

The Practice Of Happiness

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For Alex and Cicely

Acknowledgments

My good friend Andrew Blair, bringing his PhD in philosophy to my aid, has reviewed this work for its logic and philosophical soundness. Andrew is an advocate of John Stuart Mill's "Utilitarianism", a philosophy whose highest principle is, "Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness". This would seem to be a call to act in accordance with the Buddhist philosophy of the Dalai Lama: "all beings want happiness and don't want suffering".

I had practiced the "Three Person Teaching" concept (if you wish to really learn something, teach it) with Andrew in regards to Buddhism, a subject he was interested in. Each week, we got together and I would need to explain to him one or more Buddhist concepts. He had been for some time a university level teacher so needless to say he did not let me gloss over anything. Those conversations laid the groundwork for this working relationship.

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The Practice Of Happiness

Chapter One: Origins

My qualifications for writing this book do not come from having letters after my name although it is largely people with letters after their names who have made me who I am today. Let me tell you how I came to be qualified to write this book and share what I believe to be true with you.

I wholeheartedly agree with the pronouncements of His Holiness Tenzing Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet when he states that the purpose of life is to be happy and further that all living beings operate on one simple principle; they don't want suffering, they want happiness.

When I first read his words I was 47. I was standing in a book store holding a book I would not be able to afford to buy for almost a year. I had just ended a period of my life where I had witnessed first hand the awesome destructive power of negative thinking and its ability to create unhappiness. I was alone, destitute, and very unsure of my recent decisions. I had spent the previous twenty years reading, thinking and studying about how life works. I would spend every single day of the next year thinking about just what exactly happiness is.

A picture of me at about age ten shows a happy, smiling boy. I love nature and science and reading. I collect everything from rocks to arrowheads to bugs. I belong to the local archery club and the naturalists club and volunteer to help build trails in the public parks. My grades are good and I enjoy helping out at school as the class monitor over lunch times. My heroes are Jane Goodall, anthropologist Lois Leakey, and Jacques Cousteau. Unfortunately, this happy picture was soon to fade.

Like many people, I did not grow up in a family where I was provided with the knowledge, support, and role models I would require to live a happy and successful life. The family life I grew up with resulted in my living on the street for ten years from the time I was fourteen years old. I proceeded to implement all 35 of Ben Stein's recommendations as put forward in "How To Ruin Your Life".

At age 28 I finally awoke to my life and realized that I was what I referred to as a loser. I realized I did not know what winners do. I was never taught or shown. I had no examples to go by. So I set out to learn. I read everything I could that I believed to be relevant. I read widely of all the arts and sciences. I took notes and filled eight notebooks with them on everything from archeology and economics to psychology and history. I studied all the sciences; chemistry, physics, biology, as well as world mythology, philosophy and the classics of literature. I read the Bible, Shakespeare and the Koran. I read endless biographies including those of Henry David Thoreau, Aristotle Onassis, and Winston Churchill. I found

underlying patterns in all these disciplines, schools of thought and lives. I proceeded to apply what I was learning.

By age 35 I had demonstrated that I was an apt pupil and had results to show for my efforts. I was married and owned my own home and had two children. I wore a suit every day, worked for a large government corporation on the executive floor and was earning \$60,000 a year as a computer information systems troubleshooter. I worked out with weights at noon five days a week, walked or rode my bicycle to work and swam at the local pool. I continued to read voraciously on a wide range of subjects. I got up every morning at 5am to study for industry exams.

By age 47 I was divorced for the second time. I was unemployed and stone broke. I lived in a single room in a two bedroom apartment I shared with a twenty year old male college student I did not know from Adam. As I did when I was 28, I searched again for an answer to my life's mystery: why did happiness elude me? I had studied success and practiced success and yet had little to show for it at this point. Browsing the shelves of a local bookstore I opened a book about Buddhism and read the first line: "the purpose of life is to be happy". I had never heard this idea before. Even with my Masters Degree in Life Skills from the "University Of Public Library", I had never encountered this idea. For the next year I researched the subject of happiness, not "success" this time, but happiness. I read everything I could find that the east and the west had to say on the matter.

A year later I am stunned by what I have learned and the profound impact its practice has had on me and my life. I am happier than I have ever been. I am a kinder, warmer, more loving person. I am once again that happy, smiling boy in the photograph who loves life and approaches it with open arms. I determined to share what I had learned with others. I began writing this manuscript.

Chapter Two: What Is Unhappiness?

"Now you just dig them in front. They have worries, they're counting the miles, they're thinking about where to sleep tonight, how much money for gas, the weather, how they'll get there - and all the time they'll get there anyway, you see. But they need to worry and betray time with urgencies false and otherwise, purely anxious and whiny, their souls really won't be at peace unless they can latch on to an established and proven worry and having once found it they assume facial expressions to fit and go with it, which is, you see, unhappiness, and all the time it all flies by them and they know it and that too worries them no end."

-- "On The Road" by Jack Kerouac

What Unhappiness Is Not

The common perception is that unhappiness is caused by our circumstances. We feel we don't have enough money, didn't get the lucky breaks, or aren't good looking enough to find the love that would make us happy. We take for granted that unhappiness stems from such things as illness, a meaningless job, or loneliness. Surely to be poor, old, sick and alone is a recipe for unhappiness? Yet surprisingly none of these things is the true cause of unhappiness. Notice that they share the common traits of being external, outside of ourselves and all ultimately beyond our control.

Many people live out their lives under the illusion that they are in control. They confidently stand before us as a statement that they made the right decisions, they made the right moves, they worked hard and they made it happen. What they do not take into consideration is that many others made the same decisions as they did along the way, worked just as hard and are now in very different circumstances.

No doubt there are some very successful lawyers who graduated from your local universities law school. They have the right car, the right house, the right spouse. However there are many more graduates of that law school who are not now successful lawyers. The successful ones live under an illusion brought about by statistical probability and our desire and need to feel in control.

We live in a world of staggering randomness and chance. We really have about as much probability of predicting and controlling our future as we do predicting the path of a single marble dumped out of a forty-five gallon drum full of marbles onto a concrete floor. If we try to consider all the events that had to go right in order for us to have anything we have, you will see that they are uncountable and all involve far more factors than yourself. Consider your present job. What if the previous person had not left? You would have found a different job. Perhaps you met your spouse

at your current work place. You would have different children. It is entirely possible that your life would be completely different today if at some point in the past you turned left instead of right at an intersection twenty years ago. You bumped into an old friend who invited you over where you met... Such an arbitrary sequence of events really reflects just how much we are in control of our destiny.

Nor can we really control any of the things we believe make us unhappy. We cannot control illness. We may live a healthy lifestyle but that won't protect us from a genetic or all external disease. We cannot control wealth or poverty. You may save your money wisely, but bubbles burst, and fraud happens. You cannot control your employment. You may go to school to become a surgeon, but blindness may be in your future. You cannot control love or aloneness. Love has nothing to do with good looks, and aloneness nothing to do with the number of people around us. You will grow old no matter what. Your beloved may pass on before you. All these things we can perhaps influence to a degree but can never truly control.

Yet despite this real inability to control our lives, we believe that if we could then we would find happiness. We believe that if only we had more money, lost weight, or got out more, we would find happiness. But there are many people with all these things and more who are not happy. Consider how many people love to read about the ups and downs of the rich and famous. If looks, money and popularity are all that we need why aren't all the stars happy all the time with what they have?

Our history is rife with examples of people who have had little and yet been happy, people who have been crippled or ill and yet never complained but only sought to bring joy to others, and equally filled with examples of the rich and the powerful who lived lives full of bitterness, anger and blame.

Besides anecdotal evidence, there have been countless studies done with groups and individuals to find out what makes people happy or unhappy. Virtually all the research, from classic work such as that done by Victor Frankl in the Nazi concentration camps, to massive surveys and interviews done by research firms and psychological organizations spanning years and including tens of thousands of people, to the current work done by leaders in the field like American researcher Dr. Martin P. Seligman, points to the fact that external circumstances are not what make a person unhappy.

So if unhappiness is not caused by external circumstances, or more accurately, if external circumstances have no bearing on whether we will be happy or unhappy, what must unhappiness be caused by?

What Unhappiness Is

If unhappiness is not caused by external circumstances, it must be caused by something inside each of us and indeed it is. That something is choice. Unhappiness is a choice.

When we are confronted with a fact, event or situation, we compare it to our value system, to what we think is right and wrong, good or bad, or the rest of the host of opposing value pairs. We decide, based on that value system, whether the information will make us unhappy or not. If we chose that this new information makes us unhappy for some reason, we then proceed to feel, think and act out all the internal and external behaviors we feel congruent with that choice. Only we don't think of it that way. We don't realize that it was the choice that we have made that makes us unhappy, we think that it is the actual fact, event or situation that we are confronted with that makes us unhappy. We unconsciously assume a direct connection between the event and our reaction. We leave ourselves and our free will out of the equation. We make a leap but we are not aware we have done so.

Granted our choice may be *influenced* by our genetics, by our upbringing, and by our circumstances. Anecdotal and research evidence has also shown that each of these things does have an affect on an individuals outlook. Each of us has a genetically predetermined outlook, each of us has family of origin issues that skew our view of the world, each of us has unique circumstances in our present life that influence our thoughts.

How we chose to view the world in general however is ultimately independent of each of them. In the process of the choice to be unhappy, if we *allow* ourselves to be influenced by our genetics, upbringing or circumstances, they become our excuses, our justifications and rationalizations. They become our crutches that keep us forever crippled with unhappiness. When the world asks us the reason for our unhappiness, we shake our crutches at it.

When we are confronted with anything, *it is the choice of assuming a negative point of view that makes us unhappy*. Notice I do not say that we focus on the negative, chose the dark side, or see only what's wrong. This is because those qualities are not actually inherent in any fact, event or situation. They are not really there for us to select. Those qualities only exist within ourselves and we project them onto other things. Thus it is our view that is negative, not any aspect of the thing we are viewing. Everything in the world is essentially neutral, it is only ourselves that color it one way or another.

A Zen story may help to illustrate this point of the relativity of things.

The Farmer's Horse

There is a story of a farmer whose horse ran away. That evening the neighbors gathered to commiserate with him since this was such bad luck. He said, "May be."

The next day the horse returned, but brought with it six wild horses, and the neighbors came exclaiming at his good fortune. He said, "May be."

And then, the following day, his son tried to saddle and ride one of the wild horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. Again the neighbors came to offer their sympathy for the misfortune. He said, "May be."

The day after that, conscription officers came to the village to seize young men for the army, but because of the broken leg the farmer's son was rejected. When the neighbors came to say how fortunately everything had turned out, he said, "May be."

Let me give another example, one which will lead us into the practice exercise for this chapter.

A recent immigrant from a destitute mountain village in northeastern Afghanistan comes to live in your town. Her family used all their resources to send her here, to save her from their fate. She finds a small apartment, gets herself a job as a night cleaner and after a few months she enrolls in a school to improve her English and to learn some office skills. She can only afford a foam mattress on the floor and a few blankets for a bed, and has few pieces of furniture.

In her eyes all this her new life is a wonder beyond her wildest dreams. She is in the land of plenty, the land of democracy, the land of opportunity. No warlords will be visiting. There is peace. She is allowed to go to school. There is freedom. She has a room of her own. There is privacy. She can buy milk, and honey, and soft bread or a hundred things! She takes the bus to school. There are buses! Clean, new buses. In her apartment, wonder of wonders, not only running water, her own running water in her own apartment, but it is hot water. There is electricity. Most of the villages where she lived did not have electricity. Her clean bed is a hundred times softer than the hard matt she slept on at home. She will go to school, get a better job, and make a new life here. She has already made so many new friends. She met a most interesting person on the bus to school today. She goes to sleep feeling like the luckiest person in the world.

In the apartment below hers, there lives a man who grew up in the town where they both now live. He has a bit more furniture but not much. He had been a senior manager but had been laid off when the company he

worked for went under. After the divorce he had moved in here, the low rent part of town which was all he could afford, and bought himself a foam mattress to sleep on. He'd had to let his car go. He'd found a job as a night janitor in a retirement home. He was so humiliated he avoided all his old friends. He was ashamed of the poverty he lived in and the foam mattress mocked him the most but he could not yet afford a proper bed. The damned building was noisy, he never knew if the water would be hot or not, and all he could afford was the same old grocery list week after week. And then there were the buses he had now to take to get to work in the wee hours, filled with every lunatic and loser the town could gather together at one time in one place. His life was a black hole that was swallowing him up and there was no hope in sight. He goes to sleep a bitterly unhappy man.

Notice that it is not the foam mattress, the apartment, the people on the bus or the job that are inherently good or bad, but *the point of view*, the value system from which these things are perceived, is what gives them these qualities. It is what they *compare* their circumstances to that makes them happy or unhappy.

Also notice that neither of these people are aware that they are making choices through every minute of their days. They consider these choices as simply the thought process, over which they have no control and which happens automatically. They both believe it is the things themselves, their external circumstances, that are making them happy or unhappy. They seem to view the world very differently, but how different are they really?

“No one is discontented at not being a king except a dis-crowned king...unhappiness almost invariably indicates the existence of a road not taken, a talent undeveloped, a self not recognized”.

– BLAISE PASCAL

There is one more step needed for both of them to be free of the dependence upon their external circumstances and find true happiness. That step is *to become aware of the unconscious choices they are making* through every moment of their waking lives, to become aware that they can chose to be happy no matter what happens in their lives. They need to become aware that happiness is a choice. A choice to cease from ever assuming a negative point of view.

We will turn this around and soon explore the positive side, but for now, what is a negative point of view? In our western culture, we traditionally call this “negative thinking” but what exactly is that?

What Negative Thinking Is Not

It is important to point out that there are many kinds of thinking that may be labeled as negative which in fact are not. Depression, grief, or sadness are not negative thinking. They are normal, healthy functions which we have for a reason.

For example, we become depressed for the same reason we like sweets. They are both biological survival methods. In our early stages of evolution, when we as mammals wandered the forests, certain foods were highly prized as sources of energy. These foods which contained high amounts of sugars or fats were very rare and valuable, so if we found some honeycomb we should eat a lot of it. Our bodies even developed special methods of storing extra sugar or fat so we would eat more of it than we needed at the moment.

So we are biologically programmed to be attracted to sweets for a reason. It is not a mere trait of character or a personal preference. It is biologically driven, no different than the desire for sex. The desire for sex is perfectly normal and so is a preference for sweets. It improves our chances of survival. Unfortunately, in our modern world, sweets are no longer rare, and thus our genetic programming leads us astray. We have come too far too fast and our biological evolution has not had time to adapt to the new environment. We must now use our highly evolved brains to override the bodies programming.

Depression is similarly biologically based and is built into us to help us survive. In the wild, an animal that is injured does not go limping around showing the world its vulnerability and stay in the world for very long. So nature has built into mammals when they are wounded a desire to withdraw from the world, to find a sheltered place where they can lay low for a while and lick their wounds. The animal loses its appetite so it has no urge to venture out, its metabolism lowers in a mild form of hibernation, it feels less inclined to move and stays quite still. It sleeps a great deal. The only thing it does is give its wound a great deal of attention.

The animal is doing what we do when we feel depressed. Depression is nature's way of taking us out of harms way when we are injured. We humans however can be injured by a word, by the loss of a job, by a relationship ending. Our body however, again having not evolved to the same degree as our brain, does not appreciate the difference. All it knows is our feeling of injury. This feeling causes biochemical changes in us which the body recognizes and it initiates the correct survival biochemical response. We feel an urge to withdraw from the world and we spend a great deal of time mentally attending to our wound but nothing else seems important anymore. Later, when we are healed, we will begin to itch and twitch and soon head out into the world again.

I will be suggesting in this book many things which I know are challenging and controversial to some. I am aware that not everyone likes to think of themselves as an animal. Rejecting this fundamental reality can cause us to be much harder on ourselves than we need be. It can make our life much more difficult than it could be and much more confusing and frustrating. Accepting the animal in us can go a long way to make our life more understandable and enjoyable. Neither our animal body or our human mind will always rule, one is not base and the other noble, they are a single unit and at times can overrule each other. The body has biochemicals, hormones for example, that are more powerful than any drug known to science. Those chemicals can make us feel the high of being in love or the low of depression. Yet there are times the mind can overrule them. The key is to understand that all our emotions are valid and exist for a reason. As Albert Einstein said in another context, God does not play dice.

Similarly, feelings of sadness, of missing someone, of anxiety when faced with change or the many stages of feeling one goes through during the grieving process, none of these are negative thinking. All these feelings arise as a normal biologically driven healthy function.

I have written in this section on what negative thinking *is not* by commenting mostly about *feelings*. Feelings and thoughts are chicken and egg. Which comes first? Does the feeling of sadness pre-exist before the sad thoughts arise? Or do sad thoughts generate a feeling of sadness? Remember the injured animal. In response to the injury the body produces biochemical changes which result in *feelings*, it is we humans who extend the process by having thoughts about those feelings, generally to our psychological detriment.

Ultimately, in all our thinking, it is impossible to escape the underlying web of feelings, based on our life's experiences, that form so much of who we are. No matter how rational we think we are being, how intellectually pure we imagine our thoughts to be, there is always a feeling behind it though it may be far in our distant and perhaps even inaccessible past.

There are however forms of thinking that are less directly obviously influenced by emotions which can also be confused with negative thinking. One of these is critical thinking. The term critical used in this sense does not refer to the negative term "criticism". Critical thinking is another term for "reasoning", the logical process we use to work out complex problems, to try to understand the how and why of facts, situations or events, and then to make decisions or establish precepts based on that analysis.

In 1605 Francis Bacon put it this way: "For myself, I found that I was fitted for nothing so well as for the study of Truth; as having a mind nimble and versatile enough to catch the resemblances of things, and at the same time steady enough to fix and distinguish their subtler differences; as

being gifted by nature with desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to consider, carefulness to dispose and set in order; and as being a man that neither affects what is new nor admires what is old, and that hates every kind of imposture."

This kind of rational or scientific thinking is a powerful tool and again is a normal healthy part of our psych. All of these thoughts and feelings however can cross a line. It is not a clear line. It is a fuzzy border in a continuum where our thoughts go from being healthy and constructive to being unhealthy and destructive. This is the shift we will explore next. The shift to negative thinking.

What Negative Thinking Is

Unlike the examples given above, negative thinking is characterized by the fact that it is detrimental to our health and does us no good, but only harm. Always it is a corruption in our thinking, an extended form of a natural process which we take too far, usually due to fear. Fear is the line we cross into negative thinking. In the George Lucas film "The Phantom Menace", when Jedi Master Yoda first evaluates young Anakin Skywalker, the boy who would grow up to become Darth Vader, he is quite right when he tells the boy, "Fear is the path to the dark side". Though fear is a natural, healthy function, when dwelt upon and lived by it becomes an unhealthy and destructive master.

An outlook based on fear is necessarily filled with negative thinking, and negative thinking can only make us unhappy. It is destructive and toxic. It is doubt, jealousy, suspicion. It is rigid, hopeless, and fatalistic. It harms us and our loved ones and everyone around us. Rather than being a part of a healing process, it takes away our life energy and makes us mentally and physically ill.

Our own negative thinking can often be difficult to identify and sort out from the steady stream of consciousness of everyday living unless we have a way of differentiating it. Yet there is a simple, easily understandable way to do so. The term "negative" carries with it some connotation of harm either to ourselves or another. It is always destructive or detrimental in some way, and always contributes to physical or mental ill health. It will always cause a feeling of unhappiness in the present moment and lead to further unhappiness. So we can say that *negative thinking is any thought that makes us unhappy!*

How do we know when our thoughts are making us unhappy?

We all know intuitively what we feel like when we are happy. Happiness is a state which is closely tied to a sense of physical well being, that is, when we are happy, we feel physically good. It will be reflected in our expression, our voice, our body language, our energy. For some of us

unfortunately, this feeling may not be too frequent, but no matter how infrequent it is we still recognize it. We feel it in a physiological as well as emotional sense. When we feel happy others see us as relaxed, warm and friendly.

Negative thinking is characterized physically by tension, rigidity in the body, a physical feeling of anxiety, dread or nervousness, or by feelings of lethargy, weariness or insufficient sleep. Our expression is pained, worn, sullen or intimidating. Our voice has an edge. Inside we feel worried and afraid while others see us as up-tight, cold and distant.

Negative thinking can also be identified by displays of arrogance, rudeness, or irritability. Others may see us as selfish, condescending, or egotistical, yet all these outward displays of dominance or aggression only reflect our inner doubts and fears and our own negative thoughts about ourselves or our circumstances.

The strong negative thoughts and feelings that accompany immediate events such as those that arise from being exposed to rudeness are fairly easy to identify once we chose to interrupt our reaction and do so. Yet these are not the really unhealthy and destructive negative thoughts. These kind of knee-jerk reactions are usually over fairly soon and we return to our normal state of feeling and thinking. The really unhealthy and destructive thoughts are the chronic, low level ones. The ones that are born from events long past, perhaps even long forgotten, so the connection is no longer obvious. They seem to be simply a part of our nature. We may not notice them because we have integrated them into our concept of who we are. The eye cannot see itself.

It is really these chronic, moment to moment, negative thoughts that keep us from happiness, not the occasional jolt. The chronic negative thoughts are also often much harder to identify because they are only a slight shift away from healthy, positive thinking. Consider for example, how subtle is the shift from us thinking about an issue using our faculty for critical thinking, to worrying about it. When does our mind shift from positive concern into the realm of doubt, and perhaps to pessimism and despair? It is almost impossible to draw the line.

But it is possible to draw a line based on something other than a careful analysis of our thoughts. We can know which side of that line we are on by being attuned to the way those thoughts make us *feel*. The line we can draw is to ask ourselves if what we are thinking makes us feel happy or not.

There is also a way we can manage our thoughts so that we do not set ourselves up for this unconscious, chronic negative thinking. As we have seen we can manage our thoughts by being attuned to our feelings in the moment, but we can also take pre-emptive action to prevent those negative thoughts from arising in the first place. In Buddhist psychology this is

known as a causal approach, that is, everything has a cause and we deal with that rather than its effects, rather like treating the cause of a disease rather than its symptoms. By dealing with what causes our unhappiness, we can prevent its “constant arising”.

It seems like another approach yet it is really only another way of coming at the problem. Like any good physician, we treat both the symptoms and the cause of our dis-ease at the same time. We will apply it now as we examine how we set ourselves up to allowing negative thoughts to arise.

Acceptance and Expectations

This secondary process in our thinking occurs in our seemingly rational and everyday minds and leads us quite unawares from positive, healthy thoughts to negative and destructive thoughts. This process is concerned with our outlook regarding our present circumstances, but occurs as a result of having made unconscious assumptions about how those will be during some earlier moment.

The minds of humans, like those of many animals, are finely tuned machines in regard to forecasting future outcomes. That is how the cheetah draws its line of attack, how the wolf pack coordinates its movements, and how the eagle gauges its line of flight as it deftly snatches a salmon from the surface of a lake. We are all able to think of the future. We humans also think of the future in a less conscious way as we go about our daily business. We are constantly, and quite unconsciously, making assumptions about how our immediate future will be. From the moment we wake up we are comparing the present situation not only to how we would *prefer* it to be, but to how we *expect* it to be. Our preferences represent our *maximal* wishes, our expectations are the *minimal* that we assume will be present. When we wake up in the morning, we would *prefer* a Vente Caramel Macchiato for breakfast but we *expect at least* there will be coffee in the kitchen! This gap between our expectations and our experience is another area we chronically think in negative terms about.

In small ways it may be the fact that there is no coffee. The newspaper has not arrived. The gas in the car has not been filled. Perhaps there is a delay in the traffic. The essential source of each of these moments of negative thinking is our unconscious expectations about how they *would* be.

On a larger scope our expectations may be about how our life would be at this point. Perhaps we are not wealthy after all. We never did write that book, travel the world, or have a successful marriage. Perhaps the passage of time has taken us by surprise, and taken with it the boundless hope and dream of youth that somehow our shining destiny awaited us. The relationship, the home, the good life we saw on the television, never did

arrive. The present life is not what we had somehow imagined for ourselves. We are not happy.

In a manner similar to the man and woman whose life circumstances I sketched earlier, notice that it is the *comparing* of the reality experienced against the expectation that causes the unhappiness and not the circumstances themselves. I assure you that for every one of us who is unhappy with our lives there are at least four billion people on earth right now that will trade us our circumstances for theirs and be delightfully happy with the result.

In regard to each of these challenges, on the large scale and the small, there is nothing we can do to change our circumstances in the moment. If we choose to find them unsatisfactory when compared to our preferences or expectations, we choose to be unhappy. But there is another choice that can allow us to be happy regardless of our circumstances and that choice begins with acceptance. Another Buddhist story may illustrate.

A student once asked his teacher, "In this world where everything changes, where loss and grief are an inherent part of living, *where there is nothing one can count on to be the way we'd like*, how can there be any happiness?"

"The old man picked up a beautiful glass he'd just been given and said, You see this? For me, this glass is already broken. I enjoy it, I drink from it, sometimes the sun makes beautiful patterns in it. If I tap it, it makes a lovely ring. But when I put it on the table and my cat knocks it off or the wind blows it over and it breaks, I say, 'Ah, yes. Of course.'

"You fear this inevitable event. You place the glass high on the shelf or lock it away where it is less likely to break and where you can never enjoy it. For you, the glass is a source of fear and pain as you try to prevent what must happen eventually no matter what you do.

"But when you understand that the glass is already broken, then you no longer fear it. Every moment you have with it is precious. You enjoy it that much more. Every moment is just how it is. And that is enough."

We may not be able to change our circumstances in the present moment, but we are completely free to choose how we feel about them. We are free to accept things as they are. This does not mean we should not plan to change our circumstances in the future if we wish to. That kind of positive thinking will contribute to feelings of happiness. But our envisioned better circumstances are in the future, while our challenge is in the present.

We have begun to see the way negative thinking works on us at a chronic and often difficult to detect level, but that we can identify it and take steps to change it. We need to better understand just exactly how destructive it is to ourselves, to our own lives, but also to the lives of those we love.

The Contagious and Poisonous Nature of Negative Thinking

In the science of artificial intelligence, infectious ideas are referred to as *memes*: “an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture”. They are like a virus. Some are virulent, “marked by a rapid, severe, and malignant course”. Negative thinking is like that. Like a virus it is passed readily from one person to another. Some of us have immune systems that deal well with the negative thinking of others when they communicate it to us. Some of us do not and we suffer because it takes hold. It takes hold because like a real virus it can find the weaknesses in our system and exploit them. If we harbor our own self doubt, our own desperation, our own fears or cravings, another person can easily pass their negative thinking on to us and we do not reject it out of hand. Instead the sour thoughts find a new home in us and we soon come to accept them and believe them to be a part of the real world and unwittingly pass them on to another.

Whole sub-cultures fall pray to such thinking. The societies full of chronic complainers, the workplaces where only snide remarks are thought amusing, whole towns or industries full of victims. In the right social environment negative thinking becomes a contagious disease.

Negative thinking is also like a poison. The higher the dose, the longer the exposure, the more mentally and physically ill we become. We all understand how poison works. Sometimes even minute quantities, over a period of time, will be fatal. Sometimes a mild dose of a toxin can create feelings of euphoria or pleasure such as that induced by alcohol or heroin. But chronic use of toxins eventually destroys our lives and in the same way so does chronic negative thinking. And these toxins too we can pass on to others. Our outlook becomes dark, we resonate and reflect the fears of others. We become a dark mirror in which others see only their faults.

There is overwhelming scientific research evidence that proves negative thinking, and its accompanying emotions, has a direct and cumulative detrimental effect on our health. It leads to more frequent bouts of illness, and those bouts will be more serious. It leads to chronic illness and to an earlier death by as much as *decades*. The research is abundant and absolutely conclusive that happy people are healthier and live much longer than unhappy people. So I am not only writing about the mental realm in this book: I am also saying that the same motivation that sends us for our exercise walks and makes us lower the amount of fats, sugars, salts and carbohydrates in our diets, the motivation for attractiveness, physical health and longevity, exists for us to work on lowering the amount of negative thinking in our lives.

The Price Of Negative Thinking

There is a clear and documented price for negative thinking in terms of wellness and longevity. There is equally well documented evidence of the price negative thinking extracts in terms of our attractiveness, and our social and material experience of life. The lives of unhappy people reflect smaller social circles, less intimacy, and fewer successful relationships. But we don't really need research to tell us that. We all know that a sour attitude is off-putting, that chronic bitching and complaining people are avoided, and that people with superior or condescending attitudes will soon find themselves their only company.

Negative thinking does not engender an attractive expression or demeanor. Negative thinking is born of fear and fear makes us freeze and cower. Freezing is one of nature's most common self-defense mechanisms. Eyes are highly attuned to identifying light, color and pattern but above all to detecting movement. When an insect or an animal senses danger the first thing it does is freeze. Run stop. Run stop. So fear makes us tense up. This tensing also restricts the circulation of our blood. We are no longer relaxed, open and warm. We are stiff, closed and cold.

Fear also causes us to cower. Think of all the things our bodies do when someone throws a handful of gravel at us. We cringe, we close our eyes, purse our lips, furrow our brows and crease our foreheads. These physical responses occur even in the absence of any real threat because our bodies cannot tell the difference between a real and imagined threat. If the mind is full of fear, the body initiates the appropriate survival response. Negative thinking is always based on fear. So chronic negative thoughts are soon physically reflected in our posture, demeanor and facial expression. None of this is attractive.

Chronic depression, brought about when an individual catastrophizes regarding a setback or injury, either physical or emotional, also extracts a physical price. As mentioned above, depression is a normal, healthy, survival mechanism we all experience to some degree at various points in our lives. It is when we make the event catastrophic, that is, see it as something other than temporary and based on specific external circumstances, that it becomes chronic. Chronic depression drains our energy and makes us lethargic and weak. It hunches us over, shuffles our gait, and takes the color from our skin and eyes. It flattens our voice. Chronic depression is endless negative thinking. Its physical manifestations are not in any way attractive. It will not facilitate new relationships and it will work to the detriment of any relationship we already have.

Material success in this world often depends on the support and encouragement of others. The less attractive we are, either physically or socially due to negative thinking, the fewer friends, relatives and co-workers we will find on our cheerleading team. Happy, positive people are

usually more successful than unhappy, negative people. Again, we don't really need any rocket scientists to tell us that.

Chapter Summary

1. Unhappiness is not caused by our external circumstances
2. Unhappiness is caused by a choosing a negative point of view
3. Negative thinking is not any of the normal healthy emotions we have
4. Negative thinking arises when we unfavorably compare our circumstances to our preferences or expectations
5. Negative thinking can be identified by the way it makes us feel
6. Negative thinking is contagious and poisonous
7. Like lowering the amounts sugar, salt, fat or carbohydrate we consume, lowering the amount of negative thinking in our daily routine will improve our health, attractiveness and social and material success

Chapter Practice: Observe others unhappiness

At the end of each chapter I will introduce one practice exercise for us to do. These are based on what has been found through investigations by psychologists, philosophers, and spiritual leaders to engender in individuals a sense of their own good fortune. In this exercise we will enlist the comparing mind, usually our nemesis, to our own advantage. We will use it to focus on the unhappiness of others. I have chosen to start with this practice first because it comes fairly easily for us. As I will explain in a later chapter, our minds are naturally attuned to looking for what is wrong, again for biological survival reasons. We must use effort to overcome this, but it can also be used to our advantage.

For the next few days, make a conscious effort to focus on exactly what it is that makes others unhappy. Pay attention to the facts, events or circumstances that they feel are the cause for their unhappiness. Take note of their reaction, how they express their unhappiness. Notice how it effects them physically and the ways they try to pass their feelings on to others, possibly including yourself. Pay special attention to the connection between what it is they believe is making them unhappy and their reaction. Try to see the choice they are making and notice how they are totally unaware that they are doing so.

This exercise will have a twofold benefit. First, initially it will be easier to see in others the links in the chain of external stimulus, choice and reaction than it will be to see it in ourselves. Secondly, it has been shown through research that exposing people to others less fortunate than themselves causes a heightened state of appreciation for their own blessings. Simple exercises like finishing a sentence that starts: "I am glad I'm not a person who ..." will cause a momentary rise in positive feelings.

Following such exercises we will be more likely to help a stranger. Spiritual movements have used similar practices for centuries. For example, visualizations or meditations on the suffering of others, or prayers on their behalf, generates feelings of compassion in the practitioner.

As we have seen, negative thinking undermines every good thing we could want or need. It will only poison our own minds and bodies and pass as a debilitating disease to those we love and everyone around us. Yet if all the detrimental effects of negative thinking are so obvious, so well known to science as well as philosophers, religious leaders and common sense, why do many of us covet it so? Why are we so unwilling to give up our negative thoughts no matter how destructive, poisonous, and costly they are to us and our loved ones? Why would we choose to be unhappy? There must be a reason. Actually, there are quite a few. We will explore them further in the chapter: “Why We Hold On To The Negative”. For now however I would like to take a break from the dark side and explore the other side of the coin: what is happiness?

Chapter Three: What Is Happiness?

Richard Corey by Edwin Arlington Robinson 1869–1935

"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."

What Happiness Is Not

People magazine is filled with individuals who are rich, famous and beautiful and yet they are not unanimously happy. Many of them are regularly found checking into drug rehab centers, filing for divorce, or getting arrested for one thing or another. Clearly money, good looks or fame provide no guarantee of happiness. Still most of the population believes that if only they had one or more of these magic ingredients, they would be happy. Again, research has shown that sudden wealth actually causes only a temporary rise in happiness, rather like a high. We soon return to our "normal" level of happiness. Even more amazing is what recent research on depression worldwide has shown. The higher the standard of living, the higher the rate of depression in the population. The easy life is apparently not the good life after all.

Pleasure also does not bring lasting happiness. Sex, food, drugs and many other things can cause pleasure, but they do not last. Pleasure is by its nature a temporary phenomenon. The nerves of the body dictate this. Any pleasurable sensation ceases to be pleasurable after a period of time. The nerves become dulled to it. Our brains soon become satiated and no longer stimulated by it. Some have defined happiness is contentment, to be satisfied with our circumstances. I take it a step further but lets stick with

this definition for now. When someone is scratching our back or otherwise pleasuring us, we cease to care about anything else for a moment. For a moment, nothing else is really important. We are content. We are happy. All pleasures are like this, they make us very happy *with our circumstances* for a brief period of time. If we pursue them in hopes of hanging onto the happiness they seem to bring, they soon fade.

One of the most powerful and long standing expectations of our society is that romantic love will bring us happiness. All we need to do is find our prince or princess and we will live “happily ever after”. All of us grown ups know this is a myth and an illusion. It is a natural extension of our biological makeup which causes us to see someone we are in love with as idealized. This strong, chemically induced bonding is there to ensure the safety of the off-spring. Human newborns are vulnerable. Upon being born they do not jump up and run around like gazelle newborns. Humans are pack animals and function biologically as a group. In the wild, a number of stronger, testosterone loaded males were needed for protection against predators. Bonding was one of many methods nature used to keep them around after the pleasure part was over.

Romantic love does not bring lasting happiness. Like pleasure, it is a temporary phenomenon. The honeymoon phase does come to an end. The brain and body stop manufacturing their chemicals of love. Our state of happiness returns to its normal level. Hopefully our level of maturity is ready for this. Unfortunately in western cultures, statistics indicate that it seldom is.

Another state that is often believed to bring happiness is having a purpose. To have meaning in our life, to have a vision, goals and plans are often given as foundations happiness. Yet there have been many whose purpose in life drove them but brought no happiness. The drive to revenge, to justice, to riches, or to power can all bring a galvanizing sense of purpose and meaning to ones life but there is no necessary correlation with happiness. I doubt any of us would imagine that Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin were happy chaps. Oh they may have been pleased with the circumstances of their success at times, but as we have seen, that is dependent upon those circumstances and only temporary.

Many of the worlds religions and faiths are often presented as paths to true and lasting happiness. The middle east is not a bookmark for happiness in our minds. Nor is the Asian sub-continent. Yet all these regions are filled with people devoted to one faith or another and many of them demonstrate emotions which are clearly more associated with unhappiness than happiness. World history makes it clear that adherence to any particular faith is no guarantee of happiness.

So upon closer examination money, power, sex, fame, love, looks, lifestyle, purpose etc., are not able to bring lasting happiness. We can have all these things and not be happy. The lifestyles of the rich and famous

demonstrate this for us every day. They are simply things that happy people who have them enjoy more than unhappy people who have them. These things increase our satisfaction with life, our pleasure in it, and can deepen our happiness, but they do not cause it. They enrich a happy life, they can present channels of opportunity for the expression for our happiness, but they are not the source of it. Again these things are all external, temporary in nature and ultimately beyond our control.

So if our external circumstances, a sense of purpose, romantic love, or even our faith has no bearing on whether or not we will be happy, what does make us happy? What is happiness?

What Happiness Is

Just as unhappiness is brought about by the two step process of comparing our circumstances to our preferences or expectations and then choosing to take a negative point of view, happiness is the two step process of accepting our circumstances and choosing to take a positive point of view. The choice of unhappiness usually occurs unconsciously, the choice of happiness is usually a conscious choice. The former takes no effort, the latter takes intention, determination and effort.

Earlier I had mentioned that one definition of happiness was contentment. I believe this can be dangerously misleading for two reasons: firstly because it still externalizes our view of the source of happiness and secondly because it is only half of the process – acceptance can be followed with thoughts of resignation, fatalism and hopelessness, it does not necessarily lead to happiness. Happiness is choosing a positive point of view, not a neutral one.

Just as a negative point of view consists of a collection of negative thoughts, a positive point of view, or outlook, consists of a collection of positive thoughts. Positive thinking has had a fair number of proponents over the years. It has a legacy spanning the centuries and has had as many detractors as it has had advocates. Current scientific research is coming out strongly in its favor however and there are remarkable consistencies between some of our most ancient and revered spiritual practices and modern findings.

On the western side of the argument, the psychological practice of cognitive therapy is the strongest proponent of positive thinking. Milestone books on the subject such as “Feeling Good” by Dr. David Burns, a book that deals mostly with overcoming depression, show how challenging and changing our thoughts from negative ones to positive ones can steadily move us from a state of general unhappiness to one of happiness. Cognitive therapy is based on four basic principles: One, all our moods are created by our thoughts. Two, negative feelings arise when our thoughts are dominated by negative thoughts. Three, negative thoughts

almost always contain gross distortions and it is the distortions that cause our unhappiness. Four, we can train ourselves to change our thinking in a relatively short period of time.

It is impossible to write anything about happiness or positive thinking any longer without mentioning the works of Dr. Martin P. Seligman, the author of “Learned Optimism” and “Authentic Happiness”. He may or may not be the founder of the actual psychological school of positive thinking and happiness but his name has become associated with the scientific study of these areas as certainly as Sigmund Freud’s and Carl Jung’s are respectively associated with the unconscious and the transpersonal. Dr. Seligman’s books catalogue a great deal of scientific research showing the relationship between positive thinking and happiness.

On the eastern side Buddhism has emerged as a spiritual practice with 2500 years worth of discipline and study into the science of mind control, positive thinking and happiness. His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet is the best know advocate and author in this regard. Of the various forms of Buddhism, it is the Tibetan form of Mahayana Buddhism that most closely resembles the modern cognitive therapy approach. In what I consider to be the most approachable book on Tibetan Buddhism to date, *The Art of Happiness* by Howard Cutler in conversations with the Dalai Lama, the daily practices of Buddhism are compared to modern western psychological research. It is here that the anecdotal evidence of the faith finds its supporting empirical evidence in western science. The practices of the faith, as Cutler points out, are clearly more a mind science than a religion.

The practice of Tibetan Buddhism involves a deep analysis of our own thoughts, feelings and sense of self and reality, exercises to challenge our closely held beliefs about these things, and visualizations and affirmations (prayers) specifically designed to change our thinking. These practices are based on the belief that our unhappiness (suffering) is caused primarily by distortions in our thinking that are essentially erroneous and have no real basis in reality. The premises and practices of Tibetan Buddhism are remarkably similar to those of cognitive therapy.

So if both 2500 years of experience and practice and modern research based on large numbers of people point to the essential role positive thinking plays in our happiness, just what is positive thinking?

What Positive Thinking Is Not

Although I agree with Dr. David Burns that we can become happy by changing our thoughts, I do not agree with him that *all* our emotions are caused by our thoughts. I suspect this disagreement stems only from my interpretation of the point he makes in this regard in his book, rather than any real discrepancy between our views. Again this argument is the chicken and egg of feelings and thoughts. The argument only has a foundation if we imagine a boundary between the two, and like chickens and eggs, there is none.

Certain emotions exist which must operate at lightening speed. Most of these are survival based where there is no time for thinking. The fear of falling and the reaction of extending our arms when stumbling is one simple example. These lightening speed emotions and their respective outward expressions occur entirely at the chemical level. It is an imbalance at this level of emotional functionality that can cause some people to suffer much stronger feelings of depression or other negative emotions or debilitating conditions than the kind induced by negative thinking.

Just as depression, grief, and fear are normal, healthy expressions in our repertoire of feelings and are not negative thinking, emotions such as spontaneous joy, the feeling of amusement behind laughter, or the sense of enjoyment when we are having fun, are normal healthy emotions and are not positive thinking. They are temporary automatic responses to specific external circumstances. These operate at a level that is above the chemical, we can control them, like our breathing, yet for the most part they happen without our thinking about them.

Almost all scientific research into psychology has been on the negative side, the side of mental illness. This is beginning to change as researchers find that one of the best ways to overcome the debilitating effects of negative thinking is simply to replace those thoughts with positive ones. These findings are the basis for the cognitive therapy approach. They also legitimize the concept of “antidotes” found in Buddhist psychology, that positive thoughts drive out the forms of negative or harmful thinking that lead to unhappiness just as an antidote treats a poison.

Positive thinking is also not delusional thinking. In fact as we have seen delusional thinking is the definition of negative thinking in both the east and the west! Positive thinking does not deny the presence of harm, pain or suffering. It is based in reality. It does not pretend the world is a perfect place nor that our circumstances are always ideal. So if positive thinking is not our genetically acquired good feelings or unrealistic delusional thoughts about the world, what is positive thinking?

What Positive Thinking Is

"The measure of mental health is the disposition to find good everywhere."

-- Ralf Waldo Emerson

Positive thinking is the outlook that in any circumstance, in any fact, event or situation, there is good. As I mentioned earlier, many of the ideas I will present in this book are challenging. This is certainly one of them. Our minds immediately leap to the worst case scenarios; the Nazi death camps, serial child killers, or some personal experience of pain and suffering that has been visited upon ourselves or a loved one, and recoil at the thought that some good may be found there. Yet if we wish true healing, and that our lives go on to be as fulfilling and happy as possible, our negative thoughts even about these extreme situations must be let go of eventually.

As the hallmarks of negative thinking are that it is based on fear, that it leads to mental and physical ill health, and in some way brings us or others harm, the hallmarks of positive thinking are that it is based on love and trust, that it leads to mental and physical health and that it brings healing and good to ourselves or to others.

As in the Emerson quote above, the essence of positive thinking is to look for what good can be found in anything and to go forward with that. This is the positive outlook. In the face of any fact, event or situation, in the face of any circumstance, what good can come of it? What opportunity for good can be found in it?

In Dr. Burns' initial foray into cognitive therapy he was challenged by its simplicity. Surely something psychological, something "scientific" must be complicated! Surely it could not amount to what some grandmother from down on the farm would call common sense? Yet this is what he finally accepted. It is not rocket science. Any willing person can see that it works.

Dr. Burns was not the first person to have his revelations. I actually consider the first western person to think seriously and in depth about the therapeutic approach we have come to know as cognitive to be a woman by the name of Eleanor Hodgman Porter, the author of a children's book published in 1913 called "Pollyanna". The baby boomer generation are probably the last to have heard of this title. The X, Y, and "on beyond zebra" generations have not and if they have they probably have not read the book. The reason for this is that it fell out of favor during the generations of the boomers and their parents when we sought the source of our emotional troubles in our childhood, our sexuality or on the analysts couch in some form or another. Freud and his disciples, who held sway till the latter part of the last millennium, with their insistence that all our troubles were caused by repressed emotions, dismissed positive thinking as naive and simplistic. Academia can often be elitist, condescending and

scornful. It was this attitude, now thankfully being replaced by a more human centered approach, that effectively ridiculed Mrs. Porters work out of existence.

I wish to restore Mrs. Porters works to a place in our culture at this point because I believe she gives the simplest and most readily understandable explanation of the positive view available. She was not a professional of any kind, let alone a medical doctor or trained psychologist. She was a perfectly ordinary and average person. That is why I think her “loving spoonful” of wisdom is so easily understood. I make it a habit when researching intellectual and academic material, to find a novel or a movie or other form of story, to bring the ideas to life, to make them human. In regards to the subject of choosing the positive point of view, the Pollyanna story serves well.

The story is based on the idea of a game the impoverished child heroine in the book learned to play at her parents knee. She refers to the game as the “glad game” because she makes an effort to find something in everything that she can be glad about. Pollyanna is the first of two books. In the first book, the concept is not challenged too harshly. Pollyanna can be glad for Mondays because she can look forward so to Fridays. She can be glad for an injury because of how good it will feel to be well. She can be glad of her being an orphan because it brings her to live with her aunt and all the people she meets in her new home town. In this book her primary challenge is the chronic negative thinking of those she is surrounded by. Her triumph is the overcoming of that challenge by demonstrating another way of thinking, one that leads to happiness.

Pollyanna’s glad game is deceptively simple but it is far from childish. It requires intention, determination in the face of adversity, creativity and effort. Few people are familiar with the second of the two Pollyanna books, “Pollyanna Grows Up”. It took Mrs. Porter two years to write. This is because she pits her heroines resolute positive outlook against the challenges of adulthood and it would have taken her time to work through the concepts and scenarios. In this book there is real poverty, the death of loved ones, illness for which there is no cure, romantic love, jealousy, obligation and insincerity. These are the things we encounter and are challenged with ourselves in our average and every day lives. It was this second book which required real inquiry into the premises and methods of what would almost a century later be hailed as cognitive therapy that make Mrs. Porters contribution worth recognizing.

Optimism And Expectations

Let us now turn to another kind of thinking that is often catalogued as positive, optimism. Optimistic thinking has been shown through Dr. Seligman's work to be in general a beneficial form of thinking in terms of mental health and personal circumstances and one which can be learned. This is the premise of his book, "Learned Optimism". It is presented as a therapeutic approach to a common malady, learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is when we give up trying to improve our lives and accept chronic unhappiness as our only option. We come to believe the problems we face are permanent, pervasive and personal. The chronic pessimist is the archetype for this state of existence. The opposite, the optimist on the other hand, sees problems as due to specific circumstances, as temporary, and as external to their core sense of self.

One of Dr. Seligman's points in the definition of optimism is that it reflects the state of thinking that happens *after* failure, not before. Most of us think of an optimist as someone who expects everything will be great and work out. Dr. Seligman points out that it is actually the person who does not take failure personally, who shrugs it off as a temporary setback and believes they can correct their approach and be successful.

This view of optimism as a state of mind that reflects how we think *after* we fail at something, also prevents us from falling into the trap of being let down when events do not match our rosy expectations. As I mentioned in the chapter on unhappiness and negative thinking, it is when outcomes or circumstances do not match our unconscious expectations that we often succumb to negative thinking. Dr. Seligman's approach neatly fits with the rest of the puzzle pieces I am assembling here; the optimist chooses a positive viewpoint regardless of outcomes.

Let me clarify here that we can enter a situation with a positive outlook without becoming attached to outcomes. In the art of goal setting there are two kind of goals; outcome goals and process goals. An outcome goal for a salesperson might be to make ten *sales* today. A process goal might be to make thirty *sales calls*. We have no absolute control over outcome goals just as we have no absolute control over any situation. The only thing we can control is our attitude and behavior going into a situation so that we are optimizing our chances of success.

We can approach a given situation positively by entering it with a positive attitude regarding our own part in the process without having expectations regarding the outcome. We put our best foot forward and believe the outcome will be for the best.

We have thus far detailed the differences between negative and positive thinking and the fact that they are respectively the basis for either our unhappiness or happiness. We have reported the severe price that we pay for negative thinking. But does positive thinking merely leave us breaking

even, having stemmed our losses, or are there additional benefits to be gained? Is the elimination of negative thinking like the cure of a disease that leaves us symptom free but offers no other benefits? Is lowering our amount of daily negative thinking like a diet that causes us to lose weight or is it like exercise which causes additional increases in measurable health factors like muscle mass, flexibility and cardiovascular function? The answer is the latter. The benefits of positive thinking, like the demons of negative thinking, are legion.

The Benefits Of Positive Thinking

In his book “Learned Optimism”, Dr. Seligman provided evidence of one outcome which might not have fit with scientific expectations. That common sense, back-home-on-the-farm-grandmother of ours might have given us that “you poor city folk” look however because she would not have been surprised. Both optimists and people who classified themselves as realists were asked to judge the probable outcome of a situation based on some given facts. The realists were more correct in their estimates, and the optimists overestimated their probability of success, based on those facts. But the optimists were correct in the long run. The effect of their attitude what was not factored into the equation. Optimism has a positive effect on outcomes.

In his more recent work, “Authentic Happiness”, Seligman again provided evidence of the result of a positive outlook on our fortunes. When stable and successful couples were researched to find what common traits led to their success, an overwhelming factor was the unrealistic, positive illusions they had of one another when compared to the profiles of them provided by friends and family members. In fact the higher their illusions, the stronger the relationships. This was because the other partner tries hard to live up to the noble vision their loved one has of them, so as not to disappoint them. Thus their illusions became self-fulfilling prophesies.

I would ask in both this case and the one above, “Who were the ones with the illusions after all”? Illusions are a relative thing, that is they can only be measured in relation to another view. In qualitative issues such as these I am not sure if numbers can give us the really meaningful and useful answers.

So positive thinking can improve our chances of success as individuals and in relationships. I have no doubt that further research will demonstrate that this effect is found in larger groups as well. Dr. Dennis Waitley, the author of the top selling audio tape series of all time, “The Psychology of Winning”, certainly suggested this finding in his work as psychologist to returning US prisoners of war, Olympic sports teams and astronauts. Outlook positively effects outcomes.

Like less salt in our diet, lowering our amount of negative thinking every day reduces its harmful effects. There is less high blood pressure, fewer heart attacks, and lowered incidences of depression and other mental disorders. Besides these, like exercise, positive thinking generates additional psychological and physiological benefits. Our voice is more alive, our eyes brighter, our posture more erect, our mind more alert and our libido increased. We sleep better and are less prone to illness. We are more self-confident and kinder and more compassionate towards others. We are more appreciative of the good things in our lives that we do have and better able to deal with those we do not.

As a result of the psychological and physiological benefits to us directly, we are also found to be more attractive to others in both platonic and romantic terms. Happy, positive people are always a welcome breath of fresh air. People enjoy being around us. We make others feel better about themselves. We are welcoming, warm and accepting of others. Therefore positive thinking increases our social circle and the probability of romantic encounters and relationships. Our attractiveness, wellness, quality of life and longevity are all boosted by positive thinking as are our social experiences and the likelihood of material success.

Positive thinking will indeed act as an antidote to the toxic effects of negative thinking. It does more than cancel it out, it heals. It heals ourselves and when communicated it heals others. It spreads indirectly to others through our body language, our posture and our expression. It is spread to others directly through our communications with them. As with the example of the couples above, our noble belief in ourselves and others acts as a psychological helping hand, giving them a boost in their own self image, we become a noble mirror and show others a version of themselves that is just as true and real as any other.

“What men and women need is encouragement. Their natural resisting powers should be strengthened, not weakened. Instead of always harping on a man's faults, tell him of his virtues. Try to pull him out of his rut of bad habits. Hold up to him his better self, his *real* self that can dare and do and win out! The influence of a beautiful, helpful, hopeful character is contagious.” -- Eleanor Porter

How Do We Know When We Are Thinking Positively?

Again, like negative thinking we can more easily identify when we are thinking positively by how we feel than by analyzing our thoughts and the feeling of happiness that is the result of positive thinking is much easier to identify. There are none of the convoluted, clouded, constrained and dark qualities associated with negative thinking. One of the hallmarks of positive thinking is a feeling of openness to outcomes rather than an attachment to a particular outcome. We call people who exemplify this character trait “easy going”.

When we are thinking positively we feel safe, so our tendency is to physically relax. Our physiology reflects our psychology and our posture is open. Our facial expression softens and is absent of any trace of the “armoring” it takes on under the influence of feelings of fear. Instead a welcoming smile comes more readily to our lips and eyes. We can know when we are thinking positively by being attuned to the way the way we feel and the expression our body and face make of those feelings.

The body and mind are once again chicken and egg. Our body reflects our thoughts but *we can also change our body and this will bring about a change in our thoughts!* This again is well documented by scientific research and by anecdotal evidence over the ages.

Assume a virtue, if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this.
-- William Shakespeare, Hamlet. Act III, scene iv

We can thus monitor our thoughts by monitoring our facial expressions. When we catch ourselves armoring in any way, we will be more easily able to identify the associated thoughts. When we relax the body, the negative thoughts will diminish. It will then be easier to replace those thoughts with those more in keeping with our intentions, with positive thoughts that relax and open us further, that bring healing to us and those around us, thoughts that create in us a feeling of well being and happiness.

Chapter Summary

1. Happiness is not caused by our external circumstances
2. Happiness is caused by choosing a positive point of view
3. Positive thinking is not the normal healthy emotions we have by birthright
4. Positive thinking is a choice we must consciously make that requires intention, creativity, effort and determination in the face of adversity
5. Positive thinking can be identified by the way it makes us feel
6. Positive thinking is healing and brings many other benefits
7. Positive thinking is a gift we can give all those around us
8. Like exercise, including positive thinking in our daily routine will improve our health, attractiveness and social and material success

Chapter Practice: Working With Your Facial Expression

For the past few days we have been focusing on exactly what it is that makes others unhappy and how they express and communicate their unhappiness. Hopefully we have seen the three steps in the chain of

external stimulus, choice and reaction and how most people are unconscious of the middle link.

We are going to change our focus from others now to ourselves and change the nature of the exercise. This exercise has two steps.

The First Part: For the next few days monitor your facial expression. Now we could use our entire body for this however to keep it simple we will just use our facial expression. We are simply going to use it as a feedback mechanism. *Our facial expression will infallibly tell us if our thoughts are positive or negative.* When we find our facial expression contains elements of armoring we know we are indulging in negative thinking. Feel for any kind of tension around your lips and mouth such as the tension required to produce a scowl or a grimace or a tense jaw. Feel for a slight squinting of the muscles around the eyes, a furrowed or wrinkled brow. Observe if overall your facial expression becomes wooden or rigid. Many of these facial tensions will be unobservable by others but *we* can feel them. The slightest feeling of tension anywhere in our face tells us to check our thoughts. For the next few days use your facial expression as a feedback mechanism to alert yourself to when you are indulging in negative thinking.

Absence of facial tension is one of the key physical signs of happiness. It is one of the hallmarks of beauty. The next key facial sign of happiness is the smile. The genuine smile of happiness is made up of two elements, the upward curving of the lips, and a slight crinkling of the muscles around they eyes.

The Second Part: Practice smiling every chance you get. Smile at everyone. If you are not a person who normally smiles at strangers much, the change in your reality will be so remarkable that you will feel as if you are in a different world. Either way, *the point of this part of the exercise is to notice how you feel in general when you smile with genuine warmth.*

Remember that we can alter our thoughts and feelings by altering our physical expression through our body, our arms, legs, and hands, or through our facial expression. We are practicing this discipline in this exercise. We cannot retain facial tension and smile naturally at the same time. Smiling will cause us to question any negative thought we have been holding.

During this part of the exercise, be aware that not everyone will smile back at you. The majority of people, as you will soon discover, live lives base on fear. Most people wait for the other person to smile first, to see that it is safe, and since both parties are doing this, neither of them do. When we take the leadership role and smile at others first, many of them will suddenly break into a big smile. But many will not. They are still afraid that our smile is a trick or they are off in their own world. Their response really has nothing to do with us so don't take it personally.

We have thus far examined what unhappiness and happiness are, their causes and expression. With the pros and cons so clear, why do we choose unhappiness so often? Why do we chose to hold on to our negative thoughts and unhappiness even when we are aware of the price we pay? The reasons are many and often complex but we will explore some of them now.

Chapter Four: Why We Hold On To The Negative

First of all, why do we tend to notice and attend to negative things more than positive things in the first place? Why is it so easy to notice what is wrong, and why does it take conscious effort to notice what is right? Why do we seem to start with the negative and have to let go of it in order to move to a positive point of view?

Steven Pinker, the Peter de Florez Professor in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, certainly raised some eyebrows when he ambitiously titled his 1997 book on cognitive processes “How The Mind Works”. This is a very interesting and enjoyable book, he does not really try to play god after all, and it does provide much insight into how our mind works. I am going to borrow the title of his book for this section and add a tag line of my own.

How The Mind Works or “What’s Wrong With This Picture”?

Like many of the other things we do that we find so mysterious, craving sweets for example or experiencing depression, there is a biological reason for what we sometimes classify as negative thinking. As usual it has to do with survival. In the wild, fear and pain keep us alive and since survival is the bodies number one priority, they have a lot of influence over our feelings, thoughts, behavior and other priorities like food and sex.

One time worn way of looking at how the mind works is that it is like a computer. But it is a certain kind of computer. It processes not using bits and bytes, ones and zeros, but using symbols. Now the *brain* uses chemicals to process information but the *mind* uses symbols. One of the primary abilities of the human brain, or the brains of many creatures for that matter, is the ability to recognize patterns. We are unbelievably good at this. A simple example is that we can pick out a specific human face from any one of the six billion or so people who currently inhabit the earth. We all have two eyes, a nose and a mouth yet we see each facial patterns subtle differences with absolute clarity. We can easily see with the naked eye a variance in precision of one-one hundredth of an inch or less. We can detect that little difference without hesitation, virtually instantly.

The human senses and mind can detect patterns in sound, sensation, smell, and visual patterns of any kind like light intensity, color, shape etc. As Carl Sagan explains in his excellent little book regarding the origins of human intelligence “The Dragons Of Eden”, our entire brain is evolved from an organ whose sole original purpose was to detect patterns, originally the patterns of chemicals, the sense of smell. As we evolved our

eyes gained precedence over our sense of smell as a survival tool. Our eyes became especially good at detecting movement. Movement, either present or incremental, is a change in a pattern. Movement is either food or danger.

Imagine our early ancestors walking through the forest. As long as everything they are perceiving matches what their experience or knowledge tells them is normal, they do not think about any of it too much. They take it all for granted. Their minds are attuned to something else, probably to looking for food. Suddenly, there is a change in the pattern, there is something very different here, or there is a movement in some bushes. All their inner alarms go off. Sure it may be food but they assume danger first. Better safe than sorry. The default when faced with the unknown is to assume danger. That is the right survival strategy.

Notice several things in this scenario. First, we can process a vast number of patterns and symbols all at once. Secondly, as long as they meet our expectations, they present no potential for danger and so we take it all for granted. This is necessary because of the enormous amount of information dealt with by our minds at any one time. This is one of the reasons consciousness, or mindfulness as the Buddhists say, is so difficult, it is not our normal state. In order to function with the huge amount of data we are processing at any given moment, we must only focus on select bits of it at any one time. One aspect of this revealed through the study of lucid dreaming can help illuminate this point.

Dr. Stephen LaBerge of the Lucidity Institute in Berkeley California has probably done more research into the phenomenon of lucid dreaming than anyone else. Lucid dreaming is when we are asleep and dreaming but we are fully conscious and know we are dreaming. One of the questions he has asked is why we are so “unconscious” when we are dreaming. Why don’t we recognize when we are dreaming, especial when things are so wacky and unrealistic? The answer is not because we are in any special or different state when dreaming than when awake. The answer is because we are in our normal state of consciousness. We are really no less “conscious” in our waking state than we are in our dreaming state. In both cases we take everything for granted unless we feel there is overt danger. That is why only nightmares wake us up from our dreams but otherwise we go blithely along with them.

Another contributing factor to this is the “paradigm effect”. A paradigm is a mental model of something. Since our minds are symbol processors, we have symbols, or models, of just about everything in our memory banks. When we look at something, we are often really holding in our consciousness not the “real time” version of the thing, but a model of the thing we have retrieved from our memory. Again this is an efficiency built into our minds to handle the volume of processing we have to do however this function can often cause us not to see what we are really looking at but only a model of the thing, which may no longer be current. As Thomas

Khun demonstrates in “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions”, the net effect of paradigms is that largely that we see what we expect to see rather than reality.

In our lives, our experience, things that are “good” are not a threat. Unless they represent something along the lines of food or sex or something else we are interested in, they will not emerge from the “background pattern” of the moment. This is why we normally take good things for granted. This is why it takes conscious effort to pay attention to our blessings and the good things we can be grateful for in our lives. The mind is not made to work that way.

Now if we decide to buy a Volkswagen beetle, we will suddenly find the streets filled with beetles. Only if we intentionally “turn on” a specific pattern we are seeking will it emerge from the rest. So as our early ancestor was looking for food, or as we may be looking for Volkswagen beetles, they become the focus of our mind. The rest of our mind goes into its default state, which is monitoring for changes in patterns that indicate possible danger. Unless consciously directed to, the mind by default will only be looking for danger. It will only be attuned to what is wrong. This is the default state of our minds, “What is wrong with this picture?”

It is only natural therefore for us to tend to notice in our daily lives more of what is wrong than what is right. This is why negative thinking comes without effort but positive thinking requires effort. Positive thinking requires consciousness, not our normal state, and unlike the unconscious state it requires choice because it requires us to select from the various “good” and “bad” we perceive. This matter of choice is not entirely straightforward however as we do not give “good” the same importance as “bad”.

The way our brains and minds process information is to give facts “emotional weighting” or a “charge” based on experience or other factors. We look at one person and feel nothing. We look at another and feel hostility. We look at another and feel desire. These three people are facts, as we will see in another chapter they are essentially neutral but we have *assigned* to each of them a different emotional weighting. What we feel are negative facts generally get a higher emotional weighting, they elicit stronger feelings, because they are a possible threat. A car approaching us is given a higher emotional weighting than a person walking by because the car may be a danger. So we notice that car more. This is where the *determination* to chose the positive comes in. This is where the *effort* comes in, in overcoming the natural inclinations of the mind to only notice the negative and to additionally give the negative a greater importance.

Now that we understand why we seem to start off with negative thinking by default and only through conscious effort can chose to view the world in a positive light, what are some of the reasons we still find it difficult to do so? Why do we often tend to hold on to negative thoughts even when

we have enough information to chose not to? As mentioned earlier there are many reasons, a whole army of them in fact.

The Resistance Army

Holding On To Social Values

One of the reasons we hold on to negative thoughts is social values, or simple peer pressure. Peer pressure is not something that only happens in high schools. Peer pressure is a constant part of our lives at every moment. It is part of the glue that holds our societies and cultures together.

Humans are animals, as the zoologist Desmond Morris points out in his many books, but we are a certain kind of animal. We are pack animals. We are not like leopards, the ancestors of the modern cat first domesticated in Egypt, we are like dogs. Cats like to do their own thing and feel safe doing so. Dogs are pack animals and function biologically and feel safe as a group. The wild dogs of Africa or Australia, the wolves of the north, whales, elephants, lions, all forms of primates and in fact most mammals, are pack animals. As pack animals, they are actually not a complete biological unit alone.

In the world of insects and those that live in hive colonies, the real organism is not the ant or the bee, the real organism is the hive. Separately the individual units cannot survive. They are not designed to survive alone. Each individual unit in a hive colony is really just one of the many cells that make up the body. We ourselves are colonies, our bodies having been cobbled together over millennia as bits of symbiotic DNA, cells and multi-cellular organisms joined together for their mutual benefit. Our intra-cellular components communicate chemically as do bees and ants. Bee hives and ant hills are just different kinds of colonies than we are.

Just as the bee is not meant to function alone, neither are pack animals. A wolf alone is in a state of high anxiety. A pack animal alone for too long usually will perish. As pack animals, in a manner similar to a hive but at a higher level, we function biologically as a group. Pack animals find food and defend as a group. We need a group to feel safe because we know that alone we lack the resources to survive. When we are part of a social group we feel safe and our levels of mental and physical health go up. Single or solitary people do not live as long as married people nor are their levels of happiness or satisfaction with life as high. This is due to our underlying biological makeup as pack animals that only feel safe and therefore happy as part of a group. Such is our design that we can really only think and feel in a healthy way as a part of a group. This is why we feel such a strong compulsion to couple and mate. This is why we feel loneliness. It is a biological motivator caused by survival anxiety. The basic healthy

biological unit in humans and other pack animals is not the individual, it is two or more of the species.

The safety that comes from being a part of a group however comes with a price. That price is conformity. The pressure from others in the group, be it a society or a sub-culture, to make us conform is enormous. Again the underlying origin of peer pressure is safety. The reason others want us to conform is so that *they* can feel safe. Just as with the wolf pack, it is the cohesion of the group that gives us our sense of safety. We know our survival depends on it. If we do not conform, it makes others question their own situation and assumptions, they begin to feel less certain about things, anxious and insecure. This is why they often get angry, hostile, and aggressive towards people who are different, or decide to change. It is because they are afraid.

The cohesion of the group is based on shared values. We all agree on how the world is, how it operates, and how we operate within it. We agree on what is good and what is bad for the group. We agree on what is right and what is wrong. There is a large catalogue of values we all agree on. Out of those shared values we have created our societies, our cultures, our religions and our laws. To protect itself, the group will put enormous pressure on those who stray to return to the fold, and will eliminate those who do not.

Each sub-culture, right down to the family unit, has its own set of values. Our societies and cultures tell us in many ways how they expect us to feel and think and behave. Attempting to express feelings, thoughts or to behave in a manner contrary to the values defined by our sub-culture will elicit an external response as the others in the group begin to feel anxiety and to alleviate it try to bring us back in line using peer pressure. We will also feel an internal response of our own - we will begin to feel anxiety. Our body has detected that we are thinking outside of the group norms and its safety and survival mechanisms kick in. We were thinking about changing our life around but suddenly we are not so sure. Maybe we are making a big mistake with this idea of ours.

As you can see, there is a great deal of pressure for us to hold on to group values. If those group values are negative, it will be very hard to go against them. There is another level where we are pressured to hold on to existing values. Those are our own current values, the values we have determined for ourselves during the course of our lifetime. Shifting from a negative to a positive outlook often finds a challenge when confronted with our own inner set of values. Here too we are confronted with another array of characters, more members of the army of resistance, who urge us to stay as we are.

Holding On To Individual Values

In his book, “The Society of Mind”, Marvin Minsky, the best known advocate of the science of artificial intelligence and a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, likens the human mind to a society in which decisions are passed from one group of specialists to another until a decision is reached. In different situations, different groups will be given “control”. In times of perceived danger our defense groups will take control and the artist in us will take a back seat. In times of safety, the artist may take the drivers wheel, and the defense team relaxes. There is some correlation in this model with the Freudian ego, shadow, and persona etc. and also with the Jungian archetypes of ruler, warrior, and lover etc.

Freud’s theories focused on the strictly personal, wherein all things psychological were explained as originating within the individual, primarily from the infantile level. Jung, based on the similarities he found in the worlds mythologies, dreams and symbols, extended this view to add the trans-personal, to suggest there are things psychological that transcend the individual, that originate outside the individual, and can be found in all persons. He established the idea of archetypes that could be found in all of us.

The American philosopher Ken Wilber takes things a step further still, proposing that there are aspects of our psychology that transcend not just individuals but humanity itself and originate in what we have until now historically referred to as the spiritual domain.

I happen to agree with all their views and think them all valid and correct.

Though I am only going to explore a limited portion of this spectrum model of psychology and how it attempts to hold on to negative, fear based thinking, the above summary was necessary to provide a perspective to the beliefs (science is as much a belief system as any other) I reference when explaining the reasons and ways we personally resist change and why we personally chose to hold on to the negative.

The Function Of The Ego As Defender

The primary function of the ego is to keep us safe. The ego is the entity that represents the value system we have created. The ego is all about right and wrong and good and bad. The ego is judge, jury and executioner. The ego can often masquerade as us, and is only too ready, willing and able to accept this role as it has in the lives of many people, but it is not their true self and it is not ours. It is a mental construct and it is entirely based on fear. If we allow it to take over and rule and run our life it will create a life

based on fear. This is the safe but unsatisfactory life the majority of people live.

As part of its function to keep us safe, the ego splits us in two. It hides from us aspects of ourselves that we have difficulty with, aspects that conflict with the model of the world and our self as defined by our internal and external value structures. These hidden aspects are referred to collectively as the “shadow”. They are parts of our self, but they are inconvenient parts of our self, so the ego hides them from us so we don’t have trouble with them. The other half, the part of us that fits with the model of the world based on our value structure, is presented to the world. This is referred to as the “persona”. The word persona means mask. We present the world with a mask we believe it will find acceptable. As pack animals we don’t want to be kicked out of the group. We keep the rest hidden, even from our selves.

When we try to change our thinking from negative to positive the ego feels threatened. Remember that its primary mission and purpose in life is to keep us safe so it is totally risk averse. It is all defense. Positive thinking causes us to relax and be open. Negative or fear based thinking causes us to become tense and closed. This latter is the preferred state of things for the ego. As far as the ego is concerned when we attempt to switch to positive, open and trust based thinking we are letting down the drawbridge of the castle it has built around us. In fact, we threaten the existence of the ego itself. It will bring formidable forces to bear to try to stop us.

The ego is a powerful opponent because it knows us intimately. It knows all our fears and exactly where the buttons are. It is powerful because it operates at the infantile level, the level of our deepest, most persuasive emotions. It will resist with threats of danger, of death itself. It will tell us we are going to end up not just broke and alone, but humiliated and ostracized. It will beg with us for reason, it will plead for sanity, it will rationalize and justify. Its most powerful weapon is the stall. It will attempt to convince us to find a *safe* way across the chasm between our present definition of self and the new one we are attempting to create. It will try to convince us to find a way to change without the pain and doom it threatens will ensue. This is not really possible so we will search for it forever and never change. This suits the ego just fine.

If we are compelled by our true self to continue to try to change we will find ourselves back at the chasm that lies between the old and the new. We go in circles. The pain and destruction the ego fears and threatens us with if we try to cross without a bridge are really its own. We will be fine. Our ego may “have a breakdown”, “be shattered” or “go to pieces”, but *we* will be fine. In fact we will be more than fine, we will be free.

The ego is a well intended jailer. It is a worrisome but loving parent who attempts to keep a child indoors for its entire life so that the child will

never be hurt. Without opening the door ourselves and leaving that house we will never fulfill our potential as adults and we will never find happiness. The choice to be happy is really the choice to live and to embrace our full potential. The choice to be happy is the choice to accept our true self, including our shadow aspects, not just our persona. It is the choice to risk being hurt because that risk is a part of the openness required to experience love, joy and happiness. It is the declaration that we are aware we may be hurt and can handle it but will not let it dictate our life. It is the choice to become an adult, to take on the mantle of the archetype of the ruler, the choice to believe and trust in our self and something larger than our self. The choice to be happy is the choice to create a life no longer based on fear, but on love. The well intended ego is not lost after all but is resurrected in a new and higher form. Its new mandate is to protect our commitment to love and openness and happiness. It is this noble self that enables us, as spiritual teacher Shakti Gawain puts it, to return to the garden.

“The old woman I shall become will be quite different from the woman I am now. Another I is beginning...”

- GEORGE SAND

Wants, Needs And Attachment

There is another group of functions that resist our efforts to give up negative thinking. These functions are based on our wants, needs and attachments. These have a great deal to do with our idea of how the world “should” be, with our ideas of what is fair, and of what we are entitled to. The term “attachment”, as I am using it here, is in the Buddhist context. In this context it refers to our feelings of wanting something or of our aversion to something. The Buddhist term “non-attachment” means having neither of these feelings toward a thing.

In our normal daily lives we have plenty of wants, needs and attachment going on. We want that car, we feel we need that guy or that girl or we are attached to the feeling of anger.

The resistance to give up our negative thoughts and take a positive view of things comes out most strongly when under traumatic stress. This is when we feel wants, needs and attachments in the most powerful way. It is one thing to take the positive point of view when we are dealing with the personal and interpersonal challenges we encounter in our daily lives. It is a level of difficulty higher when we are dealing with more mature and complex challenges such as issues regarding our marriage, our sexuality, the desire we may feel for another, a career change, or financial difficulties.

It is most difficult when faced with traumatic stress: the abhorrence we feel when faced with the evil of genocide or the cruelty of serial child killers, the despair we experience at facing a crippling or terminal illness, or the passionate desire for revenge or summary justice we may feel in the face of pain and suffering that has been visited upon ourselves or a loved one by another. We recoil at the thought that some good may be found in circumstances where we feel only shock, horror and anger.

Certainly these are normal and understandable reactions not to be denied. But still they do not serve us for more than a moment. In truth, like all negative thinking, they do us no good and only harm and the sooner the negative thoughts we harbor are out of our lives and replaced by positive ones the better it is for us and all those around us. This process can not be rushed. Feelings of anger, of judgment, of unfairness are as natural a part of shock and trauma and of the grieving process as are sadness and depression. All of it must be embraced, but not forever.

We often hold on to our negative thoughts beyond a healthy period of time. We cross that blurry line between a normal healthy reaction and into the unhealthy domain of negative thinking. Our anger, our grief, our depression become chronic and begin to cause us ill health. We have passed the stage when we need to let go and move on and to find the good

in the world again. Thoughts which make us unhappy are normal, and healthy in the sense that they help us face up to the reality of our situation. But once we have faced up to our situation there is no point in continuing to dwell on the negative thoughts. This is where our strongest attachments must be let go of at last.

The attachment to the feeling of *entitlement* to negative thoughts is one of the strongest and most difficult aspects of resistance we have to confront. Yet if we are to find happiness we must confront and let go of our feeling of entitlement to our anger, our duty to our grief, of our own sadness for dreams lost and to finally accept that holding on to them serves no further purpose. We do not forget, but there is a healing that comes with the choice to be happy.

How To Overcome The Army Of Resistance

We see that there are many forces that will resist our efforts to chose the positive point of view. They will come at us from every angle, with every possible strategy and disguise. They will attempt to frighten, cajole and seduce us away from our intention. There is only one response to deal with them. There is only one way to overcome the army of resistance. Practice. We must practice reminding ourselves of the price we pay for negative thinking, of the benefits we gain with positive thinking, and we must practice making the choice in the present moment. The first two practices reinforce our ability to perform the third practice and only habituation, creating a new habit through repetition, will eventually permanently change our outlook to a positive one. The cognitive therapists say this approach begins to show results in as little as twelve weeks. The Dalai Lama says it takes years. Start with the present moment and stay in the present moment and time does not matter.

Chapter Summary

1. There is arrayed against us a veritable army of forces to resist positive thinking
2. The mind is by default attuned to the negative, to “what is wrong with this picture”
3. It requires conscious effort to overcome this natural tendency
4. Peer pressure tries to prevent us from changing
5. Our own inner fears try to prevent us from changing
6. Our attachment to our wants and needs and our feeling of entitlement tries to keep us from changing
7. The only way to overcome this army is to remind ourselves of the price of negative thinking and of the benefits of positive thinking and to practice taking the positive point of view as often as possible

Chapter practice: Noting Our Rationalizations

In the first chapter practice, we observed how others chose to be unhappy and how they express and communicate their unhappiness.

In part one of the second chapter practice we used our facial expressions as a feedback mechanism to monitor our own thoughts. We saw how our facial expression could tell us when our thoughts were positive or negative. In part two we saw how changing our facial expression by smiling could change how we felt and we noted how we felt and what happened to our thoughts at that moment. By now we are well aware of when we are thinking positively or negatively by the way it makes us feel and how that is reflected in our facial expression.

The exercise for this chapter is to notice when we are reluctant to let go of a negative thought. Try to identify just why it is you feel that in this particular instance it is justified to indulge in it. This process will start to bring the army of resistance out of the shadows and into the light. Like all forms of negativity, their powers are lessened in the light of day. Try and see if it is external or internal resistance. Either way try to identify it as definitely as you can. Once you have done so, ask yourself how it measures up in light of the price of unhappiness and the benefits of happiness.

I have touched in this last chapter on the Buddhist concepts of attachment and non-attachment. I have also suggested that “the choice” is something we make in the “present moment”. These concepts, like the Buddhist concepts of enlightenment, emptiness and no-self are not necessarily easy to understand to say the least. If you wish to explore them further, I think Ken Wilber in his book, No Boundary, does the best job of introducing them to the western mind.

I have my own ideas about non-attachment and enlightenment which help to make the choice of happiness and overcoming resistance much easier. In the next two chapters I will expand on these and on the importance of the present moment.

Chapter Five: Freedom From The Pairs

"For there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so."
-- William Shakespeare (Hamlet)

Necessary illusions

Before we delve into the meaning behind the title of this chapter, we need to reconsider the thing we call reality. We believe we are in the world, that it is a solid thing, and that we look out of our body and perceive it. Partially yes, but there is more to it than that. Helping us have a better mental concept of what we are really working with will make it easier to see how there can be no such thing as good or bad and will make it easier to see how we can change. We will look at the world from several different viewpoints. We will "cut it up in different ways" as the protagonist Phaedrus approaches writing computer systems manuals in Robert M. Pirsig's classic, "Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance".

The world we know and love is actually only *our* view of reality. Our vision sees the world through a particular range of light frequencies. We do not see the infrared world of many insects nor do they see ours. Our hearing covers only a certain range of sound frequencies. We do not hear sounds that elephants or dogs can hear. The tactile sensors that give us a sense of touch are spread out over our surface to a limited degree. The hair on a baby bunny rabbit can be impossible to feel with your hand until you press down. It is too fine for the number of tactile sensors in your hand to detect it. A bloodhound can follow a scent track across a yard as clearly as if it was painted in florescent orange. To us it is invisible. Florescent orange however is outside of the dogs range of visible light frequencies. Dogs would just see a sort of pale, dull yellow indistinguishable from several other colors that it also sees as pale, dull yellow.

Consider looking at a tree, if all gods creatures see a different and limited version of it, what does the tree *really* look like? The entire world we consider to be reality is like this. The truth is that no one knows what the world really looks like. They only know what it looks like *to them*. Ultimate reality exists on a plane we cannot ever really know. We really function in what is only our *version* of it. And everyone and everything has their own version.

Our abilities are not only limited by our senses. Consider the fact that our brains, like the brains of all creatures, are limited in their abilities. Imagine that just as our intelligence is vastly greater than that say of a newt, that there are intelligences equally greater than our own. It is possible that

there is much more in our present reality than we can possibly perceive or understand. Let me give you an example.

As we are in our vehicle driving along the highway we pass by a small pond. In the pond is a newt. There is no way the newt can perceive or comprehend what we really are or represent. The scale is too great. Even if his senses enable him to poke his head out of the pond and detect what we call “the road” and our car whizzing by, he does not have the ability to recognize these patterns as anything significant. His brain is simply too limited in its abilities to comprehend our existence.

In proportion, imagine that there are intelligences equally greater or different than our own which see and know and exist in a reality we are not able to perceive and even if we could we would not be able to comprehend its meaning. The newt functions on the basis of what its concept of reality is but there is much more to reality than it is capable of knowing about. We function on the basis of what our concept of reality is.

Let’s look at reality yet another way. We imagine when we are awake that we are seeing the world “out there” but that when we are dreaming that we are just seeing what we mistake for reality on some kind of mysterious little theatre in our mind. We believe the model of reality we experience when dreaming is entirely inside the physical confines of our head. Actually whether we are awake or asleep what we consider as reality “out there” is really all inside our heads in either case.

When we look at that handy tree for example our eyes perceive the color frequencies, shapes etc. and inside our brains we interpret that pattern as “tree” based on what we have stored as the criteria for “tree” in our memory banks. We map the pattern against our stored patterns and the match comes up as “tree”. The tree image we have created based on the light factors we have detected, along with everything else in our scope of vision at the moment, exists only in our minds. We have constructed a view of the world based on our limited perception of the world. It exists only as a model of reality, in our minds. The world we are perceiving right now, everything we see, hear, and feel etc., exists entirely inside our heads. The feeling of this book in your hands is really a feeling inside your head, not in your hands. Your hands perceive its textures and form, but your mind models it and gives it meaning. You are not really looking out at the book, but in.

I had the most mind boggling experience of how challenging this concept can be to wrap our minds around one night while conducting one of my lucid dreaming experiments. Now the dream reality is merely a world we construct from our memory banks rather than from live, real time inputs. Because it is based on our memories, a dream reality can be so perfectly correct that it is impossible to tell the difference between it and the reality we experience while awake. Much of Dr. LaBerge’s research at the Lucidity Institute has confirmed this.

My goal that night was to have what is called an “out of body” experience in lucid dreaming lingo. I was successful and after I fell asleep and started dreaming I was able to step out of my “real” body with my “dream” body and stood there looking around my room very pleased with myself. Of course it looked just as I expected it to. I looked down at my sleeping form. This was where it got complicated. I realized that in fact “I” was not really standing beside my bed. All that I believed I was perceiving was actually occurring inside the head I seemed to be looking down at. And I knew that inside the head I was looking down at I was fully conscious and aware of my confused “self” standing beside the bed. One of my faces smiled.

Now to deconstruct the fabric of what we consider to be firm reality further, let's re-visit the paradigm effect. A paradigm is a model of something. Based on what I said a few paragraphs ago about what we consider to be reality being really an interpretation of what we perceive, and a model we then build to function in, we can see that our entire concept of reality is a paradigm. It is a model based on our perceptions and experiences. There is only one problem. That model of reality includes our own beliefs. As a result of this we will often see what we expect to see or want to see rather than what someone else sees. We are really looking at our model of what we perceive, which contains our beliefs about it, and so the image may be different than what someone else looking at it with other beliefs sees. This phenomenon was first explained by Thomas Kuhn in his book, “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions” in 1962 and then later popularized by Joel Barker, a noted futurist. It explained how scientists saw the results they expected from their experiments and did not see results that did not agree with their expectations. This is the paradigm effect.

There is an interesting correlation here with dreams. In the dream world what happens is what we expect to happen. We see what we expect to see. Scientific research bears this out and I have confirmed this myself during many dream experiments. For example while lucid dreaming that I am walking down a street I consciously “expect” to see a park around the next corner and sure enough, there it is. If I expect my hand will not pass through the wall it will not, but if I expect it will it does. So in dreams we see what we expect to see and in “reality” we see what we expect to see.

So far we have seen that our concept of reality is far more limited, plastic and influenced by ourselves than we may have believed. There is yet another layer we impose upon our version of reality which we believe we see but which is not there at all. We believe it is a part of the world we look out at but it is really something that we project onto what we perceive and then believe we “see” out there. It is the entire world of good and bad, the entire world of values.

“Moment by moment,
things are losing their hardness;
now even my body lets the light through”.
– VIRGINIA WOOLF

Nothing Is Good Or Bad

Nothing we perceive is good or bad or ugly or beautiful or right or wrong. Everything is inherently neutral. It is we who give the things in our version of reality these values. All these values exist only in ourselves. This concept is what Buddhists, particularly Zen Buddhists, are hinting at with their cryptic references to “One - not two”, “Just this”, or “Freedom from the pairs”. They are referring to the world of values.

In order to function in the world we must have some kind of rule system. Without rules we walk off cliffs, eat dirt and stick our hands in fire. Fire is not bad but we have to have a rule about sticking our hands in fire because it causes us pain and damage. So sticking our hands in fire becomes an idea that is bad. We all agree on this rule. We create a lot of other rules based on the value “bad”. We create and agree on a bunch of other rules based on the values “good”, “beautiful”, “nice” and countless other value pairs. Every value has an opposite value. The result of this process is that we assign a value to everything. In psychological terms this is called projection. Modern psychology has demonstrated pretty conclusively that what the ego relegates to the shadow, we then project onto the world. Generally what we disapprove of in ourselves but deny and disown, we then “see” in others. We are usually experiencing this phenomenon when we take an instant dislike to someone for no apparent reason, judge others very harshly for social variation, or feel disproportionate feelings in a given situation.

Actually, the phenomenon goes very much beyond this narrow definition. Firstly, as well as those things we disapprove of about ourselves, we also relegate to the shadow and then project onto others our own greatness, the truly awesome, wonderfully good and loving things about ourselves that we fear to let live. We not only hate in others what we fear in ourselves, but desire and adore in others what we love in ourselves.

Most importantly, and the real point of this chapter, is that we are not just projecting *sometimes* and not just from what is in the shadow, but *all the time and from every level of our being. Our entire concept of reality is largely based on our projections.*

This is necessary for us to function and survive. We need a construct, a framework to live by. But this framework of what we consider reality is just an *idea* we all agree on. The world of values does not exist without us. Good and bad actually only exist within ourselves. Without humanity, good and bad ceases to exist and everything just is what it is.

We are going somewhere with this and we are getting close now. We are getting close to the heart of the labyrinth. Just as all things are inherently neutral and we assign the values of good and bad, one mans meat is another mans poison. What is good to you may be bad to me and vice a versa. This operates at the individual and societal levels. The events of September the 11th 2001 were bad from the point of view of all westerners but good from the point of view of some members of middle eastern countries. Unbelievably the same event is seen as totally bad and totally good by two different groups. Our reaction when faced with events and views like this is simply to conclude that the other party is wrong. We then assign the value of “bad” to them too. We see that these things are not absolute but are relative. It all depends on your point of view.

The facts are that some people flew airplanes into buildings and as a result a lot of other people died. Whether we decide this is bad or good or how we chose to feel about it depends on the point of view we choose. Hitler no doubt thought he was doing good things. The Romans thought Jesus Christ was a bad man. Like you, I assume I am a good person, but not everyone thinks so. Some people will think that what I am saying in this book is good, others will think it is bad. Still others will think it mere lunacy, i.e. wrong but harmless.

All facts, events and situations are inherently neutral. We are always free, entirely free, to choose whether to take a negative or positive view of them. This is where the resistance army comes in. Pressure will be brought to bear to sway us one way or another but we are ultimately free to choose. *If we are willing to accept the consequences of our choices*, we can realize the ultimate freedom any human can experience.

This is another view of non-attachment. We do not need to train ourselves not to feel desire or aversion towards anything. We only need to recognize that all the values that create our feelings of desire and aversion are not really inherent in any external objects but exist only within ourselves. Now we are free of their power, power we had previously given them over ourselves. We take the power back and give it to ourselves.

With this view, we can see that as I mentioned in the first chapter the choice is not really whether to focus on or choose the negative or positive “side” of anything. We are not choosing to “look on the bright side”, “see the good side” or to “look for the good in things”. We see that those qualities are not actually inherent in any fact, event or situation we are looking at. They are not really there for us to select. Those qualities only exist in ourselves. Thus it is our *view* that is negative, not any aspect of the thing we are viewing. This is the choice, the choice of our own view of things. The choice between a negative or a positive point of view.

If we accept that nothing is inherently good or bad or any other thing, we can see that nothing is inherently wrong. Nothing is wrong. This is a new place to start, a new way of looking at and approaching the world.

If nothing in the world is inherently bad, there is nothing to fear. The fear we see in the world is not actually a part of the world, it is only inside us. We can give it up as casually as we toss a newspaper in the recycle bin. It's our choice. If we are willing to accept the consequences we can give up our fear.

If nothing in the world is inherently wrong, and we are one of the things in the world, then nothing is inherently wrong with us. Nothing is wrong with us. Nothing.

If we chose to see the world as a hard, bad, frightening place, and ourselves as unhappy, it is and we are. If we chose to see the world as a beautiful, good and interesting and ourselves as happy, it is and we are. We can choose to see the world and every fact, event and situation in it any way we want to. It just takes intention and effort to overcome our habitual way of looking at the world. In the final analysis we are ultimately free to make the choice.

Since everything in life
is but an experience
perfect in being
what it is,
having nothing to do
with good or bad,
acceptance or rejection,
one may well
burst out in laughter.

~ LONG CHEN PA

This is the reason all the Buddhas are smiling.

Chapter Summary

1. The world we perceive and accept as reality is really a mental construct
2. Our construct of reality is only partial, flawed, and relative
3. Nothing is inherently good or bad.
4. All facts, events or situations are inherently neutral
5. Good, bad and all the other values are projections that exist only in our minds
6. We as individuals or societies assign the values of good or bad to everything
7. We are ultimately free to accept these values or not
8. The reality we live in is the reality we choose

Chapter practice: Facing The Facts

In the first chapter practice, we observed how others choose to be unhappy and how they express and communicate their unhappiness. In the second, how to use our facial expression to tell us when our thoughts were positive or negative and how changing our facial expression by smiling could change how we felt. In the third, we noticed how we are reluctant to let go of some negative thoughts and to identify how we try justify to them.

In this chapter the practice is to *mentally note the facts of things and not our value judgments about them*. For the next few days, as you encounter things, events or situations, mentally list only the concrete facts about them. Be clear regarding the difference of what is a fact and what is a value.

A value always has an emotional weighting attached to it, an emotional charge of some kind as in “I like that” or “I don’t like that”, “He’s good looking”, or “That’s wrong. She shouldn’t be doing that”. All of these are value judgments, not facts. Facts have no emotional charge at all. The ball is red. Her eyes are blue. His shoes are worn. The dog is barking. It is only when we make a value judgment about them that they acquire *meaning*. Facts alone are neutral, they do not *mean* anything until *we decide* they do.

As with positive and negative thinking, we can detect when we are making a value judgment by the fact that it makes us *feel* something much easier than we can by analyzing our thoughts. So if it is not clear whether you are noting a fact or a value, ask yourself if it makes you *feel* one way or another. When something you encounter suddenly makes you feel strongly one way or another, look at it and make mental notes of the facts about it. The feelings will suddenly become less intense and more manageable.

Attempt to see the world of facts we live in rather than the world of value judgments we project onto the world. You will see that there is much less negativity in the world than you may have previously imagined and much more opportunity and freedom available to you to choose a positive view.

Our attending to the facts diminishes not only the skewing effects of imposed value judgments but also to some degree the effects our beliefs, expectations and assumptions have on our perception. The world can seem a very different place as a result of this. This phenomenon in the parlance of the psychology of dreams is called lucidity, and in the parlance of the practice of Buddhism, enlightenment. In either case it is an awakening, the experience of becoming conscious.

Our ability to exercise our intention only exists in the present moment. The concept of the present moment is not complicated but it also may not be as obvious as we assume. Lets explore it a bit and try to come up with a useful sense of it.

Chapter Six: The Present Moment

The Illusion of Time

We tend to think of the past, the present and the future as three separate things. This is an illusion. There is only the present. The past and the future, like so much of what we consider reality, are ideas. As mentioned in the previous chapter, we construct a model of reality and we do so because we need such a model in order to function. That model includes not only the physical world of material things but also the idea of time.

Time is like money, it does not exist in the natural world. If we take humans out of the picture then all our *values* of good and bad, and our *concepts* of things like numbers, time and money cease to exist. Money, like time, is a kind of measurement, a kind of number. Scientists like numbers. Imagine science without numbers. Imagine civilization as we know it without numbers.

Science and civilization have integrated the *ideas* of numbers, time and money into our *concept* of reality and they are very useful *paradigms*. But numbers are only an idea. They don't really exist. Like other numerical measurement systems, money is merely an idea that we all agree on. A currency note is only exchangeable for units of product or service because we all agree that it is. We invented the idea because it is convenient. Time is also like this. The past and the future do not really exist. We can *think* of the past and the future but we will never *be* in any other "time" but the present.

One of the reasons we are so attached to this idea of time is because of the phenomenon of memory. Any time we are not in the present we are in our memory banks rummaging around. The past is a memory and so is the future because the future is made up of thoughts we have stored in our memory. They seem to be real and to exist because they have an existence in our memory. But imagine if we had no memory. Only what is happening *right now* would exist and nothing else would. Nothing else really does exist. We just think it does. Or has. Or will.

"The roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are...there is no time for them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence".

– RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The Only Time There Is

So if there is no past or future is there just and endless string of present moments? There is no past and there is no future because there is no such thing as time. For the same reason there is no present either. It too is part of the idea of time, part of the illusion. The idea of there being a present moment suggests a *boundary* between the present moment and something else that is not the present moment. There is really only the state of existence, and for us, of being, of awareness. The present moment and eternity are the same thing. The present moment and our entire life are the same thing. Always choosing to be happy in the present moment by choosing to take the positive point of view, really means that we will always be happy.

The present moment is the only time that matters in that it is the only time we can take action on our intention to be happy. Having been happy in the past does not make us happy in the present moment. Planning of being happy in the future does not make us happy in the present. The whole of our life, the whole of our existence is the present moment. This is where happiness is to be found. Let me illustrate by asking you two questions. They both have the same answer. When do you want to start being happy? How long would you like to remain happy?

Intentions, Plans and Goals And The Present Moment

Despite the fact that there is no future, we can still have intentions, plans and goals. Remember that externals, such as the achievement of goals, do not cause happiness but that they are a way to express it and a way to enrich our experience of it. We enjoy external things more when we are happy while knowing that they themselves are not the source of our happiness. Plans and goals are something we have in the present. Having them increases our pleasure, satisfaction and enjoyment in the present. When we achieve them, we will still be in the present! We will still be happy and still not confusing our new found external achievements with the source of our happiness. We will simply have another way of expressing and enjoying it. The important thing about being aware of the true nature of time is *awareness*. *It is the awareness which keeps us from mistakes in our thinking that lead us to unhappiness.*

Chapter Summary

1. Awareness of the true nature of time keeps us from making mistakes in thinking that can lead to unhappiness
2. Time is an idea and does not exist in the natural world

3. There is no past, present or future
4. The present moment is the only “time” there is
5. Intentions, plans and goals and their realization are all in the present moment
6. The present moment and our entire life are the same thing
7. The present moment is the only time we can act on our intention to be happy

Chapter Practice: The Choice

In our practice for chapter two, we observed how others choose to be unhappy and how they express and communicate their unhappiness. In chapter three, how to use our facial expression to tell us when our thoughts were positive or negative and how changing our facial expression by smiling could change how we felt. In chapter four, we noticed how we are reluctant to let go of some negative thoughts and to identify how we try justify to them. In chapter five we mentally noted the facts of things and separated our value judgments about them.

For this chapter we practice *making the choice to take a positive point of view*. Now that we are able to identify facts as separate from our value judgments and now that we know we are really ultimately free to make whatever value judgments we choose in the face of any fact, event or situation, we are now ready to practice making the choice of taking a positive point of view.

“You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working; and just so, you learn to love...by loving. All those who think to learn in any other way deceive themselves”.

~ SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

Decide to find a way or ways to view things positively. Remember that this does not exist in its own right, *it is not something we identify but rather something we create*. We are choosing to ignore any negative value judgments we may have and to create a positive value judgment about what we perceive. Try a few of these:

- A rainy day.
- A flat tire.
- A broken vase.
- A long wait.
- Screeching tires.

This little list of examples may appear relatively easy but it is little things like these that really make up our everyday lives. Big trauma does not really happen very often. *It is the practice we have done every day with the little things however that will be there for us when the big trauma does come along.*

In the practice of Buddhism, we are taught to greatly value our enemies because they provide us the best chance for us to practice things like patience, compassion and acceptance. Also it is pointed out that they are really quite rare. Most of us are not surrounded by a host of enemies, we likely really have just one or two, if any. It is so with major traumatic events, they are actually fairly rare in our lives and they are not the source of our unhappiness. Our everyday outlook is.

Still, it will not always be easy to find or take the positive view and *it does take practice*. Fortunately, there has been a good deal of research done on how to help people be creative. One of the best ways to do so is to make a game of a challenge. This takes away the unconscious rules and assumptions we often operate under. *If we are finding it challenging to find a positive viewpoint in a certain situation, make a mental game of it.* Making a game of it lightens it up and helps release us from the influence of the army of resistance whose power partially comes from its ability to convince us of the seriousness of the situation and therefore its ability to instill fear in us. Remember fear is the “freezer”, that is why we suddenly can’t think of anything.

This approach also helps take our thinking “out of the box”. Often we cannot find alternatives to our thinking because we limit our options in some way. Here is an example of how changing our mindset can free up our creativity. Look out your window. Now mentally place on your head a variety of hats that represent different professions. Place a construction workers hat on your head. What do you see? Place a photographers hat on your head. What do you see? Place a policeman’s hat on your head. What do you see? Place a gardeners hat on your head. What do you see?

Making a game of something frees our mind up to be able to consider a much wider range of options. Again it does this by taking away the element of seriousness, a form of fear which limits our sense of the available choices. The mental state of play, of “having fun”, is much more open to alternatives and new or different ideas. This is why making a mental game of the challenge takes the pressure off us and makes it much easier to come up with a positive point of view.

Chapter Seven: The Practice

Just as we improve our physical health by reducing the amount of the unhealthy foods in our diet and by increasing the amount of regular exercise we get, the same rational and approach works with regard to our mental health. By the same token just *thinking* about getting fitter will do nothing for us, *we have to take action on a regular, on-going basis to see results.*

The exercises below are the five chapter practices plus supplemental practices we can perform to reinforce our intention and to develop a positive outlook and be happy. They are based on methods modern western research has shown to be effective or on time tested spiritual approaches to finding happiness.

The Five Active Practices:

- 1) First Practice: Observe others unhappiness, how they chose it and its effects
- 2) Second Practice: Use your own facial expression as a feedback and control mechanism
- 3) Third Practice: Challenge your negative thoughts in the moment
- 4) Fourth Practice: Identify the facts in events or situations
- 5) Fifth Practice: Make the choice to take a positive point of view

The Four Reflective Practices

- 1) Review the costs of negative thinking: make notes, post affirmations, keep a journal – whatever works for you but do it on a regular basis.
- 2) Review the benefits of positive thinking: ditto
- 3) Consider the unhappiness of others – reflect on others you know or can imagine and how they choose their own unhappiness, how unfortunate it is for them and the price they pay.
- 4) Count your blessings – keep a daily journal of things you have to be grateful for. Doing this causes a heightened awareness of our blessings throughout the day because we start to look for them so we can write them down later.

Reminders

Icons, affirmations and tokens have been used as reminders by faiths, movements and adherents to various beliefs for millennia. The picture of Christ, the Sermon On the Mount, the crucifix. The statue of the Buddha, the Om Mani Padme Hum mantra , the prayer beads. The image of Gandhi, the Jewish Menorah, the Yin Yang of Taoism. All these things are found in the homes or on the persons of those who wish to remind themselves of their beliefs and intentions. They wear the pentangle of Wicca, the crescent of Islam, the trident of the Hindu. Photographs of role models, flags, pledges, prayers, clothing, jewelry, and ritual have all been used to remind people of their intention to adhere to and practice their beliefs. I recommend you create or find your own versions of the above to help you remember to adhere to your intention to chose to be happy.