is, whatever you do in life, do not overdo it.

Non-greed

Non-greed is what the *Yoga Sutras* call this last virtue. It means, of course, that you should avoid greed. The sutra does not ask you to be generous, although that too is a virtue. It just says you should not be greedy. To be greedy is to identify with the ego. Its source is strong feelings of desire for things. You can feel you need something without being greedy, so just needing and wanting something is not greed. Greed is characterized by desiring things for the way you expect they will make you feel, and desiring them so strongly that you may never be satisfied with how much you get.

Hatha Yoga

Hatha yoga is the physical system of postures, breathing, cleansing practices, and other techniques. Its immediate purposes are to enhance health, flexibility, and relaxation. For purposes of this discussion, however, it is useful in stilling the mind, and preparing mind and body for concentration and deep meditative practices. [\[230\]](#)

Hatha yoga can help the practitioner move along the path to enlightenment and

liberation through physical practices aimed at finding balance in the body and stillness in the mind.

Hatha yoga includes many different techniques. Important for the purposes of this book are the seated meditation postures, known as *asanas*. These postures help to provide balance to the body and focus to the mind, without the distraction of aches, pains, or general restlessness. They can help strengthen and condition the body to be able to maintain meditation postures for long periods.

Choosing a Yogic Path

The yogic path chosen depends on the person. Different ways are appropriate for different people. In addition, there are no boundaries between paths. A person may focus on the yoga of wisdom, for example, but also follow the yoga of selfless action.

All of the yogas share the commonality of helping you release your attachment to self-image and related attractions and aversions (the ego). Yoga is an elegant and subtle way to become aware of your true Self, thereby permitting happiness to flow into your life.

The Yoga of Wisdom (Jnana Yoga)

Jnana yoga is the path of spiritual wisdom, knowledge, and direct experience of the Self. The goal is discrimination between what is real and unchanging (the Self) and what is unreal and subject to change (the everyday world).^[231] The practitioner seeks intuitive knowledge of the Self. This knowledge, which is spiritual wisdom, comes from direct experience of the Self. The practitioner seeks spiritual wisdom that goes far beyond simple knowledge.

To foster discrimination you should have some book knowledge, from sources such as the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* and the Bhagavad Gita. Then you must reflect deeply on what you have learned, through meditation. Gradually, you shift your attention from what you identify as you to your true Self.

As you grow in spiritual wisdom, you may, over time, become that wisdom. As Swami Satchidananda, and ever so many other wise beings down through the ages have said, “As you think, so you become.”^[232]

The Bhagavad Gita says that those who can discriminate between the “body” and the “knower of the body” can obtain liberation, which is the ultimate goal of yoga. This discrimination is true spiritual wisdom. In this case, the body is the physical body or material reality, and the knower is the Self.^[233]

The Yoga of Devotion (Bhakti Yoga)

A frequently taken path is bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion and love. Here, God is loved as a father, mother, friend, or even a child. On this path, over time, the love of God supplants our love for things of this world and our obsession with our false selves.

In the Bhagavad Gita, God (Lord Krishna) offers guidance on the practice of devotion. He says, “Those who set their hearts on me and worship me with unfailing devotion and faith are more established in yoga.” ^[234] He further says, “Still your mind in me” and “You will be united with me forever.” He goes on to say that we can “Learn to do so through the regular practice of meditation.”^[235]

Bhakti yoga gives one something specific to focus on. Devoting oneself to God is more practical for most people than searching for spiritual wisdom of an eternal, indefinable Self, which is the practice of jnana yoga. Those who identify too closely with their physical nature as human beings may find jnana yoga’s direct ascent to spiritual knowledge a steep climb.

From the beginning, humans have sensed the presence of something beyond the material world, and they have given it many names and forms. Naming is part of the human need to see and understand things through a familiar frame of reference, even those things that we cannot see or understand. We create images and descriptions of our gods, using the phenomena and words available to us. “When grappling with subtle truths, we look for symbols that help us understand the nuances of those truths.” ^[236]

By entering into a complete and loving relationship with God, and by serving, surrendering to, and obeying God, you can slowly let go of your worldly concerns. By turning your attention away from your self-centered self and towards God, you loosen the bonds of your ego attachments and become free to find God.

Devotion is especially effective as a way of overcoming the fear that often arises as the ego gets weaker and weaker. Human beings have a powerful urge to survive, and to maintain themselves as separate and discrete beings. The ego is at the center of this urge. Disengaging from ego attachments is in some ways like dying. Some speak of dying to oneself, or being reborn, as a way of describing letting go of ego attachments.

The ego has great fear of losing its hold on you. Before you leap into the unknown of the Self, you need to have some sense that you are not leaping into a great abyss to your absolute death. The image of a loving God, who is there to receive you, can be a powerful source of the courage you need to let go of your ego attachments. ^[237]

Swami Satchidananda describes how the devotional path can be one of the easiest ways to loosen the hold of the ego. He says:

It is the emotional path that is easier than the other methods...Just surrender yourself, saying, "I am Thine; all is Thine; Thy will be done." The moment you have resigned yourself completely, you have transcended your own ego. [\[238\]](#)

Bhakti yoga is not for everyone. It requires an emotional sense of love for God. For some people, this is not possible, because there is no true belief in God.

The Yoga of Selfless Action (Karma Yoga)

To be active in the world, while remaining entirely selfless in what you do, frees you from ego attachments and enables you to find the Self. This selfless action is karma yoga. Like bhakti yoga, karma yoga is one of the most accessible of the yogic paths.

This path can work for anyone. It does not require the spiritual search of jnana yoga, and it does not require the loving devotion to God of bhakti yoga. It simply requires you to renounce the fruits of your work. Much of the Bhagavad Gita focuses on selfless action.

Mahatma Gandhi expressed the essence of the message of the Bhagavad Gita as selfless work and sacrifice. [\[239\]](#) He said that the Bhagavad Gita shows "the most excellent way to attain self-realization," which is "renunciation of the fruits of action." [\[240\]](#)

Gandhi's life is a glowing testament to this philosophy. Reportedly, he died weighing less than one hundred pounds, and the value of all of his worldly possessions was less than \$2. However, the eternal value of what he created and held in his heart was incalculable.

Here is the way Gandhi expresses the idea of the renunciation of the fruits of action:

He who gives up action, falls. He who gives up only the reward, rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the result. In regard to every action, one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto, and the capacity for it. He, who, being thus equipped, is without desire for the result and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfillment of the task before him, is said to have renounced the fruits of his action. [\[241\]](#)

Gandhi makes it clear that the "renouncer" does not give up the reward for action. "Again, let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer." Renunciation instead means only the absence of desire for a reward. Gandhi says that you can pursue your personal ends, and still be on this path, as long as you are not attached to the results of your actions. He says, "He who renounces reaps a thousandfold." [\[242\]](#)

Gandhi explains the practical side of renunciation. "He who is ever brooding over result often loses nerve in the performance of his duty." "Only the person who is utterly

detached and utterly dedicated is free to enjoy his life." [\[243\]](#)

To give freely of your time and money to others, without attachment to either gain or glory, is a way of loosening the hold that the material world and the ego have on you. Whether you pursue your personal ends, dedicate your work to God, or work for the community, you must remain unattached to the result.

You may think that working only for others can make it easier to remain unattached, but this is not true. Imagine, for example, that you enter into a contest for which there is a prize, and you dedicate the prize to charity. Giving away the prize seems to be a selfless action. However, what if you are also attached to the glory of winning the contest? Now your activity is no longer selfless. To practice karma yoga, you must remain unattached to the results, whatever they may be - or at least attempt to.

When practicing selfless action, you try to starve your ego. If you focus your attention entirely on the task, ignoring the reward, you loosen your ego attachments. As your ego weakens, you come to know your Self.

The Yoga of Meditation (Raja Yoga)

In raja yoga, the primary focus is the realization of the Self through meditation. This yoga is based on the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Raja yoga approaches the realization of Self as a science of the mind. The goal is “the understanding and complete mastery over the mind.” [\[244\]](#)

The complete practice of raja yoga is called the “eight limbs” of yoga. These eight limbs are as follows:

- *Yama* (abstinence) - nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-greed.
- *Niyama* (observance) - purity, contentment, accepting but not causing pain, study and worship of God, surrender.
- *Asana* (posture practice) - a comfortable posture for meditation .
- *Pranayama* (breath control) - controlling the vital force, usually through controlling the breath.
- *Pratyahara* (sense withdrawal) - controlled withdrawal of the senses from their objects and limiting focus to a single object of attention.
- *Dharana* (concentration) - continually refocusing the mind on the object of meditation.
- *Dhyana* (meditation) - steady focus of the mind on the object of meditation.

- *Samadhi* (contemplation) — mystical absorption, superconscious state, accompanied by intense, nonsensual pleasure.^{[\[245\]](#)}

[Appendix 3](#)

The Path of the Buddha

In this chapter, we look at the guidance found in Buddhism for living a life that keeps you on a path toward lasting happiness. The ultimate goal of Buddhist practice is enlightenment and nirvana. To be enlightened simply means to see reality as it is. It means to be “awake” to reality. Enlightenment comes from being aware of what is happening, moment to moment.^[246] Some believe that the ultimate aim of life is to be awake.^[247]

Of course, we mostly attach ourselves so strongly to the way we want things to be that we cannot see things as they are. Most of us do not have the clarity in life that we seek, and this causes us to suffer. Once we can see things as they are, suffering in life disappears. Happiness, peace, and joy all arise as you see the truth of reality.

Once you realize nirvana, you live in the world in a state of permanent knowledge, peace, and bliss. One of the milestones on the path towards nirvana is happiness.

Three Main Reasons We Are Often Dissatisfied and Unhappy

The Buddha gives three fundamental reasons for our suffering and dissatisfaction with life. According to the Buddha, the causes of unhappiness all boil down to personal desire, thirst and craving to get what we want, have things our way, and keep what we have.^[248]

Humans are willful creatures. We want what we do not have, and we want to keep the things that we do have. We want sense pleasures for their own sake, but we also want them because we mistakenly think they will bring us happiness. Our strong need for happiness turns simple desire into hunger, thirst, and craving. We selfishly want things for ourselves, and all too often would willingly deny them to others.

However, we can seldom have all that we want, and our unfulfilled desires result in dissatisfaction. Even if we do get what we want, we are dissatisfied when they do not bring us the lasting happiness we seek. We are also dissatisfied because they do not last. Dissatisfaction turns into the craving for more favorable situations and material goods, in the hope that if we can just get more, we will be satisfied.

We are, in short, addicted to having things, and to “having” people, and when we adapt to what we have, we want still more. There is never enough to satisfy the addiction.

We are also attached to our ideas and ideals, views, opinions, theories, conceptions, and beliefs. We believe that happiness will come from having the right beliefs, being smart,

being admired, and thinking well of ourselves. Dissatisfaction can set in when others hold beliefs different from our own, or when someone or something challenges our beliefs. One such belief is what we believe ourselves to be (the self-image). We are unhappy if someone or something threatens that self-image.

The desire to keep what we have includes desire for life itself. We do not want to age, become infirm, get sick, and die. We want to continue. The fact that everyone dies is a huge source of dissatisfaction.

Finally, we sometimes thirst for nonexistence or self-annihilation.^[249] The burden of living can be heavy and painful. Many times one would like life to stop, or at least slow down, so there could be a little relief. The fact that life continues relentlessly can be a huge source of unhappiness.

The Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha (the “Awakened One” or “Enlightened One”), began teaching his principles of liberation 2,500 years ago. Unlike yoga, whose exact origins are unknown, we know a lot about how Buddhism started. We know when the Buddha was born, when he died, and when he attained nirvana.

There is disagreement as to exactly what the Buddha was. When asked if he was a god or saint, the Buddha answered by saying, “I am awake.”^[250] Some schools of Buddhism consider the Buddha to be divine, while others view him as a great teacher. You will likely be attracted to a school that fits your needs for Buddha-as-teacher, or Buddha-as-God. The Buddha would have no reason to care what you thought of him, as long as you followed his teachings.

Roots in Yoga

The Buddha was trained by Hindu masters and practiced raja yoga, so Buddhism has its roots in Hinduism and yoga. Buddhism emphasizes the same goal as yoga, reducing the power of attachments to self-centered desires as a way to obtain nirvana. The core of what I discussed in Appendix 2 is relevant to the practice of Buddhism.

There are important differences. Unlike yoga, the Buddha did not include in his teaching anything about the individual soul or Self (atta or atman). Buddhism, as he originally taught it, emphasized anatta or anatman (non-soul or non-Self). When Buddha talks about dropping selfish attachments, thereby obtaining enlightenment, he does not say who or what becomes enlightened. It was his way not to theorize or speculate. His teaching

emphasized experience. If you become enlightened, the experience will speak for itself.

Compassion and Wisdom

In both practice and theory, Buddhism is centered upon compassion and wisdom. Both are necessary for a complete person. Practicing compassion alone results in a loving and compassionate fool, while focusing on wisdom alone produces a heartless intellectual.

Compassion

His Holiness the Dalai Lama never tires of reminding people that, “The entire teaching of Buddha is founded on compassion.” [\[251\]](#) He elaborates: “The basic sources of happiness are a good heart, compassion, and love...Our altruistic mind is the key to our happiness as individuals, families, nations, and as an international community.”[\[252\]](#)

All ethical conduct, which is key to fulfilling the Buddha’s Eightfold Path, springs from compassion. Not all schools of Buddhism make compassion their priority, but for all schools, it is very important

I think about compassion in two ways. First, I may have compassion for a particular person or thing. For example, if I see that a person is unhappy, angry, or in pain, I feel compassion. This feeling is quite natural.

Second, I think of compassion itself, not connected to a particular person or thing. Here, compassion is an experience or sense of the way things are. My sense of compassion is that it is a natural element of the universe. It is the essential theme of the natural order of things. If I do not have compassion, then I am not in harmony with the universe.

Compassion is a quality of being that is absolutely necessary to have a good and happy life. His Holiness says, “Compassion, love, and forgiveness...are not mere luxuries. They are fundamental to the continued survival of our species.” [\[253\]](#)

This quality draws you out of the isolation of your mind, so you can become aware of the world around you, and your true nature. To live with compassion for all is to walk the path of the Buddha.

Wisdom

The wisdom I refer to here is spiritual wisdom and knowing how to look at reality. I talk about wisdom later on when I discuss the Eightfold Path. Two elements of that path, right view and right intention, represent those aspects of the path that concern spiritual wisdom.

Mental Tranquility

In Buddhist practice, mental tranquility (or calmness) is a requirement for happiness. According to the Dalai Lama:

An external enemy, no matter how powerful, cannot strike directly at our mental calmness, because calmness is formless. Our happiness or joy can be destroyed only by our own anger. The real enemy of joy is anger. ^[254]

“Be Lights unto Yourselves”

The Buddha taught that individual effort is the way to the goal. Some religions (even later forms of Buddhism) view salvation (enlightenment) as a matter of grace from God. However, the Buddha said, “Work out your own salvation with diligence.” ^[255] He restated this many times, and in many ways. Here are the Buddha’s own words on this subject.

Do not accept what you hear by report, do not accept tradition, do not accept a statement because it is found in our books, nor because it is in accord with your belief, nor because it is the saying of your teacher. Be lights unto yourselves. Those who, either now or after I am dead, shall rely upon themselves only and not look for assistance to anyone besides themselves, it is they who shall reach the topmost height.

The Four Noble Truths

The foundation of all Buddhist teaching is the Four Noble Truths. ^[256] These truths were the first teaching of the Buddha, spoken immediately after his enlightenment. ^[257] The Four Noble Truths have to do with the nature of unhappiness/suffering (dukkha); the nature of craving for pleasure/permanence/things to be other than they actually are (tanha), which is the origin of dukkha; permanent cessation of dukkha; and the Eightfold Path that leads to the cessation of dukkha (nirvana).

Dukkha

Our primary focus will be on dukkha — how it arises and how to make it stop. In using the term dukkha, I am not trying to be obscure. I am trying to describe the problem in the most straightforward way possible, so we can explore how to resolve it.

Dukkha is from a Pali word that means “dirty hole.” In its time, the word described a cart’s axle hole. If the hole was dirty, it threw the wheel off-center, making for an unpleasant ride as the cart rolled down the road. ^[258] Sometimes it was just an unsatisfactory ride; sometimes it made the cart unsteady, which was dangerous in the high mountain passes; and sometimes it made the passengers suffer physical pain.

In Buddhism, dukkha refers to the mental states of anxiety, unsatisfactoriness, stress,

or suffering. I am using the word dukkha because none of these other words individually gets at the problem that the Buddha identified in human existence.

He saw that the way we usually interact with the world, and the way we see the world, are not right. We are off-kilter. It is as if we are trying to go through life moved by a part of us that does not work quite right. The problem as he saw it is that we do not see reality as it is, a dissonance that causes anxiety, unsatisfactoriness, stress, and suffering. In other words, it creates dukkha.

The Nature of Dukkha

The first truth in this teaching is that all human life is suffering, dukkha, whether we know it or not. Dukkha expresses in three primary ways.

First, dukkha is the physical and emotional suffering caused by the basic challenges of life: birth, aging, sickness, injury, and death. The five aspects of life are unavoidable. Although these are all painful in themselves, that pain is not dukkha. Dukkha is emotional pain in the form of dissatisfaction and unhappiness that we inflict on ourselves in response to these realities of life.

The second expression of dukkha is the emotional reaction to not having what we desire, or losing what we have. When we do not get what we want, or when we lose what we have, we suffer painful dissatisfaction and unhappiness. For example, when we lose a loved one, the dukkha that we feel from the severed attachment to that person can be extremely painful.

The third form of dukkha is our emotional dissatisfaction with the way the conditional, circumstantial world works. For example, in our world of favorable and unfavorable conditions, we try to find happiness by doing things or having things. As explained in Chapter 2, this provides us with conditional happiness, which is inherently transitory. This is not the lasting happiness that we all seek.

Dukkha can arise from the knowledge (conscious or not) that in this ephemeral world, lasting happiness will always be denied to us. In fact, most humans exist in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction.^[259] Of course, you do not need to be a Buddhist to know this. As Thoreau said, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”^[260]

Tanha as the Origin of Dukkha

The second truth states that the primary cause of dukkha is our compelling desire (tanha) for things to be other than as they are, or for things to remain as they are.^[261] This is no ordinary desire. In Pali, tanha means thirst. This thirst is personal. It relates to what you personally need or want. Tanha is also self-centered desire (craving) to have and keep

pleasurable experiences and avoid unpleasant ones. The Buddha called hunger for things the supreme disease.

It is this “thirst” (craving, ta?hā) which produces re-existence and re-becoming, and which is bound up with passionate greed, and which finds fresh delight now here and now there, namely, (1) thirst for sense-pleasures, (2) thirst for existence and becoming, and (3) thirst for nonexistence. ^[262]

Thirst for sense pleasures. We thirst for and seek out sense pleasures, in the mistaken belief that they will give us happiness, or as a substitute for the happiness that is out of reach for us. Sense pleasures are temporary, and when they are over we suffer for their loss, or we suffer the effects of oversatiation.

Thirst for existence and becoming. We want to be alive and stay alive. We suffer because we all must die. Some believe that after we die we thirst to live again, which results in the endless cycle of death and rebirth.

Thirst for nonexistence. We thirst for the burden of living to be lifted, and we suffer from the weight of life. However, life is ever-present and ever-pressing, until we die. Unwholesome methods of alleviating this suffering include drugs, alcohol or suicide.

If you have tanha in relation to something or someone, you have dukkha. If you possess something that you like and want to keep, you have tanha, and you will have dukkha in the future because nothing lasts. You may even have dukkha now because tanha causes you to fear losing what you have. If there is a condition that you cannot accept and desperately want to change, you have tanha and dukkha.

If you have tanha in relation to yourself, because you fear dying, you have dukkha. One of your greatest anxieties is the knowledge that you will someday die.

Tanha in relation to your image of yourself (your ego) can be a constant source of dukkha. You want to carry within yourself a pleasing self-image, and avoid assaults on that image. If your self-image pleases you, you want to keep it that way. If it does not please you, your need to gratify your ego may cause great dukkha.

The Cessation of Dukkha

The third truth explains that dukkha ceases as you clearly see the world as it is, and not as you wish it to be or as you fear it might be. To see the world clearly, you must reduce your desire for it to be other than as it is, and for you to be other than as you are.

The Eightfold Path that Leads to the Cessation of Dukkha

The fourth truth is that dukkha will cease if you follow the Eightfold Path taught by the Buddha. This path is a detailed guide to living and working in a way that promotes your

ability to see the truth of reality, live an ethical life, concentrate your mind, and earn wisdom.

“Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional.” [\[263\]](#)

One way of approaching the teachings of the Four Noble Truths is by looking at the Two Arrow Metaphor. Buddhism teaches that when we are touched by physical pain, we usually also feel sorrow, grief, or distress. In other words, we feel two pains, the physical and the mental. It is as if an arrow hits you, and then you immediately shoot yourself with another one. The first pain may be unavoidable, but there is no reason you have to augment your suffering by inflicting upon yourself another wound. [\[264\]](#)

The first arrow is the actual pain that you suffer, which comes from such events as losing your job, or injury. These things happen, and your mind and body react with pain. The second arrow is one that you shoot yourself. You do it to yourself by holding on to the emotional pain of sorrow, grief, or distress, or any number of other painful reactions, such as guilt or regret. By inflicting this second wound on yourself, you both worsen and prolong the pain. In other words, the first arrow happens, and there is nothing you can do about it. The second arrow, suffering, is all on you.

The Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is a guide for moving through life that enables you to steadily find your way out of dukkha. As you progress along this path, you find the joy and happiness that are natural to you. As the name suggests, there are eight individual areas of guidance: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation (or concentration).

The Eightfold Path is not one on which you take things in any particular sequence or order. For example, you do not work on developing right view and then move on to right intention. To be anywhere on the path is to be on the entire path. All characteristics of the path interrelate to one another. You cannot work on right livelihood, for instance, without at the same time working on right action and all of the other characteristics of the path.

There are two ways to examine the path. One way is to look at the individual characteristics of the path (right view, right intention, etc.). The other is to group its many features within the three categories of wisdom, ethics, and concentration, which is what we will do here. [\[265\]](#)

Wisdom

One aspect of the path is wisdom, which includes right view and right intention. [\[266\]](#) To

learn wisdom means to gain a deep understanding of how oneself, others, and things interact in the world.

Right view. Right view means understanding and seeing the world as it is, including the inherent impermanence of things, and the nature and cause of dukkha. It starts with understanding and accepting the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path. It does not end there, however.

You also have to see reality as it is, right now. Seeing is integral to your success in walking the path because a primary cause of dukkha is the inability to see reality as it is. You filter what you permit yourself to see of reality, and then focus much of your attention on subjective memory of the world. Filtering and remembering work very well when it comes to navigating the day-to-day world, but also put you in a mental cage. You can interact with your world as you imagine it to be, but because you are always dealing with a filtered and remembered reality, things are never quite right.

Not seeing reality as it is means you do not know what is happening, nor do you know who you are. You do not know why you are here and you do not know how to find happiness. Such ignorance leads to a general state of unsatisfactoriness (dukkha). When something bad happens, it pushes you over the edge to actual suffering. You may say to yourself, “Things were already bad, and now this happens!”

To have the right view means to know the way things are, and not to be caught up in concepts and beliefs about “how things are going.”^[267] Of course, if your attention is continually fixed on your personal model (internal image) of the world, all you have are your images, concepts, and beliefs about the world. Often, what you think you know of the world does not change, because it is largely a remembered world. The real world, however, is always in a state of flux. Until you learn how to see reality, as it is, moment to moment, you will always be out of sync with the world. Being out of sync is a primary cause of dukkha.

Right intention. You have right intention if you have made a commitment to being awake to reality, and to be present. You make a commitment to resist selfish desires, to exercise good will and compassion toward all, and to do no harm. Right intention refers to the motivation to wake up. When you are single-minded in your effort to wake up, you have right intention.

In one sense, if a cure for dukkha is to see reality, then right intention is to constantly try to see reality in the moment. If your primary motivation is to be awake and free of delusions, then you have right intention. Any motivation based on self-interest, or thought of gain, would not be right intention.^[268]

Ethics

The next aspect of the Eightfold Path is ethics, which includes right speech, right action, and right livelihood. ^[269] Here we are concerned with living and working ethically, and doing what is right. Ethical conduct springs primarily from compassion. If you live your life taking into account the feelings, perspectives, and rights of others, you are well on the way to living an ethical life. ^[270]

Knowing what you are doing now. The first step towards either right speech, action, or livelihood is to know what you are doing and where you are now. You can't get there from here unless you first know where "here" is. What kind of speech are you practicing right now? Is it truthful or untruthful? Is it helpful or harmful? Is it clear? What are the motivations behind your actions? Are they selfish or altruistic? What kind of work do you do? Does it help or hurt yourself or others?

You need to notice what you are doing all of the time. You must examine each thing you say, and every action you take, on and off the job. Quite simply, if what you do or say is truthful, unselfish, charitable, and beneficial to others, you are on the path. If what you do or say is untruthful, self-centered, avaricious, or harmful to others, you are not on the path.

Right speech. You practice right speech when you tell the truth, speak with warmth and compassion, and refrain from angry, malicious, or idle speech. Right speech is also speech that does not harm others or waste their time, and in fact, betters the lives of those around you.

Right speech is speech that is right for the current moment. It is also the kind of speech that helps you to be aware of the moment. It is based on the reality of what you see, and not on your concepts or beliefs about the world. ^[271]

Right action. You practice right action (or right conduct) when all that you do issues from selflessness, kindness, charity, and compassion. Right actions are selfless actions. They are actions that do not harm anyone, yourself included. They are actions dictated by seeing in the moment, and motivated solely by the needs of the moment.

Right actions are without self-serving aim or purpose, and are spontaneous and natural. Perhaps the archery master, in *Zen in the Art of Archery*, was referring to right action when he said that the archer practices his art in a state "in which nothing definite is thought, planned, striven for, desired or expected, which aims in no particular direction..." ^[272]

While these are the general requirements for right action, the Buddha spoke about specific things that were not right action. These are killing, stealing, lying, being unchaste, and drinking intoxicants.

Right livelihood. You engage in right livelihood if you earn a living without harming anyone, including yourself. In other words, earning a living through right livelihood means working in an occupation that does not harm you physically or emotionally, and does not bring harm to others. It should also be something that does not impair your ability to be awake and aware.

If your job affects you negatively, causing you to be frequently subject to negative emotional reactions, if it prevents you from sleeping or from finding peace in meditation, then clearly it is not the right job for you. [\[273\]](#)

Concentration

The final aspect is concentration, which includes right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation (or concentration). [\[274\]](#) The goal is to gain the ability to control your mind, to focus your awareness and concentration on anything you choose, and hold that focus for long periods of time. As we learned in earlier chapters, the ability to control the mind is key to finding happiness. [\[275\]](#)

Right effort. To have right effort, you must put as much effort as you can into living both the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, while at the same time not striving for any particular selfish goal. If you remain steadfastly focused on the goal of waking up, and you are constantly aware of the moment, you are engaging in right effort.

To be aware of the moment does not mean to strain or force present-moment awareness. It means being present and seeing what is happening. As with all other aspects of the path, it is also about making an effort that is appropriate to what you are seeing. [\[276\]](#)

Right effort also means not trying to force a square peg into what you clearly see is a round hole. To know that the hole is round, you have to see the reality of the hole. To see reality, you have to learn right view as well as right effort. All aspects of the path work together.

Right mindfulness. Right mindfulness is seeing the world clearly, without delusion or ignorance. To see clearly, you have to be aware of your mind's tendency to interpret the world around you rather than see the world as it is. You have to allow the world (and yourself) to be as it is.

Right mindfulness also means being aware of what your mind and body are doing right now. Regarding the mind, it means being aware of the emotional state of your mind, and the judgments the mind makes about what you see. [\[277\]](#)

Right meditation. Right meditation (or concentration) is the ability to focus all of your attention on a single object of meditation for an extended period. You gain this ability

through regular meditation. Right concentration, or right meditation, refers mostly to the meditational techniques that are central to the practice of Buddhism. ^[278]

Choosing a School of Buddhism

Numerous schools of Buddhism have arisen in the 2,500 years following the death of the Buddha. If you decide that Buddhism is your path, it is important to recognize that there are differences that you must take into account when choosing the school that best fits your personality.

All of the schools hold to the basic principles discussed in this chapter. However, that is where the similarities end. Each school aims for the same state, enlightenment of the individual, but each aims to get there in a different way.

The differences in the various schools seem to revolve around three philosophical concepts: whether people are independent or interdependent; whether the universe is friendly or indifferent to the individual and his or her fellow humans; and whether the best of humanity is of the heart or the head. ^[279]

Theravada Buddhism (The Way of the Elders)

Theravada claims to hold true to the original teachings of the Buddha. The school emphasizes individual effort on the road to liberation, just as the Buddha found enlightenment, alone, sitting under the Bodhi Tree. Adherents are usually monastic monks and nuns who practice this type of Buddhism full time. This branch of Buddhism considers the Buddha a saint and teacher.

Theravada practice centers on meditation and the realization of spiritual wisdom. This practice minimizes both theory (metaphysics) and ritual. The goal is enlightenment and eventual nirvana. One who attains nirvana is an arhat. The belief is that when an arhat dies, that person remains in nirvana after death.

Mahayana Buddhism (The Big Raft)

Mahayana Buddhism seems to have developed to appeal to the masses. People can practice this form of Buddhism as laypersons. It is not necessary to live a cloistered existence. Detractors say that Mahayana has strayed from the Buddha's original teachings and is closer to the Hindu model than the Buddha would have liked. Obviously, those practicing this form of Buddhism deny this.

The goal is enlightenment and eventual nirvana; however, the ideal is to be a bodhisattva. The bodhisattva vows not to enter into nirvana until "the grass itself is enlightened."

This practice considers the Buddha a savior of humanity. The Mahayana school holds that practitioners can attain enlightenment with the aid of divine powers. This practice places emphasis on both metaphysical knowledge and ritual. Practice centers on the virtue of compassion, and emphasizes prayer.

Vajrayana Buddhism (The Diamond Way)

Developed in Tibet, Vajrayana Buddhism is Tantric Buddhism. Tantric Buddhism accepts the basic tenets of Mahayana Buddhism. However, rejecting the silent meditative postures of other practices, Tantric practices harness psycho-physical energy by using all of the resources of the human body, including the voice, imagination, sex drive, and movement.

Here in the West, we tend to obsess about the sexual side of Tantric Buddhism, but those practices are only one part. Tibetan Buddhists are relatively small in number, but highly visible because their titular head is His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Zen Buddhism

Zen (Zen in Japan, Ch'an in China) is another branch of Buddhism that eschews theory and ritual, and holds to the original teaching of the Buddha. Practiced all over the world, Zen emphasizes a master- student practice.

Zen developed long after the Buddha died, when Buddhism came to China and fell under the influence of the teaching of the Tao.

Zen masters are well known for not explaining anything. When asked the meaning of Zen, master Butei simply lifted his index finger and said nothing. Masters do not teach in logical sentences because novices would then try to process those words in their rational minds. The door to enlightenment or nirvana cannot be found in written teachings. It exists in direct experience.

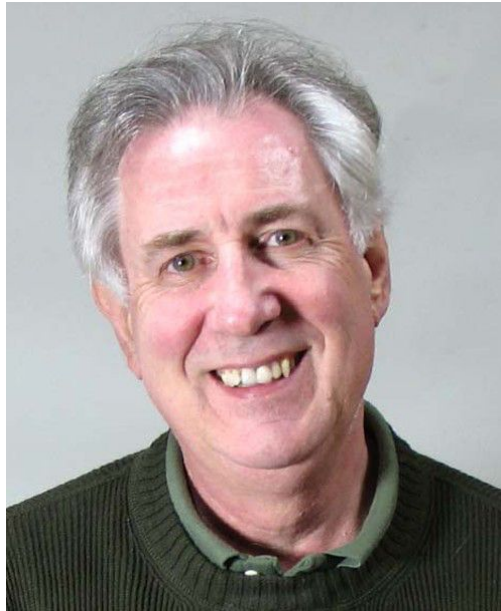
According to Zen tradition, it was the Buddha who first demonstrated teaching without words in his Flower Sermon. With his disciples all around him, the Buddha held up a golden lotus. Only one person seemed to demonstrate his understanding with a smile, and that person, Mahakasyapa, became the Buddha's successor.^[280] The Buddha said, "If we could see the miracle of a single flower clearly, our whole life would change."

Much of the teaching that novices receive takes the form of koans. These are questions or statements that one cannot understand rationally, therefore forcing the practitioner to push beyond rational thought to experience the answer. The most well-known of these koans is "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

If you enjoyed reading Be Happier in One Hour, please leave feedback on the author's obooko.com [download page](#).

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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.

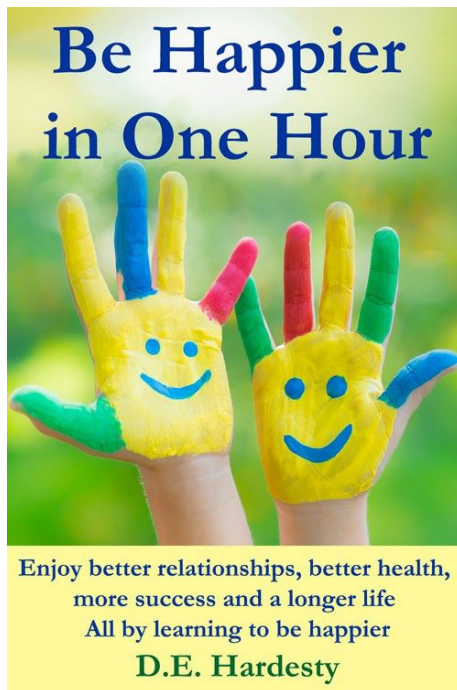
His second book, *Be Happier in One Hour*, continues exploring the ways to find happiness in our lives.

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 Books and Writing by D.E. Hardesty



Be Happier in One Hour: Enjoy Better Relationships, Better Health, More Success and a Longer Life. D.E. Hardesty. 81 pages.

For more information on this book, see

[Be Happier in One Hour](#)

D.E. Hardesty blogs at

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

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

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

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[16] Note: The SWLS was developed by Ed Diener, and is in the public domain. Diener has indicated it can be used without his permission. The answers to the five questions are used to construct the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS).

[17] For a full explanation of each overall satisfaction score, see Diener, Ed, "Understanding Scores on the Satisfaction with Life Scale."

[18] See Tsering, Geshe Tashi, The Four Noble Truths: The Foundation of Buddhist

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[19] Lyubomirsky, Sonja, *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want* (p. 33). Penguin Group US. Kindle Edition..

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[21] Claire Bates, “Is this the world's happiest man? Brain scans reveal French monk has 'abnormally large capacity' for joy - thanks to meditation,” *Daily Mail*, Oct. 31, 2012.

[22] Sachidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, (Kindle location 1792).

[23] Gospel of Thomas, 113, Translated by Thomas O. Lambdin., “ Following is the full text: "It [the Kingdom] will not come by waiting for it. It will not said, 'Look, here it is' or 'Look, there it is.' Rather, the father’s kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it." Also see Gospel of Thomas, 51, “What you look for has come, but you do not know it.” Also, in Luke 17:20-21, Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

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[28] See Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness*.

[29] Hua Ching Ni, *The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching*, SevenStar Communications. Kindle Edition (Kindle Location 19), (Kindle Locations 2318-2320).

[30] “Richard Cory, “ by Edwin Arlington Robinson

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[45] H. H. Dalai Lama, *The Four Noble Truths* (Kindle Locations 155-156). "What appears as some kind of autonomous, objective reality out there does not really fit with the actual nature of reality."

[46] See the discussion of this experiment in Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (pp. 23-24). Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Kindle Edition.

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Structure of the Living Present,” in *Introduction to Phenomenology* (p. 134). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition. In order to perceive the current instant, referred to in phenomenological terms such as the “living present” or “lived present,” we are simultaneously aware of the current instant (the primal instant), the immediate past (the retention), and the immediate future (the protention). This way we experience the current instant in context, and are therefore aware of what is happening right now. As Sokolowski explains this, our experience of “now” does not present us with individual “frames” of film. Instead, we have an immediate and direct experience of the present, past and future. Citing William James, Sokolowski compares our experience of now to a “saddleback.” “Whatever is given to us in perception is given as trailing off and also as coming into presence.”

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[53] H. H. Dalai Lama, *The Four Noble Truths* (Kindle Location 157). “Once we appreciate that fundamental disparity between appearance and reality, we gain a certain insight into the way our emotions work, and how we react to events and objects.”

[54] Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5.

[55] Ibsen, Henrik, *Peer Gynt*, Act Four, Scene 13.

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[75] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 28.

[76] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

[77] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 27. “I want everything to be explained to me or nothing.... The mind aroused by this insistence seeks and finds nothing but contradictions and nonsense.”

[78] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 6. “A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger.”

[79] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays*, p. 16. “Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal.... The truism ‘All thought is anthropomorphic’ has no other meaning. Likewise, the mind that aims to

understand reality can consider itself satisfied only by reducing it to terms of thought.”

[80] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 51. “And these two certainties—my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle— I also know that I cannot reconcile them.”

[81] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (p. 8). Kindle Edition.

[82] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 32-34.

[83] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 51. “I don’t know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it.”

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[86] See the discussion of “chronic stress” in Wikipedia.

[87] Carrera, *Inside the Yoga Sutras* (p. 167).

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[89] H. H. Dalai Lama, *The Four Noble Truths* (Kindle Location 273).

[90] Hagen, *Buddhism Plain and Simple* (p. 106).

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[93] *Yoga Sutras*, padas. 1.34 to 1.39, *Insider the Yoga Sutras*.

[94] Hagen, *Buddhism Plain and Simple* (p. 108).

[95] Satchidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Kindle Location 708).

[96] Carrera, *Inside the Yoga Sutras* (p. 68).

[97] For a good discussion of this phrase, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Om_manipadme_hum.

[98] Satchidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Kindle Location 719).

[99] Satchidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Kindle Location 2877).

[100] See Carrera, *Inside the Yoga Sutras*, Pada One Review.

[101] Castaneda, Carlos, *Journey to Ixtlan*.

[102] Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, Sec. 53, (Kindle Location 8830-8833). Kindle Edition. “We may now summarize our characterization of authentic Being-towards-death as we have projected it existentially: anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned freedom towards death

—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious.” Also see, Foulds, Steven, A Serious Guide to Being and Time (Kindle Locations 3988-3990). Kindle Edition.

[\[103\]](#) Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras: (p. 48).

[\[104\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple (p. 108).

[\[105\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, (p 95).

[\[106\]](#) See Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, (p 101).

[\[107\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple (p. 105).

[\[108\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple (p. 106)..

[\[109\]](#) Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind; Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple (p. 107).

[\[110\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, (p 103).

[\[111\]](#) Easwaran, The Bhagavad Gita, 6:19-23.

[\[112\]](#) Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras (Kindle location 8400).

[\[113\]](#) The guided Yoga Nidra meditation I use is, Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati, Yoga Nidra Meditation CD: Extreme Relaxation of Conscious Deep Sleep.

[\[114\]](#) Sachidananda, Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, (Kindle location 1792).

[\[115\]](#) H. H. The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Locations 1160-1161).

[\[116\]](#) Although not said by Jesus, the phrase “in the world, but not of the world” is generally attributed to the spirit of his teaching. For example, in John 15:18-19, Jesus, in speaking to his disciples, said “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” Zondervan (2011-01-09). Holy Bible (NIV).

[\[117\]](#) Satchidananda, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Kindle Locations 676).

[\[118\]](#) Herrigel, Eugen, Zen in the Art of Archery, Kindle Locations 764-766.

[\[119\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 2148-2149). “When the mind is attached to something, it can hold little more than self-created pain. One who is highly evolved, therefore, is attached to nothing and does not depend on any particular mental concept or form in his relations with people or in serving them. His very being benefits all life.”

[\[120\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 2069-2070). “To be completely desireless is to achieve the true happiness of agelessness; it is the way of transcendental bliss.”

- [121] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 1545).
- [122] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Locations 1539-1548).
- [123] Satchidananda, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Kindle Locations 596).
- [124] Satchidananda, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Kindle Location 371).
- [125] Easwaran, The Bhagavad Gita, 6:32.
- [126] Gandhi, Mohandas K., The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi (Kindle Locations 156-158). Wilder Publications, Inc.. Kindle Edition.
- [127] Satchidananda, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Kindle Locations 585-587).
- [128] Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 355-356). “Give of yourself, without expecting something in return.”
- [129] Compassion, the Basis for Human Happiness, a Public talk given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, UK 19th July 1996. This talk is reprinted in His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2013-08-29). H.H. Dalai Lama, The Four Noble Truths, beginning at Kindle Location 1031. HarperCollins Publishers. Kindle Edition.
- [130] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 2335).
- [131] Roberts, Bernadette, What Is Self?: A Study of the Spiritual Journey in Terms of Consciousness (pp. 27 and 31). Sentient Publications. Kindle Edition.
- [132] Visuddhimagga IX, 23. “By doing this you are like a man who wants to hit another and picks up a burning ember or excrement in his hand and so first burns himself or makes himself stink.”
- [133] Luke 6:28. Zondervan, Holy Bible (NIV). Zondervan. Kindle Edition..
- [134] Luke 23:34.
- [135] See Tammy Worth, “10 Careers With High Rates of Depression,” health.com (2010).
- [136] See Edwards, Jeffrey R., Person-Job Fit: A Self-Assessment Exercise. Darden Case No. UVA-OB-0375. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1584127>.
- [137] Bolles, Richard N., What Color Is Your Parachute? 2013: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers . Ten Speed Press. Kindle Edition.
- [138] Bolles, What Color Is Your Parachute? (Kindle Location 1792).
- [139] Deci, Edward L.; & Ryan, Richard M. (1985). Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior. New York: Plenum. ISBN 0-306-42022-8. Deci, Edward L.; & Ryan, Richard M (2000). "The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior." Psychological Inquiry, 11, 227-268. Deci, Edward L.; &

Ryan, Richard M 2000. "Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being." *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78. Also see, <http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org>. SDT is an outgrowth of the human potential movement of the sixties and seventies, and builds on the work of Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May and others. The theory was founded by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in 1985.

[140] "The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior." p. 227.

[141] "The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior." p. 229.

[142] "The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior." p. 231.

[143] Deci, Edward L.; & Ryan, Richard M (2000). "The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior." *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, p. 230. The authors further note that “need satisfaction, which in this case means experiences of autonomy and competence, is necessary for the enjoyment of the activity, but his explicit purpose in playing the music is not likely to be need satisfaction. He would be doing what interests him, and he would experience spontaneous pleasure as long as the activity was self-organizing and the task appropriately challenging.”

[144] Deci & Ryan, "The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior." p. 229.

[145] Deci & Ryan , "The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior." p. 247.

[146] Deci & Ryan , "The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior."

[147] Life stress is related to cardiac death, pregnancy and birth complications, diabetes and other physical complaints. Life stress can cause anxiety and depression, and can negatively impact academic and work performance. Stress that is long-term and excess can seriously threaten a person's health. See Kumari, Dr. Patiraj and Mishra, Richa, Effect of Job Stress and Personal Life Stress on Mental Health and Job Outcomes of Medical Professionals (July 22, 2009). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1437409> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1437409>.

[148] Bolles, What Color Is Your Parachute?

[149] Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (2008). *Flow* (P.S.). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

[\[150\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, pp 2 and 4.

[\[151\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, p 6.

[\[152\]](#) Peterson, Park, Martin and Seligman, Orientations to Happiness and Life Satisfaction: The Full Life Versus the Empty Life, Journal of Happiness Studies, Spring 2005.

[\[153\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, p 34.

[\[154\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, p 24.

[\[155\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, p 22.

[\[156\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, p 3, also, p 6.

[\[157\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, pp 49 and 61.

[\[158\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, p. 6.

[\[159\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, p 67.

[\[160\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, p 53.

[\[161\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, p. 105-106.

[\[162\]](#) Csikszentmihalyi, Flow. p. 39.

[\[163\]](#) The term “higher power” in this context began being used by Alcoholics Anonymous in the 1930’s. A commitment to seek help from that higher power is central to the twelve steps of the AA program. See A.A. World Services Inc, Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Edition (Kindle Location 829). A.A. World Services, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

[\[164\]](#) It is like the ancient story of the three blind men, trying to describe an elephant. One felt its tail and said it was like a rope; another felt one of its great legs and said it was like a tree; and the third felt one of its ears and said it was like a fan. We all experience that power in our own way, and what we experience is true for us. No matter how wise a person is by human standards, the human mind is so limited that we are like the blind. We experience and describe only what our limited minds are capable of perceiving.

[\[165\]](#) H. H. Dalai Lama, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Locations 1165-1166).

[\[166\]](#) Matthew 6:8.

[\[167\]](#) Tao is the Universal Way, the Way of the Universe, the Integral Truth of the Universe, the natural order of the universe, subtle universal truth, or the deep nature of the universe.

[\[168\]](#) Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 165).

[\[169\]](#) Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu, The complete saying by Lao Tzu is, “One who knows does not speak. One who speaks does not know. The one who knows is the one whose doors are shut, whose openings are blocked, whose sharpness is blunted, and whose

glare is softened. He is one with the subtle truth of the universe. Thus you cannot get close to such a person by your love to do so. Nor can you keep away from him by your desire to do so. You cannot bestow benefit on him, nor can you do him harm, because he holds the subtle essence of the universe.”

[170] Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 2002-2004). “...as soon as the Universal One is mentioned people immediately formulate images in their imaginations . Then they try to make reality conform to their imaginary concepts. The Universal One is truly imageless, yet in the attempt to make it conform to an image, people distort its reality and separate themselves from it.” (Kindle Location 2426-2428) “...the highest teaching is wordless because the subtle integral truth itself is unspeakable, unexplainable and unthinkable. One who tries to talk about it only deviates from it and makes it obscure. One who thinks about it loses it.”

[171] Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 2019-2022).

[172] Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching, (Kindle Locations 189-190).

[173] Tsu, Lao, Tao Te Ching: Text Only Edition (Vintage) (p. 27). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

[174] Herrigel, Zen in the Art of Archery.

[175] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 1438-1439).

[176] The Wizard of Oz, 1939, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

[177] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 1416).

[178] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 1441-1444).

[179] Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 1490-1492).

[180] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 1538).

[181] Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 1422).

[182] Tao Te Ching, chapters 2 and 7, Arthur Waley’s translation..

[183] Herrigel, Herrigel, Zen in the Art of Archery, Kindle Locations 441-443.

[184] Herrigel, Zen in the Art of Archery, Kindle Locations 363-367.

[185] Herrigel, Zen in the Art of Archery, Kindle Locations 764-766.

[186] The Tao in this sense seems a little like “the force” in the Star Wars movies of George Lucas.

[187] See Smith, The World’s Religions, (Kindle Location 4215).

[\[188\]](#) Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 1438-1439).

[\[189\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 2771-2773). "

[\[190\]](#) Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu, (Kindle Location 1115). The "love of perfumes fills the head with dizziness, love of flavors ruins the taste. Desires unsettle the heart... If this is life, the pigeons in a cage have found happiness!"

[\[191\]](#) Merton, The Way of Chuang Tzu (Kindle Location 1954-1965)

[\[192\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Location 2352). "There is no 'self,' yet worldly people believe that a self exists."

[\[193\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Location 2460-2461). "The source of all suffering is an individual's stubborn adherence to the establishment of self which separates him from his universal nature."

[\[194\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 397-400). "People are beset with great trouble because they define their lives so narrowly."

[\[195\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 1287-1289) "The Integral Way of the universe is very smooth and straight, yet people's minds prefer devious bypaths."

[\[196\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 1518-1519).

[\[197\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 2443-2444). "Kind prince, can the integral truth be put into words?" "No, Venerable Teacher, it, too, speaks for itself."

[\[198\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 497-498).

[\[199\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 1977-1980).

[\[200\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Location 2958).

[\[201\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 3079-3085)

[\[202\]](#) Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 2044-2046).

[203] Hua Ching Ni, The Complete Works of Lao Tzu: Tao Teh Ching and Hua Hu Ching (Kindle Locations 2396-2399).

[204] It is not just yoga that teaches this. Sages and saints of every religion have said that your nature is joyous, happy and peaceful.

[205] Satchidananda, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Kindle Locations 98-100).

[206] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, pp. 24 and 104.

[207] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, p. 104, explaining Pada 2.3. "Ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and clinging to bodily life are the five obstacles."

[208] Yoga Sutras, Pada. 1.3. "Then the Seer (Self) abides in Its own nature." Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras (p. 22).

[209] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, (p. 3).

[210] Also see, H. H. Dalai Lama, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Locations 304-305). "We could say that cessation [of suffering] is the highest form of happiness, because it is, by definition, complete freedom from suffering."

[211] Yoga Sutras, pada 2.4. "Ignorance is the field for the others mentioned after it, whether they be dormant, feeble, intercepted, or sustained." Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, p. 105.

[212] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, Kindle location 316.

[213] Yoga Sutras, Pada 1.3, "Then the Seer (Self) abides in Its own nature." Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, p. 22.

[214] Easwaran, The Bhagavad.

[215] In the Christian trinity, for example, the Godhead is God, the father; his Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit. St. Augustine said some believed "there was in Christ nothing else but godhead and flesh." St. Augustine, The Confessions (1st Edition; Study Edition) (Kindle Locations 3995-3996). New City Press. Kindle Edition. In religion, it is the personification of God that is ordinarily worshipped, not the Godhead (divinity) of God.

[216] Bhagavad-gita 7.26, "O Arjuna, as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, I know everything that has happened in the past, all that is happening in the present, and all things that are yet to come."

[217] The Bhagavad Gita was written in about 500 BCE, and is part of the epic Hindu poem, the Mahabharata. The Gita is an important Hindu scripture, which describes a dialog between the Hindu god Krishna and the warrior Arjuna. This dialog takes place just before a great battle, where Arjuna will be forced to fight an army that includes many relatives. It is Arjuna's duty to fight, but cannot bring himself to kill members of his own family. In this

context Krishna instructs Arjuna on duty, the nature of Arjuna as an eternal being, and how to find liberation through the practice of yoga. The Bhagavad Gita has been called a guide to living in the world. It is said that Mahatma Gandhi considered this book to be his personal guide to life.

[218] In jnana yoga, the goal is to discriminate between the Self and material world. This requires direct spiritual knowledge of the Self.

[219] This metaphor is found in Katha Upanishad, which is an ancient text containing some of the earliest writings on the central religious concepts of yoga.

[220] Yoga Sutras, Pada. 2.5. “Ignorance is regarding the impermanent as permanent, the impure as pure, the painful as pleasant, and the non-Self as the Self.” Pada 2.6. “Egoism is the identification, as it were, of the power of the Seer (Purusha) with that of the instrument of seeing.” Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras.

[221] Watts, Alan, Eastern Wisdom, Modern Life: Collected Talks 1960–1980 (p. 75). New World Library. Kindle Edition.

[222] Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1.

[223] See, Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, p. 105.

[224] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, Kindle location 401.

[225] Yoga Sutras, pada. 1.15, “Non-attachment is the manifestation of self-mastery in one who is free from desire for objects seen or heard about.” Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, p. 42.

[226] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, Kindle location 327-352.

[227] The Yoga Sutras contain 196 sutras, or aphorisms, which form the basis of Raja Yoga, or Royal Yoga. Patañjali did not invent yoga. The sutras describe the philosophy and meditational practices that were already in existence for thousands of years before Patañjali organized them into their current form. Scholars date the sutras between 5,000 BCE and 400 CE. 400 CE is given as the current estimate of when Patañjali compiled them as the Yoga Sutras we know today. See Satchidananda, Swami, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: Commentary on the Raja Yoga Sutras by Sri Swami Satchidananda (Kindle Location 122). Integral Yoga Publications. Kindle Edition. Also see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga_Sutras_of_Patanjali.

[228] Yoga Sutras, pada. 2.30.

[229] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, Kindle location 2663.

[230] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras, Kindle location 8129.

[231] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras.

- [232] Satchidananda, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Kindle Location 2888).
- [233] Easwaran, The Bhagavad Gita 13:3 and 35.
- [234] Easwaran, The Bhagavad Gita 12:2, (p. 207). Nilgiri Press. Kindle Edition.
- [235] Easwaran, The Bhagavad Gita, 12: 8 to 11. (p. 208). Nilgiri Press. Kindle Edition.
- [236] Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras.
- [237] Pada 1.23, Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras.
- [238] Satchidananda, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Kindle Locations 851-853).
- [239] The Bhagavad Gita (p. 51).
- [240] Gandhi, Mohandas K., The Bhagavad Gita (Kindle Location 118).
- [241] Gandhi, Mohandas K., The Bhagavad Gita (Kindle Locations 153-156).
- [242] Gandhi, Mohandas K., The Bhagavad Gita (Kindle Locations 156-158).
- [243] Gandhi, Mohandas K., The Bhagavad Gita (Kindle Locations 158-159).
- [244] Satchidananda, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (Kindle Location 100).
- [245] Yoga Sutras, Pada 1:29, Carrera, Inside the Yoga Sutras.
- [246] Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 21.
- [247] Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 33.
- [248] Rahula, What the Buddha Taught (Kindle Locations 728-735). Easwaran, The Dhammapada (pp. 43-44).
- [249] Rahula, What the Buddha Taught (Kindle Location 1937).
- [250] Smith, The World's Religions (Kindle Locations 1784-1785).
- [251] H. H. Dalai Lama, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Locations 944-945).
- [252] H.H. Dalai Lama, The Basic Sources of Happiness, Parallax Press. Kindle Edition.
- [253] H.H. Dalai Lama, The Basic Sources of Happiness.
- [254] H.H. Dalai Lama, The Basic Sources of Happiness.
- [255] Smith, The World's Religions (Kindle Locations 1888-1889).
- [256] H. H. Dalai Lama, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Location 21).
- [257] This teaching is contained in the sutra, Setting the Wheel of Dharma in Motion, which is also known as the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, or Four Noble Truths Sutra. For a complete translation and detailed discussed of this sutra, see Tsering, Geshe Tashi, The Four Noble Truths: The Foundation of Buddhist Thought, Volume 1. Wisdom Publications. Kindle Edition.
- [258] Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 25.

[\[259\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 18.

[\[260\]](#) From the book, Walden, by Henry David Thoreau, originally published in 1854.

[\[261\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 18.

[\[262\]](#) Rahula, What the Buddha Taught (Kindle Locations 728-735).

[\[263\]](#) Anonymous Buddhist saying.

[\[264\]](#) Sallaha Sutta: The Arrow, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikku.

“When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pains of two arrows; in the same way, when touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental.”

[\[265\]](#) Tsering, The Four Noble Truths, (Kindle Location 1807).

[\[266\]](#) Tsering, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Location 1951).

[\[267\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 54.

[\[268\]](#) Tsering, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Location 1951); Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 73.

[\[269\]](#) Tsering, The Four Noble Truths, (Kindle Location 1860).

[\[270\]](#) Tsering, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Location 1817).

[\[271\]](#) Tsering, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Location 1877); Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 77.

[\[272\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 85.

[\[273\]](#) Tsering, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Location 1890); Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 93.

[\[274\]](#) See Tsering, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Location 1918).

[\[275\]](#) Tsering, The Four Noble Truths (Kindle Location 1834).

[\[276\]](#) Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 95.

[\[277\]](#) See Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 101.

[\[278\]](#) See Hagen, Buddhism Plain and Simple, p 103.

[\[279\]](#) Smith, The World's Religions (beginning at Kindle Location 2535).

[\[280\]](#) Smith, The World's Religions (Kindle Location 2702).



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