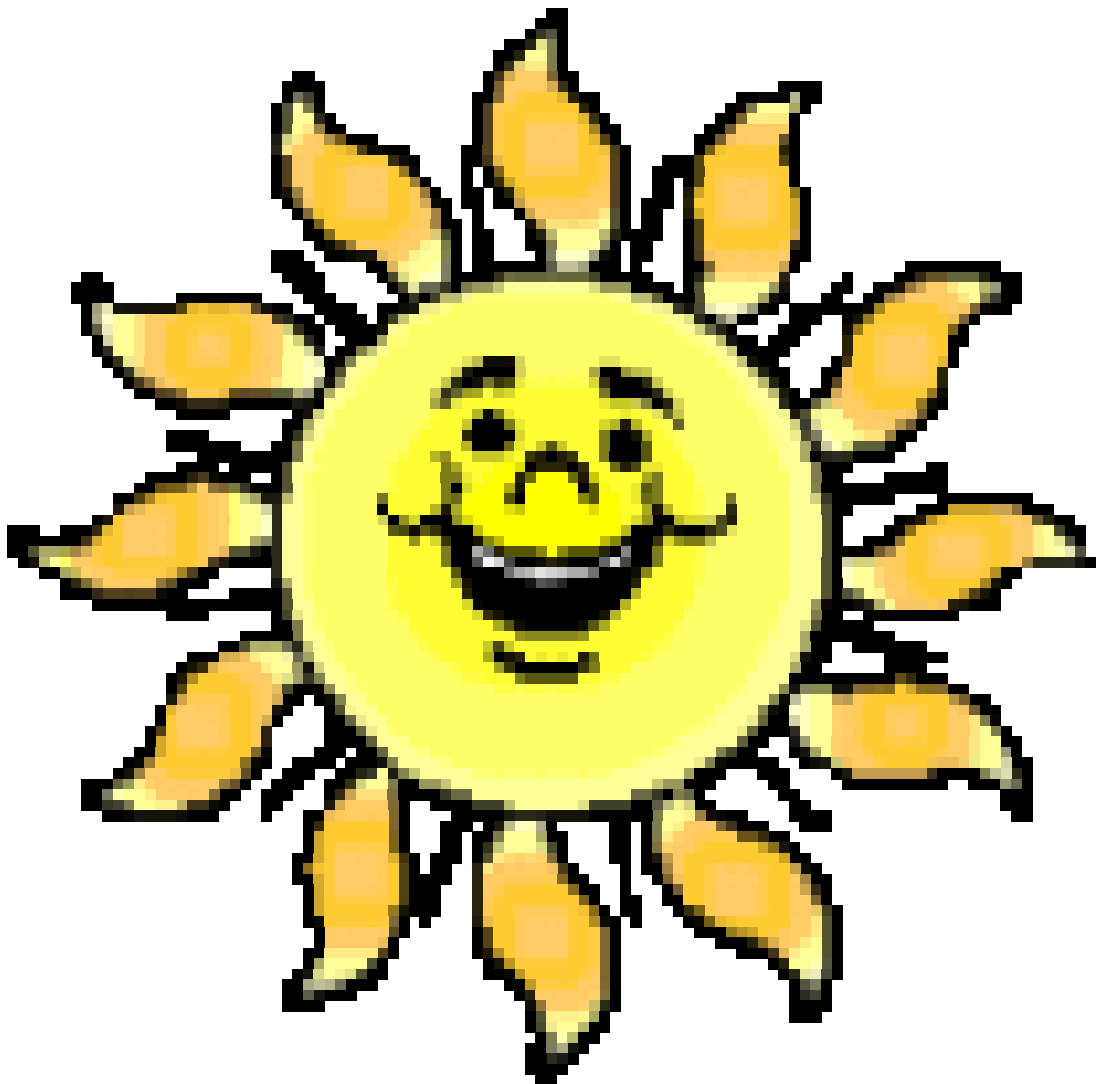


HAPPINESS IS MORE THAN JUST A LAUGHING MATTER

LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND, APPRECIATE AND ENRICH YOUR HAPPINESS FOR ENHANCING YOUR
BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT, AND TO BRING MORE MEANING, CONTENTMENT AND JOY INTO YOUR LIFE



Bill Sutton

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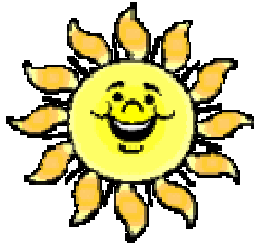
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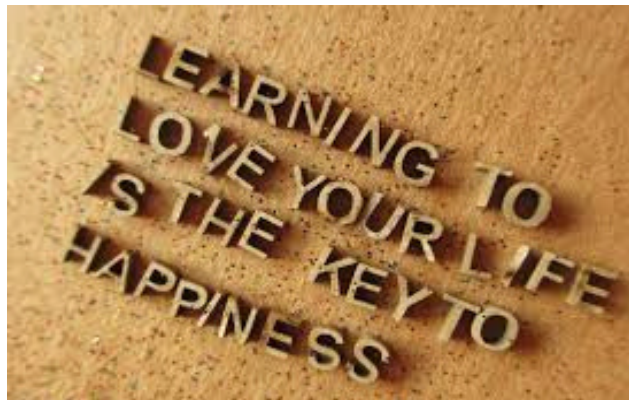
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THE ESSENCE OF HAPPINESS

LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND, APPRECIATE, AND ENRICH YOUR HAPPINESS

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To help us better understand and improve our happiness, there is a considerable amount of academic research concerning happiness being accomplished these days. In the past few decades the psychology of happiness, world value surveys, scientific evidence, and other research has established some hard facts about what causes human happiness, and life satisfaction.

Research indicates that happy people do better, and are more successful than unhappy people in virtually all realms of life. They have better social relationships, more friends, and experience less depression. They are also more charitable, productive, caring, and more understanding. Plus, they are more satisfied with life and make more money. Those are just a few of the many benefits we realize from our happiness.

I'm guessing, based on the results of several national opinion surveys and psychological studies, that a substantial majority of the people reading this would consider themselves to be either "very" happy or "fairly" happy people. In fact, almost everyone I've broached this subject with believes they are happier than the average person; and that's a good thing. Nevertheless, if you start to consciously think about, understand, and become more sensitive to the role happiness plays in your life, and learn to develop and implement strategies, behaviors, and activities that will enhance your happiness, do you think you will become a better person, a better friend, a better parent, more ideal?

As you become happier, do you become less worried and less self-obsessed? As your happiness improves, do you become more thoughtful, loving, and more socially engaged? Do you think making yourself, and others happier will help create a better world for ourselves and others? If you answer "yes" to these questions, I suspect that you are in agreement with the vast majority of people overall. To account for this reasoning, and for a more thorough response to these questions and others, please read on.

The purpose of this book is to: arouse your awareness, interest and thoughts about happiness; define, explore and promote happiness; discuss the correlation between virtue and happiness; help us better understand and enrich our happiness; recognize why negative thinking undermines our happiness; try to capture the essence of love and happiness; remember to appreciate our happiness and how fortunate we are in this world; answer the questions prefaced above and below; explain why our choices and belief systems make us who we are; reveal the true keys and formulas for achieving enduring happiness and life satisfaction; as well as identify some of the habits, strategies or principles that could help us become happier people, and improve one's overall quality of life. Also, in the addendum, it will provide an answer to the age-old, philosophical question that involves the very purpose of our existence: What is the Meaning of Life.





DO YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO BE HAPPY?

Yes, most of us already have everything we need to be happy, regardless of our nature, nurturing, or our circumstances. But, it doesn't mean that we are happy. Life is full of frustrations, disappointment, and hardships. So, it is difficult for most of us to be happy all the time. Apparently, it's even harder for those of us who have a lower happiness set-point. Genetics plays a significant role here, but that doesn't mean that you're prospective level of happiness is fixed, and can't be changed.

Psychologists say you could dramatically affect your happiness through what they call your voluntary or intentional activities. In other words, what activities that you decide to pursue in your life, plus the attitude you have, the expectations you develop, and the way you perceive things, plays a significant role in determining the resulting level of your happiness. And more importantly, these activities, attitudes, expectations, and perceptions that directly affect your happiness are manageable and within your power to control and change.

Scientific research by prominent psychologist Sonya Lyubomirsky indicates that your nature will determine approximately half of the total extent of your overall happiness capability. And, it will also establish what psychologists refer to as your happiness set-point. This set-point theory has wide support in the field, and is considered to be the baseline on the scale of your potential range of happiness.

The theory is, you inherit your genetically determined mood level, and dispositional outlook from your biological parents. It's genetically encoded, and defined as an equilibrium point, which you tend to normally gravitate back to. This set-point varies for each of you, depending on your unique genetic and biological make-up. And, which end of your happiness range you operate on - high or low - will be influenced by the frequency of both the positive and the negative emotions and experiences that occur throughout your life.

Although studies show we have a natural tendency or bias to be negative, some of us also seem to have an innate sense to be happy, research shows, some happier than others. Therefore, your happiness set-point becomes an essential part of your dispositional character but, it's not the only significant factor which ultimately determines your overall happiness level, or how happy you can become in your life.

Besides your so called innate qualities - your nature and biological makeup, conditions which can be greatly influenced by your mind and environmental factors such as, learning and conditioning - studies show the greatest part of your happiness is strongly linked with the choices you make regarding your job, relationships, activities, behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and how you perceive things.

Your circumstances, the situations and conditions that you confront, with respect to income, age, ethnicity, material welfare, disabilities, and physical attractiveness, seem to play a smaller part in determining the overall level of your happiness. According to experts, these circumstances can adjust your happiness levels up or down, but they have a relatively minor impact compared to your biological characteristic sense of well-being, and compared to the things you choose to do in your life, and the manner in which you choose to do them.

Although it's commendable, and a worthy goal to work at improving your circumstances in life, just for that reason alone, it's important to know that research shows it's not your circumstances that will significantly impact the level of your happiness or life satisfaction over the long-term. It's your reaction to those circumstances and to other life events that plays a more important role in your overall well-being.

Additionally, changes in your circumstances alone don't make a significant difference in your long-term happiness level, due to what psychologists call hedonic adaptation. This is a phenomenon in which you quickly adjust and get used to better or favorable, worse or unfavorable circumstances. Improvements, even substantial improvements in your prestige, fame, beauty, and fortune are situations that will usually make you happier. But research and scientific evidence shows that any improvement in your happiness level associated with these types of circumstantial betterments, are relatively short-lived, and usually have little or no appreciable effect on your long-term happiness level. This may seem counter-intuitive, but the evidence proves otherwise.

No matter how significant your circumstances and major life events may seem, research and scientific evidence suggests that ironically, these situations account for a very small percentage - approximately 10% - of your overall happiness level. And, changing your circumstances alone, will not deliver a significant change in how happy you are now, as well as how happy you become, especially over the long-term.

Although the happiness set-point theory states that your mood level and dispositional outlook is heritable and moderately stable over time, there are considerable individual differences in the extent to which people adapt to their genetically determined set-point. Happiness levels can and do change, and genetic related adaptation is not necessarily inevitable, according to professor of psychology, Richard E. Lucas.

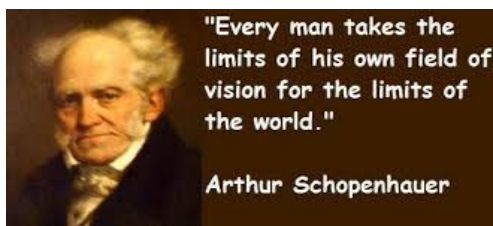
So, the endeavor to become happier is apparently much more about your life choices and how you see and react to your circumstances, than it is about your actual circumstances or your genetic blueprint.

To further this point, an impressive body of research now shows that trying to be happy by changing our life situations will ultimately not work, according to professor of psychology, Sonya Lyubomirsky.

The good news is, the remaining substantial measure, beyond your circumstances, your inherent qualities and what nature provides, is evidently manageable and within your power to control. Some research scientists say it is as much as 40%.

In summary, it appears that you have the power to not only influence, but to dramatically change and manage the typical and distinguishing nurturing aspects of your life that can directly affect the level, degree or extent of your happiness. That is, how you choose to perceive, react to and manage your relationships, behavior, environment, circumstances and other life situations by how you think, what you expect out of life, what you say and do, and the manner in which you comprehend, say and do it. It includes the capacity you put forth for finding satisfaction and joy in life. We've often heard the phrase: "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Beauty, like life itself, is in the eye of the beholder. Remember Barry Neil Kaufman's quote above, "The way we choose to see the world creates the world we see". In other words, we filter our life experiences through our own perspectives and feelings, no matter how limited or skewed they may be, according to Matthew Hutton. Carolyn Y. Johnson's article: *Everyone is biased: Harvard professor's work reveals we barely know our own minds*, states studies show everyone carries with them implicit biases that may change how people perceive situations and/or interact with others. So, it seems all of us have personalized, and unique, and implicit biases in some way, but in most all cases it seems we also have an egocentric based bias too. This seemingly inherent bias exists to help curb one's cognitive dissonance that would likely become more prevalent without such bias. This more personalized and bias sense of reality makes one's experiences, or more accurately, one's perception of reality more relevant to the ways we want and/or expect to see our particular life situations. When our egocentric or other implicit biases clash with reality, we can misread what's really happening creating feelings and perceptions that are not based on facts or the reality of what's truly happening. One's skewed, biased, and egocentric perspective is by definition not objective. Therefore, we must learn to understand that not everything that happens to you is about you, according to Matthew Hutton.

IS IT ALL ABOUT PERCEPTION?



To further Arthur Schopenhauer's thought and quote above, Robertson Davies said, "*The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend.*" However, William Blake insightfully notes, "*If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite.*" ~ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In other words, everyone sees things a bit differently to say the least; especially since the doors of perception are in fact infinite, and implicitly biased.

Our individual perceptions by nature are subjective, personal and distinct and are an inherently limiting process for many other reasons which are made clearer below.

Psychologists say that one of the primary jobs of the conscious mind is to try and make sense of the way we see our life, and form a story from our own interpretation and conception of what appears to be happening. It seems that we can help facilitate this process more effectively, and ideally, more independent of just ones' own perception, by seeking third party, neutral opinions of these perceptions and one's understanding, when helpful, useful or necessary.

Getting a neutral, more detached and ideally a more impartial opinion can provide another perspective that may be different from your own positions. Different perspectives can help us deal with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by just ones' own personal feelings, opinions, motivations, biases, or just one's own distinct and singular interpretation of what we believe are the facts, or what we perceive as true and real.

I suspect there are times we don't know ourselves as well as we think, and as well as those who are closest to us. Although others opinions may not be more objective or more accurate, their perceptions of you and your circumstances may provide some helpful insight, and could help you learn things about yourself, your relationships, and your circumstances you may never learn otherwise.

We can learn something from most every person we meet, especially when we're listening with an open mind and an open heart. Different perspectives, which includes professional clinical opinions can give you a better understanding of yourself and how you relate to, or behave with others, and help you to realize the value that this improved self-awareness, and these more diverse perspectives can bring to you and the issues at hand, even if it's not initially what you want to hear or believe. Rev. Richard Hooper notes, as human beings, we all seem to operate on the principle that only our own experiences or perceptions of reality are legitimate, while the other guys are simply delusional.

Examining differences in opinion, questioning your own distinct observations, beliefs, values, and actions, and contemplating a variety of perspectives, especially when employing the use of professional guidance, can help you attain a more balanced and a more comprehensive and holistic view of things. It can also help you eliminate pie in the sky, unrealistic expectations and help you develop more realistic ones. Reducing and ideally eliminating the frustrations and stress associated with the often-unfavorable results related to having such unrealistic expectations and setting impractical goals, can thus ideally improve one's long range perspective in thinking and planning, enhancing one's critical judgment and decision-making process.

Developing our curiosity or our desire and ability to know and learn the truth, and establishing a more dialectic model of discovery, reasoning and thought, and questioning things from different perspectives can help us examine and evaluate more critically and logically who we are; what we can realistically expect from life; what we know about the world, and how it can work best for us, and others.

Professor of philosophy Peg O'Connor says, instead of looking inward to find your true self, you might look outward toward those around you, as well as to the broader world in which you live. We understand who we are even better when we understand our relationships with others and our relationship with the world around us.

Life as we experience it is not just a series of unconnected thoughts, emotions and physical events. It's a coherent narrative unfolding in the world, and a representation of patterns of information as we perceive it.

More objectivity, standing back with less emotion and seeing things with a broader perspective rather than just ones' own singular perspective is more ideal. But the reality is, that some degree of objectivity, independent of one's conscious awareness of one's perceptions, is always lacking. Our conscious perceptions of the world are not static or passive. Like one's reality our perceptions are a fluid and demonstrably active process. They are dynamic in nature and unique to each of us. One's perceptions construct rather than record reality. In other words, the way we choose to see the world creates the world we see. Therefore, one's perception defines one's experience, but it doesn't necessarily define what's real. One's perceptions make a difference in one's life, and they play a critical role in one's happiness.

However, regrettably, your perceptions by nature are an inherently limiting process. They are subjective, personal and distinct, prone to error, redefinition, and are limited by ones' senses, experience, knowledge, awareness, reasoning, beliefs, emotions, interpretation, state of mind, and other personal biases. They can be shaped by learning, environment, context, memory, expectation, self interest, motivation and the many psychological distortions that can manifest, such as the ones' noted above.

Our perceptions are unique; and no two people view the world exactly the same. According to Arjun Walia, what changes the way we perceive reality, is information. He says when new information emerges it changes the way we look at things and, as a result, our reality changes to, and we begin to manifest a new experience and open our minds to a broader view of reality. New information can change our perception of reality. He maintains change starts from within. It starts with the way in which we are observing the outer world from our inner world. Further, we are all individually conditioned, biased and subjective. What we see in life is often what we are conditioned to look for. Nietzsche said, all things are subject to interpretation. Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is not only a function of information, perception, and belief, it's a function of power, and I add, a function of one's conditioning, and not necessarily the truth.

Besides our lack of ability to be totally objective in ones' recognition, interpretation, and ones' understanding of things, it seems to be human nature that we often perceive or evaluate ourselves with a positive bias. The brain is wired and works hard to maintain the supposition and belief that I'm OK. Furthermore, we frequently construct negatively biased images and perceptions of those whose existence, ideas or attitudes undermine our beliefs, purpose, sense of security, self-worth and self-esteem, according to Dr. Alar Kilp. So naturally, we respond differently and usually more positively to people and objects we perceive favorably than we do to things we perceive as unfavorable and unsupportive. George W. Bush said, "Too often, we judge other groups by their worst examples while judging ourselves by our best intentions".

Dr. Deepak Chopra says, the mind has a lifetime of conditioned beliefs and expectations through which it filters, and can distort our perceptions, in comparison to reality. One's observations and perceptions of reality are always refracted through one's own particular beliefs and biases.

Scientific studies show that our perceptions emanate from signals in our nervous system which allows for one's interpretation of one's sensory input in order to select, detect, organize, and interpret stimuli and other information from the world around us. We then process and apply meaning to this sensory information in order to help us organize, understand, and make sense of our environment. Our perceptions are the conscious recognition and interpretation of this sensory stimuli based on previous experiences. These interpretations serve as a basis for our understanding, learning, and knowing or for motivating a particular action or reaction.

In summary, the perception process allows us to consciously, acutely, quickly, and intuitively detect, clarify and help decipher information we sense from the external world. It helps us become aware of, notice, think about or understand someone or something, as well as define and discern objects and events. It also helps us organize and interpret ones' sensory impressions in order to figure out and comprehend who and what is out there and where it is. Perceptions give meaning and understanding to our environment. This process also allows us to act within our environment, and determine the way we choose to view ourselves, our situations, and the world.

Accordingly: "Happiness is simply the manifestation of how you perceive your life, and the circumstances that continuously unfold throughout its course. So, ultimately, happiness is a choice which relies heavily upon perception." according to Laura DeVoe's article so appropriately entitled, *Is your cup half-empty or half-full?* Or, as professor of psychology Sonya Lyubomirsky asks, do you view life events and daily situations in ways that maintain your happiness; or do you perceive experiences in ways that reinforce unhappiness?

How we perceive things - people, places, circumstances, or other life events will affect how we communicate and act, and can have a significant impact on one's well-being. Your perceptions will be the primary ingredient in the creation of your experiences and your impressions of others, and of the world around you.

All that you perceive, believe in, understand and remember will help you become the person you think you are. Therefore, your interpretations of your perceptions, your thoughts and judgments of yourself and your environment, will help bring about or create your reality, your happiness or misery.

The way that you interpret and perceive your actions and your life experiences will not only effect your self-esteem and well-being, it helps establish your identity, and it helps guide your communications, behavior, attitude, how you connect to the world around you, and it has a significant impact on who you become in life.

By maintaining a comprehensive mindful awareness about life, it seems we can become more cognizant of our own as well as others limitations and biases, and become more adept at recognizing the informational fields with which we are connecting that influence our experiences, values and beliefs. As a result, we can think, plan and act more effectively, deliberately and objectively to better meet our needs, get things done, and improve our perception process, values and beliefs.

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." - Marcel Proust.

So, how can you better connect the dots to help improve your life?

Developing a less critical, less judgmental, less cynical, and less idealistic Pollyanna view of people and life, and establishing a more charitable, gracious, tolerant, and a more realistic perspective about people and life, will help you improve your relationships, and will also help you improve the way you look at, and relate to life itself.

Changing your perspective, whether it's positive or negative or simply more realistic, can have a major impact on your life, for better or for worse. Overcoming your self-imposed limitations and your negative limited thoughts and beliefs, and seeing the goodness in people and looking on the bright and pragmatic side of life will help you maintain your happiness. Expecting perfection or idealistic situations and results, or expecting others to totally conform to your particular beliefs, expectations or will, and focusing on the negative and pessimistic aspects of people and life, tends to reinforce and bring about disappointment, anger, more stress and unhappiness.

So, happiness is a process of discovering who you are, and who you choose to be. You create your happiness by developing this self-awareness, and a more positive yet realistic, self-confident, appreciative and grateful attitude, and by doing things that bring meaning, contentment, and lack of conflict to your life.

Finally, true authentic happiness, like love, cannot be purchased. It is something that comes from within. It is an enduring sense of emotional well-being and inner peace; when you feel connected with yourself and with others, and with life in general. Goethe insightfully notes, "A man sees in the world what he carries in his heart." And, by extension of this thought, learning to love your life, and carrying this love for life in your heart is not only what you will see in life, it is also your key to happiness.



"THERE ARE THINGS KNOWN AND THERE ARE THINGS UNKNOWN, AND IN BETWEEN ARE THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION." - Aldous Huxley



HOW DO YOU DEFINE HAPPINESS?

Defining and especially achieving happiness may not always be easy, nevertheless, defining and achieving it is not so complex or elusive as some might have you believe. You'll find out why, herein.

According to *Wikipedia*, some say happiness is when reality is better than your dreams. Others say it's good luck, warm feelings, or a good mood. For us Americans, the happy or ideal life is often referred to as the "American dream", where any goal can be attained through sufficient hard work and determination.

"The dictionary definition of happiness is: feelings of joy and pleasure mingled together. But, a feeling of happiness is more than just an experience of joy and pleasure, or a good mood, or the fulfillment of goals and dreams. It is a state of mind where you feel that Life is Good", says HappyGuy.com, David Leonhardt. Aristotle described it as "the highest good, so important that it transcends all other worldly considerations"; when you truly enjoy the realization of your capacities; when what you believe, what you feel, what you say, and what you do are in harmony; when your body, mind and spirit feel fulfilled; when you become "one with life".

Positive psychologists call this "flow", when you are one with what you are doing, where everything seems to align in your favor. It occurs when one is at or near their peak performance mental state of operation. When a person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of what you're trying to accomplish. You lose self-consciousness, and lose track of time, you're extremely relaxed, there is no anxiety, everything you're doing is in perfect harmony, feels effortless, and turns out just right. I call this emotional state, the temporal and ultimate high of happiness. Flow usually occurs while performing a stimulating, challenging, and demanding activity or task, and where your challenge is balanced with your ability. When the task or activity is complete the result exceeds expectations, and can provide a feeling of spontaneous joy, even rapture, and is immeasurably pleasurable and fulfilling. It's often referred to by athletes and others as, "In the zone."

Positive psychology describes happiness as a combination of positive activities and positive emotions which are associated with feelings ranging from contentment and satisfaction to bliss and intense joy. Happiness can be characterized as our capacity for finding satisfaction. It is an emotional state that indicates our satisfaction with life; a measure of how favorable we perceive the overall quality of our life to be.

Enduring happiness as opposed to momentary happiness is a manner of traveling, a mind-set, and a way of seeing things. It is not an end in and of itself, nor is it an isolated achievement or a temporal heightened state like flow. It is an ongoing, dynamic process that is a by-product of how you choose and manage to work, play, and love, and live. It's about the journey, not the destination.

Enduring happiness is to know that your life has meaning and purpose. And, that every day you touch others in a positive way...whether to show appreciation, encouragement, or make others laugh or learn, or all at once, thank you David Leonhardt.

Psychiatrist Mark Epstein in his article, *Opening up to Happiness* says, "Happiness is the ability to receive the pleasant without grasping, and the unpleasant without condemning. It is the confidence that pain and disappointment can be tolerated and, that love will prove stronger than aggression." He says that Buddhist teachings tell us that, "Only through the uprooting of our own self-centeredness can we find the keys to enduring happiness." Remember, it's not all about you. "We need to appreciate the many perspectives of those around us." Stop trying to make the world conform to your will.

The very purpose of life is to seek and expand one's happiness, according to the Dalai Lama. In their book, *The Art of Happiness*, written by Dr. Howard Cutler and the Dalai Lama, the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso defines ultimate happiness as: "stable and persistent; a state of happiness that remains despite life's ups and downs; an attitude of moving forward rather than moving away, of embracing life rather than rejecting it; making us more receptive, more open to the joy of living."

He also makes the point once again that true happiness is a mind-set. Happiness that depends mainly on physical pleasures, money, material things, prestige, power, success or even our health is unstable. "One day it's there, the next day it may not be." These things are often temporal by their very nature and complexion. And, they should not be confused with, and are not requisites for genuine happiness. "We must develop basic good human qualities, which includes warmth, kindness, and compassion. Then our life becomes more meaningful, more peaceful - happier."

Psychologists say successful people are not necessarily happy. But they believe happy people are more likely to be successful. Along those lines, an unknown poet wrote the following about success. With these minor modifications, I think it becomes a good poetic definition of happiness; and I've retitled it here as Defining Happiness:

*Happiness is speaking words of praise,
In cheering other people's ways,
In doing just the best you can
With every task and every plan.*

*It's silence when your speech would hurt,
Politeness when your neighbor's curt.
It's deafness when the scandal flows
And sympathy with other's woes.*

*It's loyalty when duty calls.
It's courage when disaster falls.
It's patience when the hours are long.
It's found in laughter and in song.*

*It's in the silent time of prayer,
In joy filled times and in despair.
In all of life and nothing less,
That's where you'll find your happiness.*

The following are a couple of pertinent, interesting and humorous quotes or anecdotes we could all take something from:

This particular heartfelt and related anecdote has been attributed to John Lennon, *"When I was five years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down 'happy'. They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life."*

Interestingly, and relevant to the above quote, the well know syndicated cartoon strip Peanuts by Charles M. Schulz published a conversation back in the 60's between Charlie Brown and Linus where Charlie asks Linus *"Do you ever think much about the future, Linus?"* And Linus replied, *"Oh, yes...all the time."* Charlie then asks, *"What do you think you'd like to be when you grow up?"* And Linus says, *"Outrageously Happy"*. So, my question is: Who doesn't want to be outrageously happy? I was surprised and you might be surprised too with what I found regarding the psychological research relative to this particular question. See page 38, for the chapter entitled: Do We All Value the Pursuit of Happiness as a Worthy Goal? for the answer.

Finally, in his book, *The Geography of Bliss*, Eric Weiner quotes the Indian guru - Ji's insight on happiness, *"We keep postponing happiness. We can only experience happiness now. The present moment is inevitable."* In other words, now and here is where happiness lives. Embrace it.





ARE MORALS, ETHICS, AND VIRTUOUS BEHAVIOR IMPORTANT TO OUR HAPPINESS?

Absolutely.

Many ethicists make arguments for how humans should behave, both individually and collectively, predicated on the resulting happiness of such behavior. During the late 18th century, classic utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham advocated the “greatest happiness principle” as a guide to ethical behavior.

Utilitarianism is a theory of ethics based on the quantitative maximization of happiness, and the belief that the value of a thing or action is determined by its utility. Utility itself under this principle was defined as happiness with the absence of pain. Utilitarianism is a system of ethics according to which the rightness or wrongness of an action should be judged by its consequences. Utilitarian's were guided by this ethical doctrine that virtue is based on utility, and "The greatest happiness or greatest good, for the greatest number of people, is the foundation of morals and good legislation." This principle states that actions are considered moral when they promote utility and immoral when they promote the reverse. It is a system which advocates that the morally correct action is the one that does the most good. It reminds me of a philosophy of the hypothetical Vulcan race, in the Star Trek series where Mr. Spock says, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one." Then he proceeds to sacrifice his life to save all of the people on the starship. Certainly, the survivors were both grateful and happy to be alive; and "the many", clearly benefited from Spock acting in accordance with this ethical belief. The Utilitarian and Vulcan doctrines are similar in nature and in direct contrast to the ethical theory of egoism, which promotes the greatest good for the self alone. Two opposing ethical theories, one complements and serves happiness for the greater good, the other ultimately corrupts and debases it. "No one can live happily, who has regard to himself alone, and transforms everything into a question of his own utility." - Seneca

More specifically, the Utilitarian's “greatest happiness principle” was not only philosophical in nature, but it was based in science. It was an algorithmic formula to determine the rightness or wrongness, and moral status of any considered action; then quantifying the resulting happiness or unhappiness, and consequences associated with that action. These values of the algorithm and its application could then be used as a basis to support or not support proposed legislation, and moral conduct.

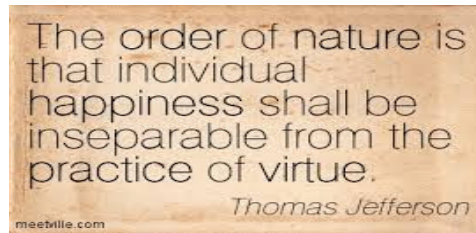
Obviously, you can not legislate happiness or emotional well-being. However, we do make laws prescribed on morals and standards of conduct which are often based on acceptable societal behavior, and how it affects the individual and collective happiness of people.

Besides the historical and philosophical context regarding ethicists and utilitarians noted above, and how they use or relate their work to happiness, the point I'm trying to make here, is twofold: First, there is a symbiotic or mutually beneficial relationship and correlation between virtue and happiness; and second, our morals and virtuous behavior are acknowledged by spiritual leaders, ethicists, psychologists, philosophers, and most people, as intrinsic values that are quite important to our happiness.

I believe that living a virtuous life - doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong - is the most important ingredient of the several fundamental and essential ingredients - see formulas below - needed to achieve genuine, sustainable, long-term happiness. My reasoning is simple, and I believe self-evident. If you choose to do the wrong things in life, and don't treat people right, it will be difficult or impossible to achieve enduring happiness and life satisfaction, regardless of what else you do, or how much other external and materialistic success you acquire.



**Happiness is secured through virtue; it is a good attained by
man's own will. -- Thomas Aquinas**



IS HAPPINESS THE PRACTICE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND VIRTUE?

Like Jefferson, many would argue that it is. Research shows that there is a strong correlation between virtue and happiness.

As noted above, “Happiness is the most fundamental of all human pursuits, and we Americans claim the pursuit of happiness as one of our inalienable rights”, according to James E. Faust who during a devotional address at Brigham Young University made note of certain qualities needed in the quest for human happiness: Our search for happiness largely depends on the degree of righteousness we attain, the extent of selflessness and patience we exercise, the amount and quality of service we render, the compassion and respect we show for our fellow man, and the measure of contentment and inner peace that we possess and enjoy.

Together with righteousness, morality and virtue, the qualities of doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong, are acknowledged by most people, as important characteristics to their happiness. In this regard, George Washington in his farewell address told us, “There exists in our society and course of human nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness”. Furthermore, Aristotle noted that happiness is “the virtuous activity of the soul in accordance with reason”. And, according to Buddha, “If one speaks and acts with a pure mind, surely happiness will follow like one’s own shadow”

Additionally, Buddhist texts maintain that, "What you are now is the result of what you were. What you will become tomorrow will be the result of what you are now. The consequences of an evil mind will follow you like the cart that follows the ox that pulls it. The consequences of a purified mind will follow you like your own shadow. No one can do more for you than your own purified mind; no parent, no relative, no friend, no one. A well disciplined, effectual, and stable state of mind brings happiness."

One could say that happiness is the practice of virtue. For thousands of years many of history’s great statesmen, philosophers, and spiritual leaders have expressed similar beliefs regarding happiness and its relationship to virtue.

Finally, the character, Jayne Cobb, while he's trying to protect the crew and himself from what appears to be an almost certain horrific death, in the movie *Serenity*, recalled what the character Shepherd Book, the spiritual teacher on board the star ship told him, "*If you can't do something smart, do something right.*" Even though Cobb portrays an obnoxious mercenary type character, while confronting death along with his unsavory nature, he finally realized that invariably, when you rely on temporal incentives in life you undermine virtues, but you never undermine virtue, and you can never go wrong by doing the right thing. Most reasonable people know the right thing to do, but sometimes the hard part is doing it.



WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

A common definition of *mindful* is: *thoughtful and careful, attentive awareness*. But, mindfulness involves more than just awareness. Many philosophical and spiritual doctrines consider mindfulness to be a path to enlightenment, to give rise to greater insight and wisdom. It is an activity that ideally - with sufficient training, practice and employment - can be experienced automatically and continuously; to make it a matter of habit, self reinforcing, instinctual in nature. It is commonly practiced during meditation. Its techniques are being utilized to a greater extent in Western clinical psychology nowadays, to help alleviate stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, eating disorders, and to help you deal with a wide variety of behavioral and other psychological conditions, as well as it can help improve our mental, physical and social well-being, and how we experience life itself.

One of the many benefits of mindfulness practices can help us become more emotionally and psychologically flexible. This particular mental flexibility is what psychologists define as: contacting the present moment fully, and based on what the situation affords, changing or persisting in one's behavior in the service of one's chosen values and goals, then mindfully observing, understanding and accepting one's thoughts and emotions without being judgmental of or ruled by them. Further, practicing the power of presence and awareness can help overcome one's tendency toward self-absorption and self-focused attention; one's counterproductive and/or overly aggressive, ego driven impulses and conditioned responses, or other learned negative behaviors; and help us become more empathetic, compassionate and more inclusive of the needs and feelings of others.

Mindfulness also involves both concentration and acceptance, and is the essence of good mental health. It can be described as a way of training the mind in being present in whatever arises, while tuning into and maintaining conscious awareness and making use of the life-lessons one has learned. Such lessons include the understandings, knowledge, insight and wisdom one has gained through one's personal experiences, regardless of the process, origin or method, i.e. through interpersonal relationships, formal and informal education, observation, perspective, intuition, reasoning, logic, etc. Mindfulness is a deliberate way of trying to become aware of, understand and accept the true nature of what is occurring moment by moment within oneself, devoid of judgment, expectations or any preconceptions. The purpose and benefits of mindfulness in part, is to improve our minds operation to become more objective, less judgmental, more mentally alert, attentive to and more deeply aware and accepting of one's experiences in order to heighten one's awareness, see things more clearly, broaden one's perspective, reduce anxiety, improve one's way of thinking, one's decision making and one's actions, so we can achieve a more meaningful, more helpful, successful, less stressful, happier and satisfying life.

In summary, the essence of mindfulness could be described as: bringing to the present, spontaneous insight, and nonjudgmental concentrated awareness of things that you have learned and realize are true. Then, applying that knowledge, truth, insight and this pure, unfiltered awareness appropriately to any given situation, in order to do what's right, and avoid what's wrong. To prevent harmful, adverse, and counterproductive choices and actions. And also, to refrain from reacting or behaving in an ego driven emotional, prejudiced, distracted, or mindless fashion.

In addition, utilizing mindfulness practices can help you become more deeply aware of your own thoughts, as well as your words and deeds and their effect on others. You deliberately pay full attention to where you are, and perceive your present experience with great clarity, with an open mind and an open heart. Clear mindfulness diminishes, and eventually dissolves your defensiveness, rigidity, fear and ego, your false self, your illusion of superiority and need to dominate and control; and enhances your relationships, your understanding, insight, curiosity, humility and wisdom, and your ability to become more fully aware of yourself, your circumstances and others in a less anxious, less emotional, less judgmental, less self-absorbed, more objective, insightful, skillful, graceful and caring manner.

Utilizing these mindfulness skills can help you to better recognize, accept, tolerate and learn from all the internal and external circumstances, events and emotions that come your way, so you can better understand, empathize with, and ultimately become more helpful to others and one's self.

You don't have to be challenged with an afflictive condition to benefit from using the techniques of mindfulness. It appears that mindfulness is a powerful and transformative skill that can enhance your well-being, and help you deal with and overcome distractions, difficulties, and other complications in your life.

It seems to me that applying these skills, even in an untaught, visceral fashion, will likely make you a better, and consequently, a happier person too. Who wouldn't benefit from more thoughtful and careful, attentive awareness, and all the other advantages associated with the practice of mindfulness?

Eugene O'Kelly in his book *Chasing Daylight* defines a perfect [mindful] moment as, "a special time of focused attention and heightened awareness, a time full of the present, when the past is left behind and the future is set aside, when your heart is wide open and all that matters is this moment". A good example of this "perfect moment" comes from the movie *Star Trek Insurrection*. In the movie, the Federation is observing an idyllic planet where adults never seem to age or experience disease or death, but gain great wisdom from their apparent immortality and enduring lifelong experiences. The lead, matriarchal character who lives on this idyllic planet expresses her opinion that, "A single moment in time can be a universe in itself, full of powerful forces, and that most people aren't aware of the now to even notice." She asks the character Capt. Jean-Luc Picard, "Have you ever experienced a perfect moment in time? When time seemed to stop; and you could almost live in that moment." After some careful thought, Picard answers, "Yes, when I observed my home planet from space for the first time."

Carl Sagan had a similar mindful thought about viewing our planet from space and he notes, "It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. He said, to me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known."

When we are mindful of how beautiful our planet is, and that it is every persons responsibility to preserve it, we become less self-absorbed, more inclined to help and support not only ourselves and our family and our particular culture, society, group, place or time, but the collective global family and the environment in which we all live so that future generations can experience this beauty and the peaceful coexistence that we need to achieve in order to preserve our planet, and to enhance our lives, to evolve and grow through enlightenment and self-actualization, and make humanity and our world a better place, a place we all share.

In this pressure filled age of distraction and divisiveness, climate change; and the need for gender and racial parity; and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, world hunger and poverty; and constant outbreaks of violence, terrorism, armed conflict, and other global crisis's, practicing mindfulness and making the most of every situation with this greater insight and awareness can help us to grow individually and collectively. This individual and collective growth can help us provide for better, wiser, more effective and responsible leadership, facilitating our distinct and collective ability to achieve more collaboration and consensus for making more informed and better decisions, and ultimately facilitate more meaningful, innovative and successful global solutions, making society and our world a better place.

Finally, the female character in the above-mentioned movie is saying it can be difficult to be truly happy, open minded, supportive and understanding until you live with nature in the present, with great clarity and insight, in an accepting, composed and mindful fashion, above time. It is said that we lie in the lap of immense intelligence and a universal consciousness, which if we are mindful of it, it will make us receivers of it's truth and light. Then we realize that true control in this temporal world does not come from just the leaders of our countries or it's laws or the material things in life, but it comes from within each one of us. The essence of mindfulness is to realize that every moment of our lives is a gift. If we become mindfully aware of the now, and notice it for the powerful and infinite potential that it offers you, you are a lot less likely to squander this gift or take it for granted. So, notice your gift, be mindful of, and thankful for it. Don't leave it unopened. Celebrate the precious moments and the opportunities that they provide each and every day, and learn to make the most of them, for yourself and others.

Practicing the power of presence can help make a positive difference not only within one's self, but to create a better and uplifting world for all of humanity. And, ultimately provide a pathway to an enlightened society that transcends issues of politics, religion, class, gender, race and even partisanship, on behalf of, and need for our peaceful coexistence, human rights, justice, prosperity and universal compassion for all.

Compassion and nonviolence help us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear their questions, to know their assessment of ourselves. For from their point of view we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition, and if we are mature, [and I add mindful of it] we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers and sisters who are called the opposition. - *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**Pooh Bear and Piglet were walking through the field and Pooh asked Piglet,
"What day is it?"
"It's today." squeaked Piglet.
"My favorite day." said Pooh.**

Cavett Robert said, "If you don't think every day is a good day, just try missing one."



HAPPINESS vs. UNHAPPINESS... WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?

There are significant consequences to both. Some of these consequences are identified here.

"The struggle between happiness and unhappiness is the story of human existence." ...Daisaku Ikada

Happiness has been pursued and discussed extensively throughout world history. This reflects the universal importance that mankind places on happiness. Why? Because happiness not only feels good, it does good. "Happy people make better citizens and are vital to a strong, healthy nation." says business professor Arthur C. Brooks in his book, *Gross National Happiness*.

Research indicates that when citizens are happier and have a more optimistic outlook, even about factors like weather, sports, and politics, they can experience weaker recessions, stronger economic expansions, and faster fiscal recoveries. A more optimistic and happier collective frame of mind may also spur retail sales, labor productivity, and smarter risk-taking, according to an article in *Psychology Today*. So, happiness and a more optimistic outlook can benefit not only individuals, but families, communities, and the society at large.

According to this article in *Psychology Today*, optimism, and I will add one's subjective well-being and positive attitude can contribute to our overall fiscal health, and help promote the bonds that hold society together. Therefore, one could assume that the economy, and in a broader sense utility reflects both pleasures and pain as well as the well-being of its respective society. In other words, there seems to be a correlation between a more optimistic and happier collective frame of mind and stronger economic activity under these more positive and confident societal circumstances. When people are optimistic and happier, they are inclined to work harder, more creatively and cooperatively (easier to work with and for), are more open to opportunities, and less likely to give up or lose their job, leading to more stability, higher personal incomes and a stronger overall economy.

The Economics of Happiness study by Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer concludes in part that happiness is not identical to utility, but it well reflects people's satisfaction with life; and for many purposes it can be considered a useful approximation to utility. So, happiness is more than just an ideal emotion that effects one's individual well-being, it appears that it can dramatically affect our collective economic well-being and our psychological wealth too.

Based on what I learned concerning survivors, in Kathleen McGowan's article *The Hidden Side of Happiness*, it seems there are a lot of consequential similarities between people who say they have "found" genuine happiness, and survivors of harrowing ordeals.

People who've finally realized true happiness in their lives, which includes many survivors often say, they've become more understanding, tolerant and forgiving of others. They are more inclined to bring conciliation and peace to former troubled relationships. They realize true friends are sweet responsibilities without self interest, are precious, special and rare, should not be idealized or taken for granted, but should be cherished and valued for who they are, and the love, affection and companionship they provide. They also realize that material ambitions seem immaterial and superfluous. They embrace life, are open to the joys of living, and appreciate friends and family first and foremost. They realize what a wonderful source of counsel, support and comfort they can be to each other in times good and bad. They often gain an increased sense of self-esteem and self-awareness. They rearrange values, priorities, and accrue more confidence and conviction not only in their ability to discern right from wrong, but to be able to cope better, prevail and carry on. They know that good relationships, good morals and good intentions can be corrupted by bad influences which include being in the wrong environment, and ultimately by making the wrong choices. They believe they recognize and understand what's truly important in life, and what is not. They realize it's not how much we have, but how much we enjoy and appreciate, and the goodness we impart, that makes life more meaningful.

Unfortunately, survivors often suffer from some level of disorder related to Posttraumatic stress. But fortunately, many also realize the benefits after undergoing severe stress and trauma, and experience what psychologists call posttraumatic growth. In *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Haidt points out that the ability to make sense of tragedy, and then find benefit in it, is the key that unlocks posttraumatic growth.

Sometimes it takes an extraordinary event such as a life threatening or near-death experience to really focus our attention on the true meaning of our life. Cecilia Capuzzi Simon points out in her article *The Humanitarian: Bobby Muller*, that former Marine Lieutenant Bobby Muller, a Vietnam Vet, at the age of 23, was shot through the chest in battle, which collapsed both his lungs and severed his spinal cord. He says the key to thriving after trauma is in truly confronting your mortality. "Once you realize your life is a flickering flame, you become desperate to find meaning and tie into something bigger and more profound, that's about doing good, that's about love, that's about service in the fellowship of man."

In Pamela Weintraub's article, *The New Survivors*, psychologist Keith Bellizzi said, "Post-traumatic growth goes above and beyond resilience. It is so intense that some people use it to reconstruct their lives. They don't return to the same level of functioning, but to a greater level."

As a result of his near death and "I'm just happy to be alive" experience, Bobby Muller, even though he knew he would be paralyzed for rest of his life said, "I completely got it. I've been given a second chance" And since then Capuzzi notes, the former Marine Lieutenant became a leading advocate for veterans' lives and founded several Vietnam veteran foundations along with The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which won the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

I believe one of the wonderful consequences and a significant benefit of being a survivor is, you often find or attain genuine happiness and real peace of mind as a result of your severely difficult or trying experience. You're more open to new roles, new challenges, and new experiences. You change your perspective about what really matters, rearrange priorities, values, and goals, and focus on what you now recognize and value as meaningful and important. You learn not to waste your precious time and efforts on, and fret about the inconsequential and meaningless things in your life. It's an enlightened and wondrous feeling, and quite satisfying to realize that if you can overcome and survive the trauma, especially under extraordinary circumstances - violence, combat, war, disasters, terminal illness, etc. - you can do anything that's humanly possible and capable of being achieved, and even what's infinitely improbable.

The good news is, you don't have to be a survivor and experience a harrowing ordeal or posttraumatic growth to enhance your happiness and to realize the benefits. We can all learn to expand our capacity for happiness, and bring into being a more meaningful and engaged life, without the trauma.

More happiness can improve the quality of one's life in numerous ways, apart from those noted above. As we become happier, I believe, based on my own personal experience, that we can become less worried, less fearful, less self-obsessed, less abrasive, and less angry.

In addition, we can become more compassionate, more content, more caring, more confident, more charitable, more gracious and appreciative, more creative, more flexible, more cooperative, more connected, more harmonious and loving, more active, more accepting - of self, and others - more satisfied, more relaxed, more playful and productive, more energetic, more understanding, more respectful, more forgiving, more hopeful and helpful, more socially engaged, and more emotionally, spiritually and physically healthy.

As a result, we could become better people in several ways, which include: better spouses, better parents, better friends, and better citizens; act with more integrity, come to be more ideal, feel more fulfilled, and help create a better world for ourselves and others. Furthermore, studies indicate that happy people naturally and not surprisingly are more well liked, volunteer more, and apparently even live longer.

These are many significant, desirable, and beneficial consequences, indeed. In addition to academic research, and my own speculations, observations, experiences, and realization of a lot of these benefits, the supposition that such an improvement in our happiness base line could create these many betterments seems apparent, and consistent with reason and intellect, and is hard to disregard. Also, these emotional, spiritual, physiological, psychological and socially related betterments are a notable and representative sample, but far from an all-inclusive list of all the significant and compelling reasons to aspire for greater happiness. There are many other consequential, and compelling reasons, and benefits which are identified further, throughout this book.

In stark contrast, unhappiness breeds the antithesis of all the above consequences and it can create other negative emotions or psychological concerns such as: depression, despair and hopelessness, sadness, anxiety and insecurity, sleeplessness, anger and misery. Unhappiness can also contribute to feelings of indifference, and inhibit your enthusiasm and interest with your work, long-range objectives, personal activities, and impair valuable relationships. So, unhappiness can become a self sabotaging emotion when it instigates new problems, interferes with work and long-term goals, and unsettles relationships.

According to William James, "The attitude of unhappiness is not only painful, it is mean and ugly. It hinders rather than serves one's purpose; and clearly is not helpful as a way out of the difficulty. It but fastens and perpetuates the trouble which occasioned it, and increases the total iniquity of the situation." In most or all respects it appears to be counter-productive.

Still, profound changes can occur when you are feeling deeply unhappy, discouraged and unfulfilled. Unhappiness can trigger your growth in ways you may have never imagined otherwise.

It is not uncommon during your darkest hours, propelled by your unhappiness, that you eventually realize you need to change. And, you need to start searching for the rightful ways, truthful answers, and begin to recognize the real value, marked ability, and control you have within yourself. Remember the proverb, "The darkest hour is just before the dawn." It's when things seem their darkest, that you can finally see the light. It is saying, there is hope, always, even in the worst of circumstances.

More importantly, beyond just hope and the inevitable sun rise, you need to understand that much of your happiness or lack thereof, and how you live your life, as well as how you view and make sense of the world, is manageable and within your power to control and change.

It seems we have a tendency to overestimate the long-term emotional impact of very bad news and unhappy circumstances and we underestimate our capacity to adapt. In my experience, the emotional impact of significant events, both positive and negative is usually temporary and dissipates over time.

History has shown that humans have a wonderful capacity to adapt, even under the most difficult circumstances. There are countless examples throughout the ages of such individuals like former Marine Lieutenant Bobby Muller, and entire populations that demonstrate how well people, and societies adapt, cope, grow and carry on. Therapist Dr. Albert Ellis believed that we manufacture much of our own unhappiness and misery, and more importantly, that we have the power through rational thinking alone, to improve our happiness and our outlook on life, regardless of our circumstances. The character David Rossi in the series Criminal Minds says, "Scars remind us where we've been. They don't have to dictate where we're going."

Karl Wilhelm Von Humboldt, a German statesman said, "I am more and more convinced that our happiness or unhappiness depends far more on the way we meet the events of life than on the nature of those events themselves." In fact, Von Humboldt got it right. Scientific research shows that our circumstances - the situations and conditions we confront - play a small part in determining the overall level of our happiness. It's our perceptions, attitude, and how we meet those circumstances and events that play a much more significant role in determining the level, degree, or extent of our happiness or unhappiness.

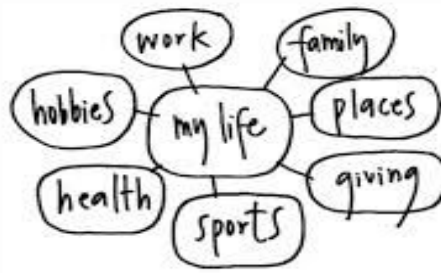
Finally, it has been my experience that both our happiness, and our unhappiness not only affects one directly, it affects others around us, many significant others. And, it has also been my experience that happy people are kinder, more helpful, and treat others better in many significant ways, than unhappy people do. Therefore, one might conclude that happy people naturally care more about others, and unhappy people naturally or otherwise don't. Who would you rather be around?

People who are unhappy may get some consolation from knowing that others are unhappy too. But, ancient wisdom says, "Misery may love company, but company doesn't love misery."

Remember, happiness and how you live your life is a choice. Remember too, life and happiness isn't about pleasing everybody. Be Happy. Be Yourself.

Choose **HAPPINESS**



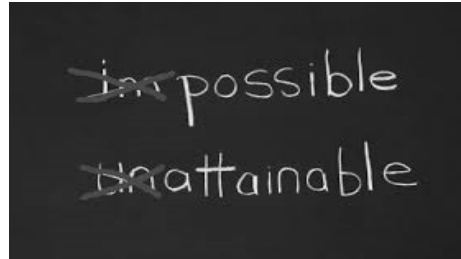


WHAT IS THE ONE THING YOU WANT MOST FROM LIFE?

Some say love; faith; more money; a bigger house; a good job; good health; a new mate; more business; prestige, success or fame. And, some even say they want nothing at all. But, research reveals, time and again, that most people say that happiness is the one thing they want most from life.

“Happiness is one of the primary ways we evaluate how well our life is going. It should be one of the most important things you consider in examining your own life” according to Psychologist Dr. Michael Fordyce, one of the modern pioneers in the field of human happiness research.

Life is a matter of choice.
You can be a doctor who saves life.
A lawyer who defends life.
Or just be yourself,
a person who touched my life...



DOES NEGATIVE THINKING ACT AS AN OBSTACLE TO OUR HAPPINESS ?

“My life has been filled with terrible misfortunes, most of which have never happened.” A humorous, yet insightful quote by Mark Twain. Someone else said, "My glass isn't just half empty, it's totally empty."

Yes, negative thinking, negative feelings, and obviously negative emotions can act as obstacles to our happiness.

Lacking positive or affirmative qualities and self-confidence, and expressing or feeling habitual skepticism can undermine our physical, psychological, and social well-being. "In one sense, the battle to be happy is a battle against negativity. Bad things happen all the time but how we internalize them, how we react to them, is what ultimately determines their final effect on us", according to Dr. Alex Lickerman.

Negativity, the quality or state of being negative can extinguish the enthusiasm and support of others. It can diminish your values and beliefs, or inhibit your confidence, efforts and imagination. It rarely empowers, excites or inspires. It disheartens one's spirit, is often unnecessary and avoidable, and is usually created by a limited insecure mind to protect and defend itself. It also has a tendency to alienate, and to create or reinforce boundaries and discord between oneself and others.

Released from such negativity you can help defuse or ideally eliminate commonly perceived, yet often exaggerated, delusional and unreal nonexistent threats or conditions and the hurt, anger, irritability, disappointment and unwarranted frustration that often accompanies such circumstances. Without this negativity you can gain a more desirable, optimistic and caring perspective, enhance creativity, improve your focus, respond more usefully and favorably to such circumstances, and plan for the future in a more prudent, affirmative and mindful fashion. Further, you become less anxious, make better decisions and contribute to a much richer, happier and more successful life without the adverse consequences that often come about from one's negative thinking or a corresponding negative attitude.

Furthermore, negativity reduces our resilience and ability to more readily recover from or adjust easily to illness, adversity, or other misfortunes, stressful situations and negative experiences.

Scientific studies by the Heart Math Institute (HMI) show that negative thoughts and negative emotions create disharmony in the nervous system that can lead to inefficiency and increased stress on the heart and other organs, and adversely affect one's physical and emotional well-being.

On the other hand, relating to positive thoughts and positive emotions, and having self confidence, affirmative tendencies and an optimistic outlook, is normally a healthier way of thinking. This more affirmative and healthier way of thinking enables you to produce a positive mindset. And, in comparison to the tendency for skepticism, disagreement and opposition, and a negative way of thinking, instead, creates harmonious rhythms that are more efficient and less stressful to the body's systems, thereby enhancing, and not adversely effecting one's physical and emotional well-being.

Further, HMI studies also indicate that positive thinking with a more confident and upbeat attitude can shift one's perception and improve one's ability to reduce stress and increase one's resiliency, and improve one's coping skills to be able to deal more effectively with hardship, frustration and other difficult situations in a more positive and productive way.

A positive mindset, this tendency to look on the more favorable side, is a learned and discipline way of thinking, and also a mental attitude in which you focus on opportunity, a positive sense of well-being and optimism that brings everything into the realm of possibility. In other words, the optimist is the person to whom every difficulty is an opportunity. While the pessimist is the one who can interpose a difficulty in every opportunity.

W. S. Holmes contrasted these two attitudes of optimism and pessimism well, when he said, "Do you become discouraged easily, or do you bend to your advantage even the apparent ills of life? It is the difference between the pessimist and optimist: The pessimist chews his quinine pills; the optimist, when chased up a tree by a bear, sits calmly and admires the view. Be an optimist; make reverses and rejections redound [have an effect or consequence or rebound] to your advantage."

Research shows that this positive, disciplined thought process, and a more optimistic philosophical way to approach life can produce more harmonious and supportive relationships; more satisfying experiences, feelings and emotions that can drive one's mind, and by extension one's life in a positive direction. Therefore, this more positive and affirmative thought process can help you transcend negativity, fear, anger and cynicism; become less contractive and less myopic; gain a healthier and broader perspective, and expand your consciousness in countless directions; improve your mood and behavior; give you more confidence; increase one's motivation, moral, potential for growth and boost creativity; improve life outcomes; and invariably encourage, empower and help you to create the life you want to live.

Therefore, through the power of positive thinking, the mind can help you become happier, more satisfied and successful, and it can create a positive mental schema or pattern of thought using belief and expectations alone that can help or heal both the body and the mind itself, and give rise to and manifest other positive outcomes.

Dr. Bruce Lipton agrees and he says the mind can influence biology and can change the character of one's physical and emotional health. In other words, belief and one's expectations can become a very powerful psychological medicine, providing therapeutic benefits even when the medication, treatment, or procedure one is undergoing is known by one to be a sham. The real power of the placebo effect allows one to tap directly into the mind's tremendous ability to stimulate healing, it can make one feel better and improve both one's physical and emotional well-being, actualizing the Latin definition of the placebo effect, *I shall please*, I add by the power of suggestion alone.

Cognitive science studies have shown that the placebo response utilizing our unconscious resources can facilitate beneficial healing effects due to personal expectations and one's beliefs. Although a placebo is a fake treatment, in many cases it can and does produce a very real response, and it can play a significant part in the healing process.

Psychologists tell us that the majority of our thoughts, and approximately half of all the words that people produce from their working vocabulary to express emotions unfortunately have a tendency or bias to be negative, lack affirmative qualities or constructive features.

On the positive side, Lipton maintains that one third of all medical healings are due to the "placebo effect". In other words, when you have optimistic and positive thoughts you can generate a healing response. When you have negative thoughts, it can have the direct opposite effect, and inhibit the healing process. He calls this the "nocebo effect". Negative, unfavorable expectations breed negative, unfavorable responses.

Furthermore, many psychologists believe that negative, dysfunctional thoughts are the root causes of depression. Life can seem inherently unsatisfactory if we let our negative thoughts and emotions overwhelm and control us.

Renowned psychologist, professor Martin Seligman says it's important to realize that our emotions - positive or negative respectively - can affect our health, productivity, our relationships, and how we handle adversity.

Research indicates that happiness is initiated in the limbic - primitive/emotions - area of the brain.

From what I read, and as noted earlier, there is scientific evidence that our minds have a natural negative bias under normal circumstances, and especially under stress. This evidence shows that threats loom large within the most fundamental of our basic needs, which includes our safety and security. According to professor Seligman, we've learned throughout the ages, that the price we pay for missing clues of nearby threats and dangerous situations can be catastrophic.

Also, according to professor Seligman, our brain developed during a time of ice, floods and famine; in the midst of the ice age. He says during that time period Homo sapiens were experiencing significant hardship and turmoil. In times where even the smallest, yet numerous unexpected obstacles could turn into an uncontrollable chain of stress filled negative events which could result in one's undoing. In times where what's up ahead is more likely to be disaster, not one's blessing or good fortune. In times where constant negative feelings and fatalistic expectations build-up and makes the self seem smaller and more vulnerable, and the ever more anxiety filled and dangerous world seem larger, more uncertain, worrisome, and threatening. So, as a consequence, we have what professor Seligman calls a 'catastrophic brain', a brain that's instinctually looking for what's wrong.

These days this acute cautionary instinctive characteristic of our nature appears to be beneficial to soldiers, police officers, fire fighters and others that invariably need to be on the lookout to identify risks, dangers, and other life-threatening situations. It could be critical for their survival.

The amygdala is the part of the brains' limbic area involved in the processing of expression of emotions; especially fear, anger, and aggression. This area of the brain also provides an early warning system, which alerts us to immediate dangers, imminent threats, and produces the famous fight-or-flight response. This instinctive process allows us to recognize and anticipate danger, respond quickly and automatically to threats in the environment, and take preventative action.

This so called "catastrophic brain" condition may also explain why many of us seem to have a bias toward seeing threats, why we appear to act more quickly, decidedly, and persistently to negative situations, and why we engage in needless worry; some more than others.

Nonetheless, if we constantly focus on danger, perceived threats, adversity or uncertainty, what I call chronic fear-based thinking, we tend to build-up excessive levels of stress and anxiety that not only adversely affects our health, it could also impair our judgment, diminish our overall effectiveness, and distort our frame of mind. These particular environmental factors and/or negative emotions appear to be harmful to normal human relations in our modern, more developed world. Also, these perceived fear-based circumstances could create the perception that others appear suspicious, distrustful or even hostile. As a result, we could experience even more apprehension, anxiety and fear, greater inhibition, insecurity and paranoia.

Also, fears that stimulate chronic or prolonged stressors such as child, spousal or other abusive relationships; living in war zones, and in high crime, violent, and rough neighborhoods; and living under totalitarian control in any environment, can cause increased and prolonged emotional distress, inflammation, and high blood pressure, according to psychologists. They also say, these stressful situations can raise one's risk for heart disease, cancer, arthritis, and other physical and emotional ailments. Studies show they also increase the risk of diabetes, alcoholism or other substance abuse.

Excessive levels of fear and anxiety, as well as incessant negative thinking can also act as a major obstacle to achieving our goals, whether they are external goals or inner growth.

Negative thinking, as well as other negative emotional states of mind, may not only hinder human relations, personal growth, and ones' happiness, they could also become a catalyst or a cause of additional emotional suffering and physical illness.

Dr. David Hawkins conducted a 29-year study that demonstrated that the human body becomes stronger or weaker depending on a person's mental and emotional state. According to Hawkins' research, those mental and/or emotional states that weaken a person may include shame, followed by guilt, apathy, greed, anxiety, desire, anger and pride.

Furthermore, Dr. Deepak Chopra in his book, *Ageless Body Timeless Mind*, states, "Our cells are constantly eavesdropping on our thoughts and emotions, and being changed by them. A bout of depression can wreak havoc with our immune system; falling in love can boost it. Despair and hopelessness raise our stress levels, and the risk of heart attacks, strokes, and cancer, thereby shortening life. Joy, hope, and fulfillment keep us healthy, and extend life. This means that the line between biology and psychology can't really be drawn with any certainty. A remembered stress, which is only a wisp of a thought, releases the same flood of destructive hormones as the stress itself."

Alexander Weiss, comparative psychologist at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, appears to agree with Chopra. He says researchers have known for years that people who are agreeable, excepting, positive, and happy, and low on neuroticism, pessimism, and negativity tended to have more successful relationships and careers, live longer, and have better immune systems. On the other hand, he says, people who are unpleasant, disparaging, and disagreeable, who rate high in neuroticism, hostility, and pessimism, that hinder, deny, or oppose constructive thoughts or suggestions, are not hopeful or optimistic, and are lacking positive or affirmative qualities, such as enthusiasm, interest, or optimism, are generally less happy, and have poorer immune systems and therefore, they are less physically and emotionally healthy.

In addition to our emotional state of mind, researchers seem to indicate our environment, our thoughts and our experiences have the power to shape the brain, shift personality, alter our immune systems, and the way we view things.

Therefore, if you want to live a longer, healthier, more hopeful, energized, appreciative, grateful, less stressful and happier life, it seems you should try to view things in a more positive, not negative fashion.

Although we may be genetically hard-wired and predisposed to the “catastrophic brain” conditions noted above for our survival instincts, our brains are not static or incapable of transformation, even in the later stages of life. Research shows our brains performance can be altered or restructured through a process of what neuroscientists call neuroplasticity. This process apparently enables the nervous system to adapt or regenerate after trauma. This neuroplasticity is a function of the brains capacity and natural ability to reorganize itself to compensate for injury and disease. It's a way to optimize your brains fitness, and rewire itself after damage, and to adapt to environmental, behavioral or other changes that occur across one's lifespan.

Experts say measurable changes in the brain - good or bad - can occur in response to new behaviors, environments, and experiences, thoughts, feelings and emotions, as well as diet, medications, other drugs or substance abuse.

Research shows the brain can change and adapt to meet new challenges such as head trauma and old age.

Experts also maintain that through concerted effort and practicing meditation and mindfulness, you can stimulate neuroplasticity shaping techniques that can change the brains organization to help maximize your potential for success, happiness or whatever else you deem important or may want to manifest in your life.

They say the brains natural ability to change, regenerate and heal is one of the reasons that many stroke victims, at almost any age, can fully recover due to the brains capability to optimize and restore, or transfer cognitive abilities and reorganize itself to move functions to undamaged areas.

Our brains have the ability to grow new neurons, disable dysfunctional or unproductive connections, and the malleable brain is quite adaptive to all kinds of new inputs, according to Dr. Howard Cutler.

Dr. Marcia Lucas says, by noticing and making more mindful choices about our thoughts, feelings, and reactions, we can actually change the structure, activity and connections in our brain.

Training the mind to expand our capacity for happiness and a more positive bias, regardless of our job, instincts, genetic make-up, or our happiness set-point, is both feasible and beneficial.

Positive and negative bias in one's perception, behavior, and understanding are a natural facet of the human condition, and they also fulfill several important functions, says Alar Kilp. He notes our perceptual biases help to relieve feelings of uncertainty, and are instrumental in formulating the myths (or purposes) that give meaning to our existence, in the subjective construction of our identity, and how we present ourselves to the outside world. He also notes that, if we are able to accurately recognize our authentic biases, we may gain better insight into ourselves, better discern the similarities mankind possesses, and therefore we can learn to know and better understand one another.

Psychologists say our positive and negative biases may be antithetical, but aren't mutually exclusive. Psychologists also maintain that these opposing biases ideally coexist to provide balance and certain other benefits, especially when there is a risk of serious negative consequences.

Although positive and negative biases do function in both positive and negative ways, when they become unreasonably disproportionate in one's thought process, emotions, and actions, therefore inhibiting a healthy and balanced lifestyle, they may become counterproductive, whether they are overly optimistic or overly pessimistic.

Nonetheless, in general, we should nurture and cultivate our positive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, according to the Dali Lama, because they are often helpful and contribute to our happiness and well-being. And, we should not always eliminate, but we should actively challenge, rein-in, and thoroughly reassess our negative thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors, when necessary, because they can be harmful, undermine our happiness, inner-growth, and well-being, and cripple the human spirit.

One's natural bias toward negative thinking can lead to overly pessimistic and distorted thoughts, and exaggerated negative emotions. Over time this negativity can become addictive, overwhelm us, and exacerbate or contribute to even more negativity, anxiety, pessimism, and dysfunction.

Excessive negative biases may also become extreme, habitual, harmful, and dangerous.

Chuck Gallozzi in his article on *Negative Thinking* states, "The constant stress that flows from negative thinking, saps one's energy, focus, and motivation. It may also lead to depression, self-pity and hopelessness. Additionally, negative people attract other complainers, because those who live in a world of doom and gloom, harm themselves, alienate others, and have no choice but to look for other negative people to associate with. They then feed off one another and spread their gloom and misery everywhere."

Helen Keller insightfully noted: "No pessimist ever opened a new doorway for the human spirit."

"It takes but one positive thought when given a chance to survive and thrive, to over-power an entire army of negative thoughts." Robert Shuller.

Benjamin Pisraeu recommends you: "Nurture your mind with great thought, for you will never go any higher than you think."

According to Ramakrishna: The winds of [greatness and success] and God's grace are always blowing, it is for us to raise the sails.

Winston Churchill said: "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

Practice seeing the opportunity, and take advantage of it. Sometimes, if you're lucky, it knocks, but most of the time it's not so apparent, waiting to be discovered, otherwise it will quietly slip away.

Finally, although they are connected, there is a distinction between negative thinking, negative feelings or negative emotions.

Psychologists say that it is important to your well-being that you confront your negative feelings, and challenge your negative thoughts head-on, and not let them overwhelm and control you. They say you should not try to deny them. Your efforts to suppress them often makes things worse.

Also, if you do not experience adversity, negative feelings, painful emotions and hard times, you may not value or fully appreciate your pleasures, joyful experiences, and your happiness.

When you don't allow yourself to experience disappointment, sadness and painful emotions, you can limit your capacity or ability to find meaning or to derive purpose from them. Painful emotions and the associated distress they cause will usually linger with you and often intensify when they are not acknowledged, confronted or released.

Paradoxically, psychologists say, certain positive and negative feelings can flow along the same neural pathways and emotional conduits, therefore, when you block your painful emotions you may inhibit the pleasurable ones too, and vice versa.

On the other hand, when you dwell on your negative thoughts and emotions or distressing events, you rarely gain insight into them. Psychiatrist Carl Jung maintained that your connection to sadness, melancholia, or other cathartic emotions can generate or allow for valuable psychological self-feedback that can lead to understanding and introspection. If you do not dwell on them, he said these intense mental states can act as a catalyst for this improved insight and self-awareness. They can aid in your emotional healing, lead to other positive emotional and physiological changes, and he maintains that these connections are essential to your mental health.

Also, it appears to be difficult or impossible to build character or totally appreciate your happiness and the good things in life, without experiencing the bad, sad, distressing, and painful things in life. Inevitably, we have to recognize, accept and deal with the bad consequences, along with the good.

Sadness, misery, fear, and other painful or negative emotions, along with adversity and hard times are unavoidable, and are bound to happen. The reality is that life is full of heartbreak, disappointments, frustrations, and anxieties. Learning how to deal with them effectively, which includes: keeping them in

their proper perspective, using them to look deeper into the meaning of things, and to help modify one's behavior for the better, or to create other positive changes, and to derive purpose from them, will ultimately contribute to: more productivity, a more hopeful and optimistic future, and a more satisfied, less stressful, healthy and happier life. Effectively managing one's negative emotions can also help you develop a new, and greater appreciation for one's own life, and the people in it.

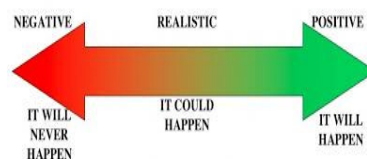
Learning to effectively deal with negativity can also improve your coping skills and capacity for resilience. It can maximize your potential for personal growth and adaptability. Further, it can make you a more nimble, psychologically flexible, effective, constructive, and more confident and helpful person.

So, employing the right strategies can make it easier to achieve your goals, overcome one's difficulties and anxieties, gain self-confidence, attain success, and enhance one's relationships, enthusiasm, optimism, self-esteem, happiness, and overall quality of life.

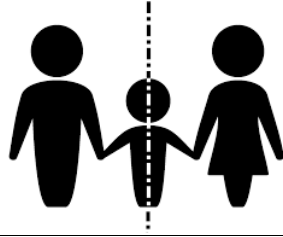
In conclusion, contrasts allow us to more clearly see, differentiate, learn and benefit from both the positive and the negative things in life. Furthermore, without experiencing a variety of both positive and negative emotions, "no one portion of the universe would then have importance beyond another; and the whole collection of its things, and series of its events would be without significance, character, expression or perspective. Whatever of value, interest or meaning our respective worlds may appear imbued with, are thus pure gifts of the spectator's mind", according to William James.

"The recipe for well-being", according to professor of psychology David G. Myers, "requires neither positive nor negative thinking alone, but a mix of ample optimism to provide hope, a dash of pessimism to prevent complacency, and enough realism to discriminate those things we can control from those we cannot."

Although all of us will get unwanted surprises along the way, according to Jonathan Haidt, we'll adapt and cope with nearly all of them, and many of us will believe we are better off for having suffered. The measure of a man, like the measure of a society, according to Nietzsche, is how well they transform pain and suffering into something worthwhile. "That which does not kill me makes me stronger."



"Being positive won't guarantee you'll succeed. But being negative will guarantee you won't." Jon Gordon



DO CHILDREN INFLUENCE PARENTAL WELL-BEING?

Are you kidding me? A rhetorical question I'm sure, for most or all parents. Yes, the role children play in their parents' lives, and vice versa, can certainly enhance or detract from their respective levels of happiness, health, and emotional well-being.

Regardless of their age, whether children are infants, toddlers, teenagers or grown adults, parenting remains the most precious, important, meaningful, demanding, rewarding, and extremely difficult and challenging responsibility that mothers and fathers undertake throughout their lives. Freud opined that child rearing is one of the few "impossible professions".

There are numerous books written on the subject; and we all have our own opinions on the best way to raise our kids, but I think most experienced parents can agree that good child rearing and parenthood requires first and foremost a strong commitment to parenting (which includes, but is far from limited to the seemingly endless effort and responsibilities that go along with it. Unfortunately, the amount of time, education, effort and responsibility required for proper parenting, like any other "profession", difficult, demanding and complex job is unknown in any complete sense by first time parents, no matter what they have imagined, thought, or been told; and no matter what they have read about the subject or have previously observed). Also required is the formation and the development of realistic expectations and sufficient resources needed to help support the parents themselves and for good child rearing, which include: a significant amount of energy and time; a considerable emotional and sufficient financial investment; proper education, discipline and parental training to become great parents and to help the child to develop into a decent, self-confident and capable person, amongst other things. There is no question that child rearing is extremely time consuming (some studies estimate it requires an average of 8 hours a day; parenting seems to be a full time job in and of itself), and it's quite costly (estimated cost for a middle income couple can be around \$250k to raise a child to the age of 18, not including private schools or college education). Further reinforcing the above-mentioned Freudian sentiments, child rearing is not simple or easy, and nearly impossible to get completely right, no matter how hard you try, or how much quality time you put in, or how much experience, training or education you have.

Good parenting comes with a myriad of province and great responsibility, endless worry and other emotional strain, sacrifice and subordination, and there are those times that I suspect we have all experienced, when parenthood outright sucks. But if you ask parents the question: *What is so profound and important in your life that you would risk everything, even die for it?* in a heartbeat, most parents would say their children. Because nurturing, protecting, and keeping them from harm seems to be a natural, if not a learnt parental instinct. It's just what we do for our kids, regardless of the happiness or unhappiness they bring forth.

Even though there are children who for whatever reasons, do not bring a lot of happiness and joy to life, and may bring about more frustration, disappointment or heartbreak, most caring parents cherish their children's future, and consider parenthood one of life's true blessings. They would go to the ends of the earth, and still sacrifice themselves, if they had a choice, because of their devotion, commitment, and the love they have for their children.

It's all about the love. Without love there would likely be limited or no sacrifice. The love we have for, and give to our children is more important than any worldly goods, possessions, or materialistic values we might provide for them. Without love our own world and our children would be in a place of despair, feeling isolated, hapless and forsaken; and a loveless state surely hardens the heart. Kids, like love itself, change everything. There is nothing more precious, sacred and special than the love parents have and provide for their children.

The study, *Happiness: Before and After Kids* by Mikko Myrskylä and Rachel Margolis found that happiness increases prior to and in the year of having a child. Then, it often decreases thereafter but not below before-child levels. This data further reinforces the happiness set-point theory, noted earlier, where our happiness eventually gravitates back to our natural biological equilibrium level, or set-point of happiness, regardless of the circumstances.

This study abstract goes on to say that those who become parents at young ages usually have a downward happiness trajectory. While those postponing their parenthood often have a higher happiness level post-birth. The study's findings show that the first child usually increases happiness a lot, the second less, and the third may actually decrease happiness. The study notes that socioeconomic resources are important, especially for men. This study maintains that those with low education gain little in happiness from the birth of a child. It also maintains that childbearing increases happiness most among those that not only postpone their parenthood, but not surprisingly, those that have sufficient resources available to them. According to sociologist Melissa Milkie, these resources include the one's that will not only help the children directly, but also the resources that will help the parents in terms of supporting both their mental health and their socioeconomic status as well.

Additionally, the benefits that sufficient resources can provide, is the fact that these resources can help reduce or allow you to better cope with the many stressors and the strains associated with parenthood. They can also improve the parent-child bonding process because these socioeconomic resources can facilitate more and better child social development, more quality time together, and circumstances - environments and experiences - that are conducive to, and can provide for a more safe, relaxed and supportive environment, and foster more satisfaction, stability, and improved academic and social success for the children. Surprisingly, according to an article written by Brigid Schulte, the above noted study by Melissa Milkie and others have found that, even more than any quantity or quality time spent with their children, parental income and a mother's educational level are the socioeconomic factors that are most strongly associated with a child's future success.

Other research also shows that parents with low levels of income and education, not surprisingly, have been shown to be strong predictors of a range of physical and mental health problems such as markedly higher rates of depression. Although this research was not conclusive in stating that this particular set of risk factors associated with low socioeconomic status and higher depression rates was exclusive to parents only, compared to non-parents and other individuals or couples with the same set of risk factors.

Income, health, leisure time, sex, marital quality and marital stability, and even life satisfaction are things that can change anytime, for any couple, particularly when having children. These seem to be some of the key factors, in addition to our socioeconomic status and family environment that can play a role in, and that can impact both the parent's and the children's well-being and overall quality of life.

Briefly, the Myrskylä and Margolis study generalizes that having children seems worth doing. It goes on to say that, while becoming a parent does not necessarily make people more happier than they were years before having the children, the levels of subjective well-being increased sharply the year before the year of the birth, especially one's first child, and I add, where the happy moments outweigh and/or have been more intense than the unhappy one's making the overall net effect of having children not only positive, but without doubt worth it.

Finally, my experience with my child, although quite positive, has taught me that we should not count on our kids to provide for our happiness, especially when our children become adults. Although many of our happiest, most beautiful and loving moments may have been influenced by and focused on our children, our happiness is our responsibility, not theirs. I suggest you don't selectively rely on them or burden them with this responsibility because it's not reasonable or appropriate, and as a result it can lead to frustration. If they are caring and responsible sons and/or daughters they will provide love and support when needed, but they should not be tasked with providing for your long-term happiness. It's our responsibility to take action to maintain or improve our own well-being, rather than trying to make someone else responsible. Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert looked at several studies and concluded that children give parents and adults many things, but an "increase in daily happiness is probably not among them". Having children may be the best and most meaningful thing that will ever happen to you, but your children, according to many studies are not going to be the key to your enduring happiness and life satisfaction.

Our children live in a different, more diverse, complex and to a greater extent, a more difficult, stressful and more rapidly changing time than previous generations. These more recent, evolving generations have experienced dramatic demographic, social and technical changes, different cultural values, concerns, social and political environments relative to their parent's generation; and these different generations of Americans have their own distinct reactions to these changes according to Pew research. They see the world and themselves, and cope with life differently than their parents do. And, every child and respective parent-child relationship is also different and unique in its own way. Therefore, some children and parents bring forth great happiness and joy and sadly some do not, for a wide variety of reasons. Although there are conflicting studies regarding parenting and happiness, one absolute seems quite clear, that children can create more or less happiness for their parents and vice versa. It is also quite clear that giving birth and having a child creates people, individuals that we hope become self-conscious, self-reliant, rational beings, with a sense of morality, kindness, cooperation and intellectual curiosity, that develop emotional competency, and their own opinions, values, beliefs and actions.

Regardless of our nature, the values we instill, the environment we provide, or the examples we set forth, we need to remember and respect that we can't control our children when they grow up and become of age, no matter how noble and loving our intentions and actions have been, or how hard we might try to help them. And, we certainly can't control everything, even in our own personal lives. But, more importantly, what we can control is how we react to everything, which includes our children, no matter how easy or difficult they may be.

In conclusion, I think most parents would agree that parenthood itself is far from simple or easy, but often comes with relatively more benefits than drawbacks, and can lead to a richer, more meaningful, purposeful, fuller, rewarding, and a happier life.

Psychologist Edward Hoffman says, despite the undeniable conflicts that often exist between parents and their children, I'm convinced that this special relationship anchors our most basic capacity to love, nurture, and to befriend others.

Whether we experience parenthood or not, happiness or unhappiness is a choice which relies heavily upon one's attitude and one's perception, regardless of our nature, our differences, our similarities or our circumstances.

Although the ability to choose happiness or anything else may sound simple as noted above, and is certainly easy to say, let's be very clear that choosing happiness, having or adopting kids, responsible parenting, eating healthy, daily exercise, developing good habits and good relationships, being at the top of your game, or accomplishing anything worthwhile in life, involves more than choices. It requires hard work, planning, knowledge, sacrifice and dedication.

It is important to note that the realization and the fulfillment of the intended outcomes of your choices will simply not just happen on their own, or come to fruition just because you choose them. Successfully accomplishing the intended outcomes of your choices, like parenthood itself, is far from simple or easy.

So, when someone says "it's simply your choice", it doesn't mean it's easy; ask anyone who struggles with their children, their weight, substance abuse, school/learning, relationships, depression, and so on.

Making the right choices in life is critically important, but it's only the first step in the process needed to accomplish one's objectives, to challenge one's obstacles, to maintain one's well-being, and to help one and their children cope with the many difficulties, uncertainties, and questions that you and your children will invariably encounter throughout your lives.

The hard thing is not making a decision in life, it's thinking about the consequences of what you have decided.

It's important to note that our happiness and our life satisfaction can be influenced by, but cannot come exclusively from our children or any other external source. Ultimately it must come from within oneself. Learning to make the right choices and learning to love your life - with or without children - is the key to one's happiness.





DO WE ALL VALUE THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS AS A WORTHY GOAL?

I suspect there are very few values and goals that all people can absolutely and unanimously agree on in life. Each one of us have our own value and belief system. Based on both, our nature and our nurturing, many of us may have varied or similar common values and beliefs. But there will be subtle, if not significant differences for each individual. Especially with the environmental, social, and cultural dissimilarities that exist throughout our world; besides the disparities that exist in one's intelligence and awareness, in one's perceptions and experiences, and one's emotional and psychological well-being.

Naïvely, I thought the pursuit of happiness may be something the vast majority of people would agree, is both a worthy and compelling objective. After all, who doesn't want their life to be filled with joy and happiness? However, when I asked my sister to read the draft of this book, because I value her opinion, surprisingly, I could sense a real reluctance, and even an irritation in her mannerisms in response to my request. Nonetheless, I gave my sister Susan the draft and asked her if she would review it during her flight back to Seattle.

My sister is a wonderful person. Usually, she does not hesitate to provide help and support any time, especially when asked by family, friends and loved ones.

As it turns out, my sister never provided any feedback. She never mentioned or even acknowledged the draft I asked her to review or subject matter involved. This was uncharacteristic of her. She usually looks for every opportunity to help, praise, and encourage others, especially the people she cares about.

I discovered many months later, during her next visit to stay with us in Boston, that she didn't read even one word of the draft. After some coaxing regarding this issue, her reluctant and unexpected response to me was, "I don't give a damn about happiness, and I have zero interest in the subject." She was not only indifferent to the subject of happiness, she gave me the impression she felt pressured, annoyed and even distressed by my request to discuss or even think about happiness, never mind read a book about it.

It seems that certain people, which apparently includes many introverts like my sister, "Are not driven to seek big hits of positive emotional arousal - they'd rather find meaning than bliss - making them relatively immune to the search for happiness. In fact, the cultural emphasis on happiness these days, may actively threaten their mental health." according to psychologist Laurie Helgoe, in her article entitled, *Revenge of the Introverts*.

Helgoe further notes that a psychology paper entitled, *Come on, Get Happy: The Ironic Effects of the Pursuit of Happiness*, by psychologists Maya Tamir and Iris Mauss, states that the pressure to be happy actually reduces happiness for all people. Mauss also said, "We found that when we prime people to value happiness more, they become more unhappy and depressed."

So, it appears that my sister's feelings are far from unique. Happiness is in fact, not something everyone is openly looking for and wants more of.

Thinking about, and emphasizing the value of one's happiness may make one less happy. And, even if it does make one less happy, it should not imply that one does not have, or may not realize an innate wish to be happy or happier, even if you don't consciously realize or openly admit to it. Though the relationship between introspection and one's happiness may be unclear, it seems the deeper understanding we have of happiness, the more likely we are to appreciate and enrich our own well-being; and that of those around us as well.

Understanding is the psychological process that allows you to think about, and deal with the subject matter more adequately. It improves your reasoning, judgment, comprehension and insight. Therefore, your interest, appreciation and awareness of happiness, as with many things in life, will probably be enhanced with more or adequate understanding. Besides one's understanding, the more motivated and enthused you are about anything, the more likely you are to find benefit from, and be rewarded by this improved stimulation, interest and knowledge. Even if my sister did read the draft, because of her lack of desire or interest, she is less likely to enjoy and benefit from the knowledge, insight or understanding she might gain otherwise. This seems to be normal human behavior. We tend to pay attention to information that: is salient or surprises us and stimulates our interest and attention; or we have been taught to value; or is consistent with our beliefs about ourselves and the world; and we tend to avoid information that we feel is not salient; or does not grab our attention; or is contrary to our beliefs, interests, objectives and values.

As noted earlier, my sister is far from unique in this regard. Many people like my sister, and a number of psychologists to some extent, have apparently become turned-off by the so called "Be happy or else!" philosophy. Like my sister, some seem to be displeased or even distressed by the attendant cultural and self-help industry emphasis on happiness, and the corresponding pressure to value happiness more than they feel is warranted.

Happiness is only a part, albeit a special and significant part of the overall study and the science of subjective well-being and positive psychology. It entails more than just one's emotional experience of joy, pleasure or happiness. It encompasses the many aspects related to life satisfaction, and how people evaluate and can improve their lives.

Nonetheless, our individual life's goals, ambitions, purpose and desires are most always geared to enhancing our own and/or our loved one's well-being, in some form or fashion. And if these aspirations are fulfilled, I think we all believe that the desired results will make us happier. And, if in fact that is the case, it seems that we all harbor a desire to be happy whether we choose to consciously or openly acknowledge it or not. Lyubomirsky says, recognizing our natural inclination or desire to be happy is not only an important or meaningful recognition, it is a worthwhile goal that we all have a right to pursue, and the ability to achieve.

However, when we become preoccupied or obsessed, and compulsively and/or unremittingly pursue anything to an unhealthy extreme, whether it's achieved and especially if it's not achieved, it will usually end up causing disappointment.

Even when we accomplish our objectives, all of our original expectations are often not met, especially when striving excessively, beyond reason and convention. Some unexpected negative consequences, along with unattainable, unrealistic, idealistic or escalating expectations are all too common in this regard, and will frequently result in disappointment and frustration. These are the root causes of much of our unhappiness; whether it's related to the people we care about or the goals we pursue.

Unless it's a crucial situation, we should aim for moderation and flexibility when establishing our goals and our expectations rather than trying to set our sights on extremes and idealism. This more pragmatic and more realistic strategy can help prevent disappointment and frustration associated with our many imperfections, and our tendency to rely on unrealistic and idealistic expectations of ourselves, the people we care about, the goals we set, and what we expect out of life. Flannery O'Connor said, to expect too much is to have a sentimental, Pollyanna view of life, and this is a softness that often ends in bitterness.

Managing our expectations more realistically is one of the critical strategies that will help us live a happier, less frustrating and more satisfying life.

Also, we should not lose sight of the process. Remember, it's the journey, and not the destination that provides meaning and growth. Besides, we can only experience joy and happiness now, in the present. When we become preoccupied or obsessed with the end result only, we tend not to derive pleasure and contentment from the process of what we're trying to accomplish, and how or who we're trying to accomplish it with, or accomplish it for. James Oppenheim said, "The foolish man seeks happiness in the distance, the wise grow it under their feet."

We often look past living and enjoying what's in the present, and postpone our happiness for something further down the road. In other words, the journey is your life, where you experience your happiness and all the other emotions and aspects of your life, moment by moment. The destination, your goal, is only a brief moment, an end or terminal point of intention or desire. It's true. It's not what you get by reaching your goal that counts, it's what you become by trying.

The journey, the effort, the progress, the adventure, the joy, the sacrifice, both the successes and failures, and what you've learned, as well as the resilience, skills and wisdom you've gained, and the connections and choices you've made as a part of the process, is what makes you more competent, self assured and complex. It also provides the meaningful growth that brings you more joy, fulfillment, and happiness. Wayne Dyer said, it's kind of like dancing. Your purpose is not to get to a certain place on the floor, or just to finish the dance, it's to enjoy each step along the way.

Contemplating and planning for the future, committing to and making progress toward your goals, and learning from your past, is critically important, but don't lose sight of the journey and living in the present. We shouldn't hesitate to enjoy our memories, look forward to our future and the completion of our goals, but all we really have right now is the present moment. Savor the here and now, the precious and irreplaceable moments never to be repeated again. Embrace it while you can, don't let it escape you, enjoy life when it's happening.

Our life is made up of the sum of our present moments, and each moment provides an opportunity for conscious choice. Make the most of them. Making the right choices is important to life satisfaction and happiness. If we think rationally, regardless of the outcome, by making the right choices, providing enough effort, and accepting that each one of us is flawed and imperfect, and there is some randomness in life and circumstances beyond our control, then we should never have regrets about our good intentions, the right choices and other principled acts of volition that one has chosen.

Finally, the pursuit of happiness is something of a misnomer. It is a psychological state that is not pursued directly. It's more of a by-product of how you choose and manage to work, play, love and live.

Happiness is an emotion. Like other strong feelings and effective states of consciousness, such as joy, sorrow, fear, hate, or the like, it's subjectively experienced. It's a conscious mental reaction to the connections you make or don't make, and how you perceive, react to, engage with, and manage relevant relationships, circumstances, events, activities, work, and other life experiences.

We've all heard the saying that happiness is a choice. But it can arise spontaneously rather than through conscious effort. There is nothing wrong with spontaneous, short-lived, or other transient positive emotions. The more positive emotions we experience, regardless of the duration, the happier we will become. However, enduring happiness like all long-term, sustainable, worthwhile things in life is not spontaneous, effortless or easy. It is usually the result of intention, conscious choice and effort, stability, hard work, persistence, developing the right mindset, and doing the right things. It also requires making the right choices throughout our lives.

Conscious choice is a gift that carries great responsibility. Dr. Scout Cloud Lee says, " When we acknowledged that all of life is sacred, and that each act is an act of choice, and therefore sacred, then life is a sacred dance lived consciously each moment. When we live at this level, we participate in the creation of a better world." Remember mindfulness. It will help you live at this thoughtful, careful, and attentive level of consciousness and awareness. More importantly, it will help you make the right choices.

Enduring happiness involves the choice to consciously change and manage your state of mind.





WHAT REALLY MAKES US WHO WE ARE?

There are many factors in your life that contribute to who you are. One's unique nature and one's nurturing are likely among some of the most critical ones. However, the enormous range of possibilities of who we are capable of becoming is immeasurably great.

I believe the primary determinant of who we become in life individually, is the product of, and is directly connected to the choices we make. Furthermore, the choices we make and the actions we take are strongly influenced by one's nurturing. This includes our acquired (i.e. learned) characteristics, which involves our thought process and the belief system one develops as a result of one's environment.

Each of us is unique in our own way, and each of us is capable of realizing our full potential by making the right choices, and taking responsibility for one's choices, right or wrong.

"I am responsible. Although I may not be able to prevent the worst from happening, I am responsible for my attitude toward the inevitable misfortunes that darken life. Bad things do happen; how I respond to them defines my character and the quality of my life. I can choose to sit in perpetual sadness, immobilized by the gravity of my loss, or I can choose to rise from the pain and treasure the most precious gift I have – life itself." ...Walter Anderson

Victor Frankl said, *"When we can no longer change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."*

What Frankl and Anderson are saying is, you can't control or be responsible for everything, but you can control and you are responsible for your choices and how you react to everything. You have the power. This power is your free will. Exercising or not exercising your free will is your choice and more importantly your responsibility, and it is what makes you who you are.

You have the power to make things happen; to not feel victimized or become immobilized by the inevitable misfortunes that we all experience as human beings. You have the power to experience more joy and happiness. You have the power to move forward in a positive direction, out of the darkness, and into the light; to not let adversity and the external world drag you down or dictate your emotions. You have the power and responsibility to control and manage your own self-development, and to help you achieve the life you want, deserve, and can't wait to live. You have the power to let go of your internal resistance, your fear or doubt, your restrictive or definitive nature, and limiting beliefs; to let go of anger, resentment, and other negative and counterproductive emotions and attachments, or toxic people that bring you down. You have the power to overcome challenges or obstacles that hold you back from:

making progress, pushing your self-imposed boundaries, and fulfilling your acquired and innate abilities, gifts, and talents. You have the power to be fully alive, joyful, to find meaning and support your higher purpose in life. You have the power to commit to continually bettering yourself; to make a positive difference in this world; to feel love, fairness, compassion; to be grateful for what you have, and as Natalie Ledwell recommends, to seek the company of like-minded individuals that share your passions, and/or principles and values, and inspire you to be better.

You know what you are, you know what you can be, the choice is yours.

Our nature and nurturing, which includes our thoughts and beliefs are intertwined and combined they greatly influence who we are. But in the end, it's our choices that ultimately determine who we become. Our thoughts, beliefs and decisions affect the ways that our human potential is actualized, being helped or hindered by good or bad choices.

Denis Waitley adds, a sign of wisdom and maturity is when you come to terms with the realization that your decisions cause your rewards and consequences. You are responsible for your life, and your ultimate success depends on the choices you make.

Choice is the right, and your power or opportunity to choose. Choice involves preference for one's decisions, beliefs and for one's course of action over another. Free will is the ability to make choices.

From my experience, poor choices or abnormal decision making seem to be one of the basic symptoms of an unhappy and emotionally distraught life. Theodore Roosevelt said, if you could kick the person in the pants responsible for most of your trouble, you wouldn't sit for a month. Your troubles and unhappiness are often the result of your own bad choices.

Free will allows us the opportunity to choose for ourselves, so we can learn, grow and evolve, and ideally become a better person. We can learn from both our good choices and bad, our successes and our failures, but there are consequences. So, the choices and decisions that you make do matter. I believe they ultimately determine your destiny - things we can actually shape and alter by our choices - and by extension, one's choices can not only shape one's life path, they can affect the lives of others, especially those around you. Decisions determine destiny. William Jennings Bryan wrote, "Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved." You get to decide.

Inevitably, we become what we believe and do. We are the total sum of our choices and actions. It's our choices that make us who we are.

What we think, or what we know, or what we believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only consequence is what we do; rightfully declares John Ruskin. But, what we do is based on the choices we make. Mac Anderson points out, you are always one choice away from changing your life. The analogy we often hear is similar: The journey may be long, but it always starts with a single step.

To further Mac Andersons' relevant observation on this subject, Denis Waitley insightfully notes, there are two primary choices in life; to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them.

Denis Waitley's two primary choices in life noted above, by extension lead us to two questions identified by Ajit Singh in his article entitled, *How your ego may be ruining your health and happiness*. Singh says, our ego often comes in the way of us accepting the reality of situations and looking at things rationally, not just emotionally. When something that we don't like happens, we resist it. He goes on to say, if you keep your ego out of the picture and ask yourself two questions, you will be in a better situation.

- 1st Question: Can [and should] I do anything about what has happened? If yes, do it. If nothing can [and should] be done accept the situation as soon as you can.

- 2nd Question: Can I learn anything from what has happened? If yes, learn it as soon as you can; [and apply this insight appropriately in the future, if and when necessary]. Otherwise, let it go without regret.

When asking the initial question, which is the title of this chapter, one might at the outset ask, besides our genetic makeup, where does it all start? *What really makes us who we are?*

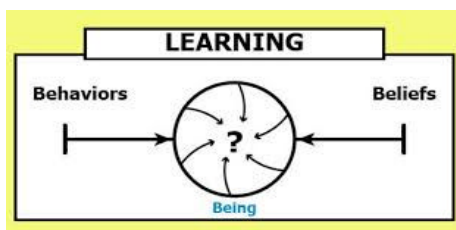
Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said it starts with one's thinking. He said: *Watch your thoughts, for they become your words. Watch your words, for they become your actions. Watch your actions, for they become your habits. Watch your habits, for they become your character. And watch your character, for it becomes your destiny. What we think, we become.*

The nature of thinking and how to manage it regarding one's decision-making process, which includes one's own way of manipulating information, one's reasoning and judgment can be quite complex. However, the basic thought process of linear thinking progression noted above appears to be easy to understand, not complicated and seems reasonable when you break it down successively. If it all starts with one's thoughts, and if no one can limit or control another's thoughts exclusively, it would follow that no other can limit or control what one becomes exclusively, except oneself.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought. This construct in question however, is not to be taken in its most literal sense i.e. I can think hard that I want to be Superman each and every day, but will I be faster than a speeding bullet or able to leap tall buildings in a single bound? Rather than it's literal definition, the product of this constructs' reality by present neuroscientific research seems to be that one's mind is malleable and can be conditioned, and it starts with one's thoughts, notwithstanding of how they are created. The kind of thoughts we put our energy into help shape our mind. They do not literally cause us to become what we think; but the essential message here is our thoughts do have a powerful psychological influence on our being. And more importantly, we have the power to change our irrational, maladaptive and counterproductive thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, with the recognition and acceptance of same, we can have the power to change what we become. In other words, I am what I am, but I have the power to choose what I become.

Inherent in human nature arguably, is our freedom to choose, think, decide and act voluntarily, deliberately, and willingly. To consciously select, evaluate and determine our own choices, actions, and maybe one's beliefs. This includes our mental acceptance of and conviction in, or validity of any cognitive content, such as perception, memory, judgment, and reasoning held to be true, or what one believes to be true. The choices you are capable of making regarding your beliefs, whether such beliefs are logical, emotional, spiritual or fallacious, seem to be critically important not only for your cognitive development, but your beliefs, pragmatic based, true, false or otherwise, seem to permeate and affect every aspect of your life on some level.

THE ENORMOUS IMPORTANCE AND POWER OF ONE'S BELIEFS



One definition of belief is a statement, assertion or theory that you accept; or the feeling of being certain that something exists or is true.

Wikipedia defines belief as the state of mind in which a person thinks something to be the case, with or without there being empirical evidence to prove that something is the case with factual certainty. It goes on to say that mainstream psychology and related disciplines have traditionally treated belief as if it were the simplest form of mental representation and therefore one of the building blocks of conscious thought.

Nonetheless, it is my belief that nothing holds more power over our happiness, well-being, and the way we both see, and live our lives, than the beliefs of the mind.

One's beliefs are often used as a basis for one's choosing, deciding and acting.

Developing one's personal belief system involves a cognitive or mental process that determines how one abstracts, filters, and structures information to help one cope with and understand one's perceptions and life experiences.

These experiences include one's observations, activities and other life events, and the concrete (person, group, object, etc.) and abstract (thoughts, theory, information, etc.) aspects of one's life. In other words, it is an organized and insightful way of trying to explain and understand what's happening to one's self and the world around us.

All belief systems offer an explanation of something, based on several factors which include one's knowledge, experience, insight, intuition, and perspective. Beliefs can be held with varying degrees of certitude i.e. one's lifelong, substantive and core beliefs (those which you actively think about and seem certain of) or the ones that may be less pragmatic, intuitive or are only considered more probable than not. Another classification of beliefs is known as dispositional beliefs (those which you may ascribe to but have never previously thought about).

Consciously or unwittingly choosing, affirming, developing and installing your belief system will not only help determine the magnitude of your happiness and well-being, it defines and limits who you are.

It also defines the ideas and principles which you judge to be true.

The beliefs you hold to be true become woven into the fabric of your life, and become one of the integral parts of one's conscious thought, one's experiences, and one's rationale for making one's choices.

Jonathan Wells says, the quality of our life is a reflection of the quality of our beliefs about who we are, and what we are capable of becoming.

Our beliefs are essentially the plans, specifications, and constructs of our world. They become the fundamental building blocks of our reality, and the frame work for how we see our life, and how we view and make sense of the world.

As noted earlier, belief is the confidence, trust or faith one has in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof. Since we cannot know everything with absolute certainty, we all have a need to develop our own belief system.

Our belief system plays to our inherent desire to feel safe and secure. It also plays to our need for sense of purpose and control, essentially giving us a feeling of direction, confidence, certainty and stability.

Our beliefs exert a profound influence on how we think and what we do, and on the way we function to fulfill our desires and needs. Further, they strongly influence, reinforce, and facilitate one's unique belief- based decision making process, and one's sense of meaning.

Belief is a dynamic state of mind, multidimensional in nature, either an intellectual judgment or special feeling, often reinforced by an emotional or spiritual sense of certainty or conviction.

Most people tend to cling to their beliefs, and lifelong, core beliefs die hard. Nonetheless, one's beliefs are subject to change, based on several factors. Such factors can include social and environmental forces as well as one's philosophical and ideological influences, and one's mental attitude and expectations. There is also little doubt that one's experience, values and culture can shape and refine one's belief system. Further, our beliefs develop and can evolve over time through observation, new circumstances, changes in one's perception, experiences, maturity, awareness, knowledge, understanding, conditioning and faith. Beliefs can also arise through or be influenced by our sentiments, feelings and emotions; and one's biological and environmental conditions.

Our beliefs, especially the ones we start to question, the ones that don't quite mesh with our new circumstances, experiences, perceptions of reality or other new information can become far more adaptive through one's critical examination of such suspect beliefs. This includes the rationale and context one uses to support such beliefs.

Changing, restructuring, or extinguishing one's beliefs is predicated on our mindful awareness of such suspect beliefs, and begins with one's uncertainty, doubt, and the questioning of these beliefs, and the results they are producing in your life.

When you realize your life is not working quite right; you're experiencing less satisfaction, more grief, anxiety, anger and frustration; and your beliefs are in conflict with known facts, or they don't seem to serve you or make sense anymore; and your expectations are often wrong; and your decisions are not producing the desired results; it's time to question, reevaluate, or abandon your false, outdated, irrational, incoherent or unsound, counterproductive or limiting beliefs which are repressive or indefensible or negatively impacting your life; then replace or update them with more accurate, rational, effective and empowering beliefs. This critical evaluation process and the installation of the right beliefs can bring you to a new level of consciousness that can help you transform and improve the quality of your decision making and your life on all levels.

When you're thinking rationally and clearly, you will realize that a true or accurate belief will stand up to ongoing and careful examination and the highest scrutiny possible. You will also realize an inaccurate belief will not stand up to such intense examination. An accurate belief will also vastly improve the odds that the results of your decision making will be more effective, meet your reasonable expectations, and help produce the results and create the life you desire.

Get in the habit of questioning your beliefs to help you create the life you desire, and to better serve one's purpose.

The collection of one's mutually supported complex set of beliefs form the structure for one's belief system.

Among other things, our belief system helps define our self-identity and personal sense of reality.

Like our perceptions of reality, the boundaries of our beliefs and the substantive content of our belief system may be limited by one's choice, observations, understanding, knowledge and the confluence of one's experience, logic and emotions. But, both content and boundaries, as well as the reach of one's beliefs, are potentially infinite, and also unique in one's own distinctive way. In other words, the potential range or scope of one's perceptions and beliefs, as well as one's thoughts and actions is immeasurably great, and individually there is no question we are unique, even if we share similar cultures, environments, values and beliefs. The reasoning here is simple and clear; no two people view the world or act exactly the same.

"To every experience, each of us brings our own schemas, attitudes, and expectations. In fact, the process of interpretation guarantees that we will not all form exactly the same impression of the people, places or events that we see; our prior experiences color our current perceptions." according to the *Principles of Social Psychology*.

Further, even though human beings all share a human nature, individually this nature manifests in different ways making one's particular beliefs, thoughts and actions unique in some form or fashion unlike anyone else.

Our beliefs, along with our genetic pre-dispositions play a critical role in helping to establish not only our self-identity, but our happiness set-point, contingent happiness levels, and how we see and choose to respond to the world around us.

Our belief system provides us with a core set of values, ideas and principles which governs our repeating patterns of thought and behavior, and our assumptions and expectations about the way the world works. For the most part, these core values and beliefs help account for our reasoning, attitudes, decisions, and actions, which are all choices formed by our beliefs. Our beliefs are also conscious or unwitting choices, which come about as a result of our upbringing; especially the environmental factors - learning and conditioning - and the social and cultural forces that we are exposed to and influenced by, throughout the course of our lives.

The one's that usually influence and help develop our belief system include our parents, friends, family, and the media, spiritual leaders, teachers, and others whose ideologies become significant in shaping our self-image, and our view of the world around us.

We normally behave in ways, and routinely create situations that consistently support and reinforce our core beliefs. It has been said that individuals in one sense are prisoners of their beliefs. What we value, how we decide, act and behave is largely based on our belief system. As a result, our beliefs become the foundation for our life, and as Buddha said, our life is the creation of our mind.

Often times, it seems we allow the fact that when we don't believe in ourselves and our ability to act willfully, or we don't believe in self-determination and we have a deterministic or fatalistic attitude or belief about life, it can prevent us from moving forward in a more positive, self-assured, more broad minded, creative, flexible and more confident manner.

This belief that our circumstances and one's behavior are predetermined and inevitable, and we have little or no control over it, and we are powerless to do anything other than what we actually do, undermines our sense of empowerment, individual responsibility and accountability.

Fatalism is an attitude of resignation that maintains we have very little or no power to influence the future, and that all events are predetermined by fate, and are therefore unalterable and inevitable.

This fatalistic view can cause unnecessary distress, and inhibit us from achieving our full potential. In other words this limiting belief associated with our lack of confidence of our ability or discretion to choose, is a choice that can cause us to become more anxious, angry, resentful or insecure, and adversely affect how we feel, perform, and how we relate to others, and the world around us; especially if we believe our life is beyond our control and predetermined by others or an all powerful force such as fate.

Renaissance man Peter Voss notes in his article, *The Nature of Free Will*: without freewill, if we ultimately had no control over our goals and choices, if all of our actions were simply the inevitable operation of forces outside of ourselves, if freewill was some kind of illusion, then, to many of us, life would seem bleak indeed. Planning, self-esteem, prescriptive morality, self-control and social responsibility would be quite meaningless.

Behavioral economist and business professor Arthur C. Brooks points out, mental health professionals have known for many years, a perceived lack of personal control often leads to misery; it is terrible to feel you are at the mercy of circumstances or other people.

Psychologists say that one's negative thoughts, negative beliefs and innate negativity bias, or one's foreboding or fatalistic nature can distort one's normal emotional processing, and negatively influence one's sense of self, stability, health and confidence.

Further, negativity and a perceived lack of personal control can colour one's reality, uniqueness and dignity, and inhibit one's functional performance, potential and personal growth.

Psychologists also say a chronic and intense negativity bias can also cause one to constantly over-react in a negative direction. In turn, this can lead to chronic mood and self-esteem problems and disorders which not only feel bad, they can trigger stress consequences, upset, and other negative experiences.

W. Clement Stone says there is little difference in people, but that little difference makes a big difference. The little difference is attitude. The big difference is whether it is positive or negative.

When your mental outlook and the way you view things is positive, and you believe your life is full of potential, opportunity and is within your power to control and change, you tend to behave with a more positive and more confident response and attitude. You also tend not to view challenges or other demanding situations as unscalable obstacles in your path. Then you're able to approach the unpleasant and distressful things in life in a more positive, opportunistic and productive way. You also realize that any obstacle that stands in your way can be circumvented or surmounted with the right attitude, effort and ability.

Your positive thinking brings everything into the realm of possibility.

You are more likely to accomplish your goals by staying positive, optimistic, in control and focused on your objectives.

You also become more productive and resilient by spending your time, energy, and your efforts solving the problem rather than putting your precious time and effort into trying to find fault with someone or something.

Optimism can also help you become psychologically and physiologically healthier, less stressed, become more broad minded and creative, and boost your ability to make more powerful and effective intuitive judgments, broaden your scope of thought and action, become more flexible and adaptive, and keep you moving forward with more confidence and determination.

Neuropsychologist Rick Hanson speculates that stimulating and strengthening positive brain states through the practice of meditation and mindfulness, accompanied with a corresponding relaxation response may actually alter how your genes are expressed, thus reducing the cellular damage of chronic stress and improving one's immune system.

Academic research shows these mindful meditation strategies can be beneficial in furthering the effective development of one's stress management and coping skills. The positive mind-set and other favorable results of meditation can benefit you in many ways.

The regular practice of mindfulness and other meditation techniques can help you embrace whatever comes your way, which includes obstacles and opportunities; providing better control over your emotions and daily behavior; improving one's emotional stability and response to stress; thereby restoring one's calm, and bringing with it increased awareness and inner peace.

In turn this can lead to better physical and mental health and a better quality of life. Besides, experts say there are no reported side effects from practicing mindfulness and meditation except for positive benefits.

On the other hand, when your mental outlook and sense of control is wanting and not positive, when it is one of apprehension and pessimism, your response, attitude and your ability to take action, be effective, influence your own life and take responsibility for it, and for your behavior, it becomes just the opposite i.e. negative, self-sabotaging, lacking a sense of personal control, and you naturally become more stressful. You can also become needlessly and unsparingly critical of yourself, therefore doubting your ability to solve your problems effectively and manage your stress in more productive and healthy ways. You may choose to be negative, constantly complain, over-react, blame others, play the victim, and give up control of your life, but you can never give up responsibility for your life without losing control of it.

When you lose control of your life you tend to be in a heightened state of distress, tentative and uncertain of the way things will go. It is about accepting responsibility, not for the future but for the choices you freely make about the future, according to Dr. Elliot D. Cohen.

Psychologists say your perception or awareness that you are initiating, executing, and controlling your own volitional actions in the world, is essential for you to feel in control of your life, and it plays a vital part in your physical, mental and psychological well-being.

Regarding one's beliefs, Jonathan Wells makes the point that when your mental outlook and your perception of self and of the world validates your beliefs, you feel secure in the fact that your view is the correct one. However, let's not forget that your own views and beliefs are just one's impressions of reality. Your perceptions and beliefs are only a relative, partial and subjective picture or feeling respectively, of how things presently seem to be; and unfortunately, they are not always correct or accurate. The effectiveness of our decision making can be one of the bench marks in gauging the accuracy of our beliefs.

Steve Pavlina states in his article, *Installing Empowering Beliefs*: None of us make decisions based on reality itself. We make decisions based on our beliefs about reality. When our beliefs are accurate, our decisions will tend to be effective, producing the results we desire. But, when our beliefs are inaccurate, our decisions will often be ineffective, producing undesired results.

Ideally, we should make decisions and adopt beliefs that have been sufficiently scrutinized with as much certainty as possible; and that will benefit and empower your success, personal growth, happiness and self-esteem.

Research in body/mind medicine is showing that we can either support or obstruct our happiness and well-being by our beliefs, activities, and behaviors.

Everything we value, believe-in, decide and do, both positive and negative, reflects our beliefs, and helps build the foundation, that forms the events, we experience in our future. Our belief system helps create this self-fulfilling prophecy, and helps influence our perceptions of the world. It also helps regulate our minds controlled and automatic processing systems. This includes our conscious thinking creative mind, and our more powerful cogent subconscious mind. The mind that silently, continuously, and instinctively directs our lives for us, and helps govern our biology, emotions, attitude and behavior.

It is important to note that studies show one's beliefs and subconscious strongly influence, but do not necessarily predetermine all our choices, course of events or one's destiny.

It seems that humans have a strong sense of freedom. Like many, I will venture to say most people believe that you are ultimately responsible for your choices and actions, for the reasons noted herein, which arguably includes one's free will. Therefore, your behavior, your future, your course of events, and every decision you make is not necessarily and not totally predetermined by your inclinations, your biology or genetic blueprint, by necessity or your environment, by others, or even what reason suggests. Because you have the freedom and ability to make distinct choices unimpeded by certain prevailing factors, together these particular circumstances or conditions will allow one to primarily control one's own course of events.

Studies show that what we do, or how we decide to react in life, does not always have to be driven by our nature or ones predispositions; and generally within more open societies like our own, and within reasonable limits, we are not coerced from the outside to act against our will. However, there are certain necessities and conditions one cannot control or escape within oneself, even within such open societies where freedom of belief and a multitude of choice exists. Furthermore, according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "There are always external constraints on the range of options we can meaningfully try to undertake"

In summary, acting with freedom of will repeatedly, day in and day out, with an intellectual capacity of rationality that produces highly adaptive outcomes, plus an awareness of relative alternative choices and their respective consequences, logically allows us to reconcile the fact that, I could have chosen or done otherwise, even against all inclinations.

Hilary Bok, a philosopher at the Johns Hopkins University believes, if one is capable of stepping back from one's existing motivations and habits and making a reasoned decision among various alternatives, then it seems logical that one is capable of believing in the concept of free will.

Therefore, regardless of one's inclinations, genetic blueprint or the subconscious minds profound influence on one's emotions, thoughts and behavior, neuroscientific studies suggest people can consciously choose to override their predispositions; that reasonable individuals have the capacity to act independently, to make certain choices that are not the product of just instinct, emotion, habit or causal chains, choices that are significantly free or undetermined.

The above noted suppositions are some of the factors or rationale one might use for defining certain characteristics associated with confirming the existence of free will. And by extension, this rationale further supports an associated and tandem belief regarding free agency, the capacity of individuals to act independently, to make their own free choices, and to be held responsible and accountable for their respective choices and actions.

On a conscious level the will by its nature may seem free considering the above noted suppositions or facts, but it does not necessarily mean there are absolutely no external or internal constraints or circumstances that can impact and inhibit our volitional control. Such constraints can include the physical, psychological, biological and theological factors and influences, or other possible causal reasoning, relationships and beliefs.

What you create in life is usually a reflection of your deeply ingrained belief system. Nicolas Kidd and Hank Schram said in an article entitled, *General Perspectives on Relationships*, "Life is like a mirror. What happens to us on the outside is a reflection of what is going on, on the inside."

It seems that both our internal and external experiences are filtered through our belief system. This includes the meanings we attach to life experiences; how we think, how we use information; and how we remember, respond, and relate to people and events.

It also seems that it is difficult or impossible for anyone to be totally objective about reality. Since our individual realities are idiosyncratic, subjective, often swayed by cognitive biases or dysfunction, and they are actively constructed in the mind.

We are often caught in our own perspective. We don't always see things the way *they* are, we see things the way *we* are. Our reasoning, perceptions and memories can be error-riddled and manipulated by one's beliefs and biases. Psychologists call it cognitive bias. These cognitive biases or mistakes in reasoning usually happens outside of our conscious awareness, where our thoughts, our particular way of thinking, our unique belief system, and our way of looking at things can be biased, exaggerated or based on flawed reasoning which includes irrational thoughts or logical fallacies which misrepresent the facts. These unconscious biases often occur in our brain as a result of holding onto one's preferences and beliefs regardless of any contrary and factual data or actual information.

There are numerous cognitive biases that can lead to systematic deviations from a standard of rationality or good judgment, according to Wikipedia. These common biases or errors in thinking can cause us to make questionable decisions, reach erroneous conclusions, or lead us to make critical mistakes. Further, Wikipedia states that many of these biases affect one's belief system, business and economic decisions, and human behavior.

We apparently have a built-in, innate bias that can favor our own perceptions and memories over actual experiences. Whereas our belief-based perceptions often support and reinforce what we personally believe-in, what we tend to remember, and sometimes what we value or desire, they do not however, necessarily represent what's real or true.

It seems that we are constantly rethinking and sometimes remodeling, romanticizing, idealizing, and emotionally rationalizing our past situations and experiences to fit our present frame of mind, support our views, motivation, purpose, and our current belief system, no matter how rational or irrational our views, purpose and beliefs may be. Leland R. Beaumont writes in *Emotional Competency*, our minds are wired to select and interpret evidence supporting the hypothesis and the belief that "I'm OK". He maintains we work hard to sustain our essential beliefs which includes the fundamental belief that "I'm OK". He says self-justification is deeply ingrained in each of us; that mental schema makes it easier for us to perceive information that supports what we already know or believe. He explains our brain distorts reality to increase our self-esteem through self-justification. We often ignore the bad and highlight the good to increase our hope, reduce our anxiety, and to defend and support both, what we want, and what we believe in.

Furthermore, our belief system according to neuropsychology research is powerfully influenced by our brain's proclivity for attachment. This emotional bonding or attachment is a feeling that binds one to people, places, ideologies, and the body of ideas that reflect our perception of reality to render it worthy and acceptable with one's beliefs regardless of whether they are true, factual or not. This natural propensity or inclination for attachment, and the belief that "I'm OK" can influence one's thought process to become more emotionally and subjectively biased, and critically affect one's objective decision making, logic, rationality and judgment.

Why are we predisposed to this emotional bonding, and subjectively biased affective condition?

Dr. Alex Lickerman says the answer lies in neuropsychology's growing recognition of just how irrational our rational thinking can be. He further states our brains become intimately emotionally entangled with ideas we come to believe are true, however we came to that conclusion. He maintains that this emotional dimension to our rational judgment explains a gamut of measurable biases. These attachments and emotional biases can affect one's conscious thought, objectivity, logic, intellect, and of course the accuracy or validity of one's beliefs.

Naturally, people routinely listen to their own beliefs which includes their respective moral sense and the belief that "I'm OK", and they often assume that others share these same beliefs. For these and other reasons, we are most always convinced that our particular beliefs are the correct ones.

Therefore, according to Gerhard Adam, we tend to justify and defend our particular belief system vigorously as being the only means by which one can judge or experience the "truth" or "reality". We often process information intuitively, based on one's current perceptions and expectations, but not necessarily based on reality.

We may rely on intuition and expectations during our information-processing mode because it seems more efficient, and it takes less mental effort, deliberation, reasoning and analytical thought.

According to an article in The New York Times, psychologist Jonathan Haidt maintains that we were not necessarily designed to listen to reason. One's thoughts and decisions are not always logical or objective, and are often made from needed feelings, intensive and strong compelling emotions or intuition.

Haidt argues people are fundamentally intuitive, not rational. He says when you ask people moral questions, they reach conclusions quickly and produce reasons later, only to justify what they've decided or believe; often based on emotion, instinct or gut feelings, not necessarily what's intellectually reasonable or right.

Intuition aside, he goes on to say, without question, people do reason. However, their arguments aim to support their conclusions, not yours. Psychologists call this confirmation bias. This is the tendency to search for, interpret, focus on and remember information in a way that confirms one's perceptions, biases and beliefs, not necessarily to confirm what's factual, real or right. In other words, it is a specific psychological phenomenon in which individuals select information that aligns with their attitudes, feelings, beliefs, or behaviors not only to affirm what they already believe or have done, but to reduce psychologically uncomfortable cognitive dissonance, and actively avoid conflicting beliefs, situations and information likely to increase it.

Dr. Michael Shermer concurs. He says, after forming our beliefs we then defend, justify and rationalize them with a host of intellectual reasons, cogent arguments, and at times with plausible, yet less credible, unchallenged and emotional explanations. Like Haidt, he says beliefs come first, explanations for beliefs follow.

Shermer goes on to say we can't help believing. Our brains evolved to connect the dots of our world into meaningful patterns that explain why things happen. These meaningful patterns become beliefs. He explains that once beliefs are formed the brain begins to look for and find confirmatory evidence in support of those beliefs, which adds an emotional boost of further confidence in those beliefs and thereby accelerates the process of reinforcing them; and round and round the process goes in a positive feedback loop of belief confirmation.

This deductive reasoning and validation process, whether it's conclusive, accurate or not, helps to eliminate the cognitive dissonance, because as a rule our minds prefer certainty and we hate uncertainty and the unsettled anxiety and lack of conviction that often comes with it. This mental and psychological process not only impacts one's beliefs, but it seems to impinge upon our free will.

Additionally, your limited experiences, moral understanding, emotions, and finite knowledge and beliefs can convince you that the answers to moral or other questions that you are pondering seem obvious or undeniable, even when they are not; that there is a clear distinction between right and wrong, some type of moral clarity, when at times there is not, and you don't need any further information because you already intuitively and quickly decided what you believe is right, despite further relevant information or facts that could prove otherwise.

We are not as good at challenging our own beliefs, as we are at challenging other's.

Professor Brooks notes, we also convince ourselves that we are right, by avoiding questions where the expected answers are not what we believe or want to hear. We can also expend an inordinate amount of time and effort trying to disprove ideas that contradict our current beliefs or purpose, especially if they might generate serious consequences contrary to one's own beliefs and self-interests. It is a process referred to as disconfirmation bias. The idea that people are unable to evaluate evidence independently of prior beliefs, especially when such beliefs are reinforced by strong emotional conviction, and/or one's self interest.

Although there is a dichotomy in terms regarding these two particular biases, i.e. the negative argument to disconfirm a belief vs. the positive argument to confirm a belief, it is important to note that one's disconfirmation bias supplements and usually complements and reinforces the objectives of one's confirmation bias in this respect. These two biases work in tandem. But, as Dr. Lickerman notes in his article, *The Two Kinds of Belief*, both of these particular biases simultaneously compromise our ability to judge ideas on their merits and the evidence for or against them.

So, it's human nature, which includes the brains innate capacity and inclination to look for information that fuels our preexisting views, and to notice, rationalize and overemphasize things that confirm one's beliefs and biases (confirmation bias), and ignore, deny, minimize, or dismiss what doesn't (disconfirmation bias), no matter how valid such conflicting or contradicting the evidence may be.

It seems that these particular biases are one of the reasons why eye-witness testimony is often wrong. Our beliefs are so powerful that they are capable of dominating our experiencing self. A bias called subjective validation or belief preservation. In other words, this belief preservation bias involves one's perception that something is true, if one's beliefs demand it be true, whether it is or not, regardless of the evidence.

For the most part, our beliefs become our reality. So, choose your beliefs carefully.

This is important to contemplate, because as noted here, our happiness, reasoning, perceptions, memories, self-image, and all of the individual characteristic ways we respond to the world, as well as our enduring patterns of thought and behavior, stem from our core beliefs, help develop our core values, and become part of our belief system, and our way of life.

As we grow, mature, learn, and gain wisdom, and as our awareness about reality expands with the advent of new experiences and further knowledge, we are able to gradually understand more of what life, is really all about. This process allows us to improve, develop, and progressively reassess our belief system, and expand one's consciousness, awareness and concept of reality. Thus, help rid ourselves of irrational cognitive and emotional biases, inaccurate assumptions, and other false propositions, misguided, delusional or self-defeating behaviors and beliefs; and replace them with new, enlightened ones that will better support and help accommodate higher stages of growth and development.

Furthermore, as we evaluate and develop our core beliefs, and learn to understand, improve and appreciate our core self - the principles by which we live, our ethos or character, who we really are - we can heighten our self esteem, and we may also experience a greater sense of inherent worthiness, deserving of a deeper, happier, and more fulfilling life.

By the way, the most fundamental aspect of our core self as it relates to our happiness is our self-esteem. If we don't appreciate, enjoy, and have a good opinion of ourselves, how can we be happy? For the most part, happy people are optimistic, content, and self-assured; they feel good about themselves and about life in general. A positive and healthy perception of oneself, and one's role in life, is important if not essential for achieving enduring happiness.

Why are self-awareness and self-respect important and relevant to our well-being?

Because, without sufficient awareness of one's own values, passions, emotions and feelings, biases, attitudes and behaviors, and without a proper respect for one's own conduct and regard for the dignity of one's own character, achieving a meaningful and happy life will be most difficult or impossible.

Also, don't confuse beliefs with wishes, reality or the truth. Remember these aphorisms: "The easiest thing of all is to deceive oneself, for what a man wishes, he generally believes to be true" - Demosthenes. And Roman philosopher Seneca aptly noted, "Eyes will not see when the heart wishes them to be blind. Desire conceals truth as darkness does the earth".

"If you believe you can or you can't, either way you're right." - Henry Ford

Abraham Lincoln's astute observation was, "People are just as happy as they make up their minds to be" Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius noted, "Life itself is but what you deem it." Yet, if we seek the truth, "A man should look for what is, and not for what he thinks should be." - Albert Einstein

Lastly, if you want to help overcome adversity, become more successful, achieve your goals, and enhance your belief system and the quality of your life, you may want to follow Charles Kettering's advise, "Believe and act as if it were impossible to fail."

What Kettering is telling us is, it starts with our beliefs, but we must act on them, and I add, with a realistic and reasonable mindset, not just with a positive or Pollyanna attitude, and move forward. He says the more you act on your beliefs, the more you believe you can do it. He maintains this practice builds experience, confidence, and determination. Then you realize you can do it, and through these character strengths you are able to subdue any fears or self-doubt, and overcome our natural tendency or bias to be negative.

So, when you continue to believe and act as if it were impossible to fail, with the right effort, ability and persistence it can become both a habit and a self-fulfilling prophecy.

However, as noted earlier, one can believe with firm confidence and with great resolution in one's beliefs or goals. You can develop great enthusiasm and an unfailing positive attitude too. But, the desired outcome of one's goals and one's beliefs will be negative, if one's beliefs are not credible or one's goals are not capable of happening, no matter how malleable or desirably conditioned one's mind can become.

Faith alone can certainly motivate or convince one to believe in something or someone regardless of evidence. But we need to realize that we should not make decisions and adopt beliefs or try to accomplish goals until they have been sufficiently scrutinized with as much certainty as possible.

Just believing in something, without critical examination, especially if it is not valid or possible, no matter how hard and long one believes, will not make it so. The kind of thoughts or beliefs we put our energy into, notwithstanding of how they are created, help shape our mind. Our beliefs do not literally cause us to become what we think, or turn a false belief into a reality.

But faith and other abstract beliefs is a whole nother matter. Human history has shown that faith can give one the courage to find purpose when reason and all else fails. Another thing human history has shown is, "Everyone believes they're right" when it comes to their faith and/or their beliefs. As noted earlier, we work hard to sustain our essential beliefs, which I add, includes the fundamental belief that "I'm right". This self-rationalization seems to be deeply ingrained in each of us; our mental schema makes it easier for us to perceive information that we already perceive to be true or believe in.

What you are will show in what you do. - Thomas A. Edison

"Taint what a man don't know that hurts him; it's what he knows that just ain't so." - Frank Hubbard

Finally, research shows we have an innate ability to experience new and sudden, deeply penetrating and meaningful understandings, revelations or changes in our lives regardless of one's prevailing beliefs and biases.

Flashes of insight, personal transformation and profound transcendent experiences have been inherent and important characteristics associated with humanities history and its evolution. Psychologists say these flashes of insight can be provoked during times of crisis, but are often initiated by some simple, commonplace occurrence.

For example, these moments of sudden insight or realization could be stimulated by the birth of a child, or the death of a loved one, something profound or of wonderment that you've seen, heard or read about.

These insightful experiences come to us in an instant, usually when the conscious mind or ego is looking the other way.

These exceptional moments of revelation often occur after we exhaust the intellectual mind and our conventional way of doing things. Some might call this "thinking out of the box", when the intuitive mind is at the forefront and most acute and more capable of transcending limitations so we can experience a different level of consciousness.

Throughout the history of mankind there have been countless examples of these manifestations, revelations and sudden insights into reality which have left indelible marks on, and have changed not only individual lives, but the course of history itself.

Some of these pivotal moments are more profound than others.

Each sudden cognitive or spiritual insight, or noteworthy moment we experience, no matter how subtle, can play an important part in our life. They can change or reorder one's priorities, values and beliefs, alter one's world view, shift or expand one's perspective or consciousness.

An example of such a pivotal, "aha moment" of clarity noted earlier, was when former Marine Lt. Bobby Muller was told that he would be paralyzed for the rest of his life as a result of the injury he received in battle during the Vietnam war.

While contemplating this realization, his sudden eureka moment came to fruition when he said, "Now I completely get it, I've been given a second chance."

He went on to say, "Once you realize your life is a flickering flame, you become desperate to find meaning and tie into something bigger and more profound, that's about doing good, that's about love, that's about service in the fellowship of man."

Because of this "aha moment", and because he experienced such a sense of personal growth, and a higher level of functioning, and a new appreciation of life as a result of his post traumatic growth, he was able to overcome his adversity, move forward in a positive fashion with greater understanding, and become a leading advocate for veterans' lives, and he founded several Vietnam veteran foundations along with The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which won the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

Google "aha moments" and you will find thousands of similar examples in business, education, religion, personal life and so on.

I believe most if not all of us have experienced such a striking realization or pivotal moment of clarity, discovery or transformation in our life.

Neuroscientific studies show we are wired to have these pivotal moments.

These spontaneous and instinctive moments of exceptional clarity, understanding and discernment are thought provoking and usually take place or come to mind unexpectedly. They can be quite powerful and even life changing.

According to professor Norman Denzin, they can alter the meaning structures in a person's life. Former Marine Lt. Bobby Muller's epiphany during his moment of crisis and sudden realization is a perfect example of this.

Experts say it may be difficult or impossible to predict when these sudden insights will occur. Nonetheless, studies indicate that particular environmental conditions such as the color of the room you are in, the sounds you hear, and other environmental influences or stimulus information you receive can affect your mood and your state of mind.

Changes in environmental conditions can affect brain chemistry. Therefore, a compatible and appropriate physical, mental and emotional environment could foster or make these types of eureka moments possible or more likely.

Additionally, psychologists say that it is possible to mentally prepare for, and not just wait or hope for such moments of revelations and great insight.

Research shows our mood can play a part in stimulating these insightful moments and changes in our level of consciousness.

In addition to one's environmental conditions, studies show that when you're feeling happy, you're usually relaxed and have a sense of freedom and safety, and it tends to open the mind to more creativity and insight.

Although flashes of insight can be provoked during times of anxiety and crisis as noted above, when you're unhappy, anxious or fearful the mind is not relaxed, you may feel worrisome or threatened, then your scope of attention and awareness usually narrows, and these negative emotions or worrisome feelings create psychological conditions less conducive to eureka moments.

Furthermore, psychologists say if our mind is primed and ready beforehand, if we exercise the use of mindfulness-based practices, by focusing our insight and concentrated awareness on the present, and intuitively tuning into our self-knowledge, we can more easily recognize and grasp their true meaning, relevance and importance when these spontaneous and unexpected revelations occur.

When we are mentally and emotionally prepared and trust our ability to discern the true nature of a given situation when it's happening, we can become more effortlessly aware of, and then instinctively act on these moments of sudden realization, inspiration, recognition or comprehension, and move forward in a more insightful, spontaneous, non-judgmental and thoughtful way. These exceptional moments of clarity and insight, what some might consider an epiphany or "Aha Moment!" can help reinforce a newly expanded sense of consciousness and self, and allow the solution to a previous incomprehensible problem, concept or situation to become transparent and obvious. Some of these defining moments of clarity or shifts in consciousness where you transcend your normal perception and gain real wisdom, understanding and truth, can change not only one's life, but the course of civilization.

"Believe in your moments of revelation, believe in yourself, take action, and watch the world conspire to support you." - Elise Ballar



IF YOU *Believe*
IN YOURSELF
Anything
IS POSSIBLE



WHAT IS OUR BIGGEST AND MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF HAPPINESS?

Besides our beliefs with our self-respect, other people are our biggest and most important source of happiness or unhappiness. So it is wise and fruitful to invest our time and efforts in developing, enhancing, and maintaining close friendships, family relationships, and many acquaintances. These people give meaning and balance to our lives.

Research has found that people with the highest levels of happiness and fewest signs of depression were the ones with strong ties to friends and family. We form these connections not only because of what we do for our friends, family, and others, but because of what they do for us as well. Social skills, connecting with and caring for others, and mutual social support are important factors in the development and growth of these important relationships. We also establish these strong connections with family and friends and others, whose ideologies become significant in shaping our self-image, and our view of the world around us.

Science of the past decade has demonstrated that our connection with people and the need for appreciation, love, companionship, and community is a biological imperative, and is woven deeply into our DNA, according to Dr. Henry S. Lodge.

New research reveals that, feeling connected is essential to a person's health and happiness. The depth of involvement and connection with our self - self-awareness and self-esteem, not self-absorption - and other people, particularly friends and family is most important; but all connections matter. The more engaged in life, and the more connected we become with our self, friends, family, and others, as well as with our work, romance, activities and hobbies, the healthier, happier and more satisfied with life we will become.

The Dalai Lama makes the point that, "A genuine connection with people will also produce a willingness to open ourselves to others, creating a bond, based on our common humanity. Without the feelings of affection and connection with other human beings, particularly in times of great loss, life becomes very hard."

Studies have apparently revealed that people with feigned or inadequate connections to others not only have less relationship satisfaction, and tend to experience less pleasure, more sadness, and live a lonelier life, they are often significantly unhappier people that develop a greater risk of depression. Psychologists say withdrawing from others is a common symptom of depression. And they also say the lack of social contact with others, and the inability to take pleasure in joyful events are the hallmarks of depression.

When it comes to improving our happiness, our lives, and our world it's our fundamental human connection, and the goodness, caring, compassion, kindness, energy and support between people that makes a difference.

"We humans are social beings. We come into this world as a result of others' actions. We survive here in dependence of others. Whether we like it or not, there is barely a moment of our lives when we do not benefit from others' activities. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that most of our happiness (or unhappiness) arises in the context of our relationship with others." - The Dalai Lama.

Jonathan Haidt makes the point in *The Happiness Hypothesis* that interaction with others is important to one's long-term happiness. "We need both the give and the take. We are an ultra-social species, full of emotions, finely tuned for loving, befriending, helping, sharing, and otherwise intertwining our lives with others. Although attachments and relationships can bring us pain, what John Donne and Seneca said respectively, rings true; "No man, woman, or child is an island." "We need others to complete us."

If you are able to think about the welfare of others, you develop a more broad-based view of life, as opposed to a narrow, self-centered view. If your mode of thinking is confined to self-centeredness, according to the Dalai Lama, then anything and everything that happens to you seems to have significance beyond reality. Even a trivial problem may seem unbearable.

"No one can live happily, who has regard to himself alone, and transforms everything into a question of his own utility." - Seneca. John Mason says, if you are only looking out for yourself, look out! The man who believes in and invests in nothing but himself lives in a very small and myopic world. He will find it difficult to be truly happy and successful.

To help improve one's empathy, awareness, gratitude, perspective, expectations, objectivity, and interpersonal relationships, along with developing one's capacity for goodness and purpose, psychologists believe we should attend to the interest of other beings beyond just ourselves. Giving of yourself joyfully is the key to one's sustaining and satisfying relationship with the self and others. It will create mutually desirable, gratifying and positive change; and it becomes the path to one's wholeness.

Furthermore, sustained emotional investments in other people can help alleviate loneliness, reduce harmful levels of stress, bring us more joy and success, and it is one of the primary ingredients in the recipe for enduring happiness. Suzanne Harrill recommends you take full responsibility for your own life and happiness and remove all expectations that another can do the job for you. With a loving and gracious attitude, becoming more focused on giving to others than taking, you will manifest and notice incredible, unexpected and wonderful things unfolding in your life. You will feel better about yourself, your relationships and your life. It will change the way you see the world. It will cost you nothing. It's free, exciting and wonderful. It will shift your consciousness and enhance your life in positive and meaningful ways. It makes the world a better place. Who could ask for more?

On the other hand, it is important to note that our relationships, no matter how loving and giving we may be, are not always a source of happiness and joy. It's unrealistic to expect that they will not bring us some pain and sorrow from time to time. But the pain and suffering that we inevitably encounter in our relationships and in other difficult situations that we experience throughout our lives are what helps us develop our resilience and coping skills. It shapes our character and our faith, provides for personal growth, makes us more complex and stronger, to help overcome such difficulties.

By undergoing this process, we can learn about the benefits of healing and forgiveness, and the need for mutual understanding, tolerance, and compromise in our relationships.

Nonetheless, it is important to understand and note that pain and suffering is ultimately justified in life, only by the goodness it can provide.

Enduring and fulfilling relationships, like mature and loving marriages, are always about the willingness to be there for each other, especially when things aren't going so well. It's about growing to become a better person, friend or partner. It's about love, support, commitment, and trust. It's also about give and take. Laurie Wilhelm in her article about the *10 Benefits to Maintaining Good Relationships* has some simple and sound advice, "Think about what you want out of a relationship then give it. You'll be surprised how much better your relationships become!"

Finally, according to an e-mail my wife Jeanne received, it stated that, at an evening class at Stanford, the last lecture was on the mind-body connection, and the relationship between stress and disease. It went on to say that the speaker (apparently the head of psychiatry at Stanford) said, among other things, that one of the best things that a man could do for his health is to be married to a woman. Whereas for a woman, one of the best things she could do for her health was to nurture relationships with her girlfriends.

Ostensibly at first, people in the class apparently started laughing, but quickly realized he was serious. As stated, this is essentially what he said.

The psychological differences between men and women can profoundly influence how we form and maintain relationships.

Women connect with each other differently and provide support systems that help each other to deal with stress and difficult life experiences. Physically this quality "girlfriend time" helps women to create more Serotonin - a neurotransmitter that helps combat depression and can create a feeling of well-being.

Women share feelings whereas men often form relationships around activities. They rarely sit down with a buddy and talk about how they feel about certain things or how their personal lives are going. Jobs? Yes. Sports? Yes. Cars? Yes. Fishing, hunting, golf? Yes. But their feelings? Rarely.

My experience and observations reveal that trying to foster quality personal relationships primarily around activities exclusively, will tend not to create substantive and enduring friendships. These types of casual, activity related relationships, and other limited friendships commonly developed by guys, may often lack intrinsic value, significant meaningfulness, longevity, and fall short of providing the helpful social support systems that women naturally develop with each other, and clearly benefit from.

Furthermore, due to certain presumed "cultural norms", and genetic influences, guys are often under the impression that showing their emotions is a weakness. To be a "real man" they need to be macho, aggressive, independent, assume authority, take control, and even dominate and compete for their interests in life.

Guys learn how to network for sports and other related activities, political affairs, better jobs and promotions, but it seems they often lack emotional sensitivity, and/or discount the need for emotional investments in other people. Unlike women, they resist or appear incapable of sharing and discussing the intimacies of their affections and loving emotions regarding their personal relationships.

Men tend to find intimate sharing or emotional engagement with others uncomfortable or even overwhelming. They seem to have an inability to put their emotions into words, even with their wives.

Boys may feel pressure from their peers, and often are socialized to suppress or hold back the expression of their emotional vulnerabilities, innermost feelings, and passionate thoughts about others. As a result, many often feel isolated and alone in their emotionally related connections in life.

In contrast, it seems that guys are more inclined to show their affection and intimacy with less discourse, non-verbal engagement, unspoken signs of attachment, companionship, and practical acts.

On the other hand, most women validate their friendships through dialogue and the intimate sharing of experiences. They are comfortable with, and naturally seem to know how to make these emotional connections with each other work.

It seems that women tend to be more collective, global thinkers. They realize how important and mutually beneficial these connections are to their friends, family, and community.

The e-mail goes on to say that women share their feelings and emotions all the time. They share from their heart with their sisters, mothers and girlfriends, and evidently that is good for their health. He said that spending quality time with a friend is just as important, or may be more important to our general health as jogging or working out at a gym. It is as critical for your health as the lifestyle choices you make.

There's a tendency to think that when we are "exercising" we are doing something good for our bodies, but when we are hanging out with friends, we are wasting our precious time and should be more "productively engaged" is simply not true. In fact, he said that the failure to create and maintain quality personal relationships with other humans is as dangerous to our physical health as smoking or obesity, in addition to the adverse effects it can have on one's mental and psychological well-being.

So ladies, every time you hang out to schmooze with a gal pal, just pat yourself on the back and congratulate yourself for doing something that's good for your health!

I don't know whether this e-mail is genuine or not. In either case, the psychology appears to be explicit, valid and worth sharing, and as Jeanne noted to her sisters and other girlfriends when she forwarded the e-mail, the message is clear, appears credible and based on her experience is "spot on".

So, it seems that many women indeed are very lucky, and I suspect are very grateful to be able to more naturally develop and maintain these types of meaningful friendships along with the accompanying social support.

So ladies, as the e-mail suggests, you should toast to your friendships with your girlfriends. Evidently these relationships are just what the doctor ordered and they can provide far-reaching benefits for your health.

Studies apparently show that they not only create more serotonin to help combat depression, they can improve your ability to fight infections, and they may have protective effects on your cardiovascular systems, especially in times of anxiety and distress.

Furthermore, these networks of supportive relationships that women typically develop with each other may provide an environment conducive to enhancing other essential relationships with their spouse and other friends and family.

These supportive networks usually include, but are not necessarily limited to the people in their lives that genuinely care about them. These friends help them cope through times of uncertainty, enhance their feelings of security, provide emotional and other support, and can help reduce stress, tension and feelings of isolation and loneliness. Plus, it becomes another favorable strategy for enhancing their happiness and overall well-being.

So, here's to quality girlfriend time! Us guys could learn a thing or two from you gals, for sure. But, as Jeanne would say, "What else is new?"

The more knowledge, insight and support that we derive from our personal relationships and the more appreciation we have for our differences - gender or otherwise - the deeper understanding, tolerance and compassion we develop for each other, and the stronger we become.

It is important to acknowledge, understand, learn from and appreciate both our respectful nature and our individualities. After all, that's what makes life more interesting and complex. If we were all the same, even ideal, what fun or challenge would that be, and what help could we be to ourselves or others?

The continued growth and development of our interpersonal relationships will enable us to become more thoughtful, sensitive and happier individuals, better companions, friends and citizens, and more supportive and compassionate human beings, that will help create a better world for all of us.

Finally, when it comes to friends and other people who may influence you, John Mason believes that your best friends and your true mentors in life are those who bring out the best in you. They encourage and they influence you to become a better person. He advises you to look carefully at the closest associations in your life, because they are an indication of the direction you're heading.

There is little doubt that your interpersonal relationships and your environment have an impact on your well-being. Mason maintains that it is better to be alone than in the wrong company. He uses a banal but an appropriate example that if you "run" with the wolves you'll learn how to howl. But, if you "fly" with the Eagles you'll learn how to soar.

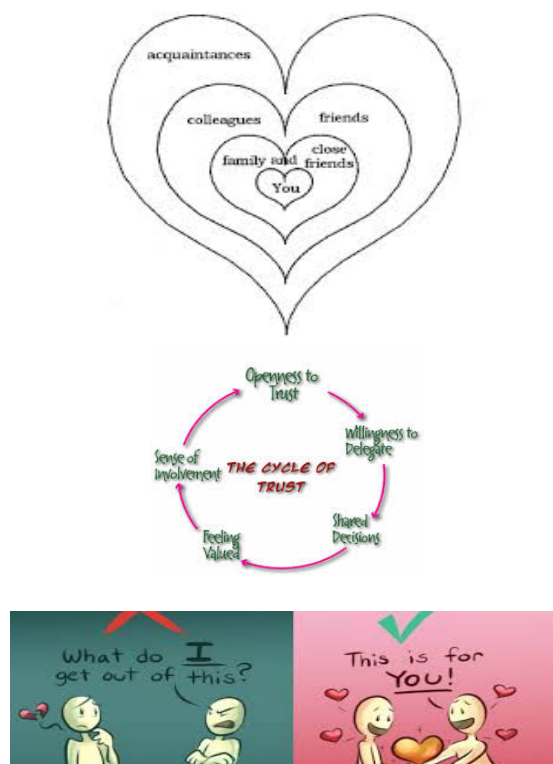
It would not hurt to take note of what people and what relationships and what influences in your life are causing you to either howl or to soar.

Satisfying and lasting relationships - individual or collective, personal or professional - have to be fair and equitable. And, that requires mutual respect, trust, flexibility, effort, and responsiveness to emotions and needs.

A strong connection with friends and family, establishing good personal and professional relationships and developing mutually supportive social networks seem to be some of our biggest and most important sources of happiness and life satisfaction.

Beyond our safety and security, these interpersonal relationships are also the most important resources that we can establish to provide for our sense of community, well-being, and our need to focus beyond just ourselves.

My research through the years regarding certain philosophies and virtuous principles seems to reveal that they have one thing in common, that is: we are not here on this earth to be alone. We are here for each other, for our friends, family and loved ones, and for our community. We are here to give and experience love. It is said that love, faith, hope and charity are the virtuous character qualities associated with salvation, and represent the essence of the human spirit. They all remind us that we should be here for each other; to give us a sense of underlying oneness, to individually and collectively complete our lives, sustain inner peace, warmth, understanding, and as Tal Ben-Shahar says, deepen our sense of happiness and delight in the world.





DOES WORK CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR HAPPINESS?

They say marrying the right person plays a crucial role in determining the level of your happiness or misery. Ditto for your work.

Recent studies reveal that work has a higher connection to our happiness than social relationships. Although there appears to be a strong correlation between the two. We often spend half of our waking hours or more at our place of work. In addition to our outside activities, our work place is where we most often make connections, establish interpersonal ties, and develop social relationships.

Until recently, the common wisdom, including the interpretation of psychological research seemed to indicate, the single biggest predictor and the highest correlation with our well-being is our social relationships, especially family, friends, and other intimate connections. Hence, our relationships with people are our biggest and most important source of happiness, as noted above. However, a recent mega-study (a study of 225 studies) by prominent psychologists Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ed Diener, and Laura King reveals something rather different.

Sonja Lyubomirsky in her article, *Happiness Breeds Success...and Money!* says, based on the results of this mega-study or what they refer to as a meta-analysis, "One factor towered over social relationships in its connection with happiness. That factor was work. The evidence, for example, demonstrates that people who have jobs distinguished by autonomy, meaning, and variety - and who show superior performance, creativity, and productivity - are significantly happier than those who don't." Furthermore, work often requires greater challenges and skills compared to rest, relaxation, and leisure activities. These work-related challenges can be more stimulating and demanding, fostering conditions conducive to more intrinsically rewarding flow experiences, and improving one's problem solving skills and coping strategies, leading to a more confident, successful and satisfying life.

Additionally, Lyubomirsky asks and answers the question, "Why does our work make us happy? Because it provides us a sense of identity, structure to our days, and important and meaningful goals to pursue. Perhaps even more important, it furnishes us with close colleagues, friends, and even potential marriage partners."

Also, people who have a good friend at work are much more likely to be engaged in their work; and, people with at least three close friends at work are much more likely to be extremely satisfied with their life. These are some of the findings Tom Rath reflects in his book, *Vital Friends, the People You Can't Afford to Live Without*.

It seems logical, and studies reveal that a happier person naturally and not surprisingly cultivates more friendships. Based on research and my experience, it also seems that the happier, as well as the more positive, and the more helpful and humble a person is, the more likely they are to receive help, support, encouragement, and recognition from their supervisors, subordinates, peers and other colleagues. As a result, they are also more likely to develop: more, higher-quality and longer lasting professional relationships and friendships, improved personal growth, job satisfaction, receive promotions, and are also more likely to become successful leaders.

In *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Haidt says, "Work at its best is about connection, engagement, and commitment. As the poet Kahlil Gibran said, "Work is love made visible." Love and work are crucial to human happiness because, when done well, they draw us out of ourselves and into connection with people and projects beyond ourselves. Happiness comes from getting these connections right. Happiness comes not just from within."

Tomas Chamorro Premuzic, a professor of business psychology at University College London has a similar take about the love and connection between work and life. He says the more elusive the boundaries between your work and life, the more successful you probably are in both. He encourages people to find what he calls a "work-life fusion". Premuzic argues that this union will help develop what he refers to as a counter intuitive work-life imbalance. Balance should not be the goal, integration should. He maintains, that it is unnecessary and difficult for most people to find that elusive balance between their work and life. He believes the only way to be truly successful, and achieve a healthy relationship between work and life is to follow your passions, find your mission, and learn how to embrace this unification and connection, for a more logical, coherent, less resentful way to organize, acknowledge, and integrate our work and life.

So, embracing more flexible and more permeable boundaries, and the inevitable imbalance, and the proper marriage or union between work and life, will help you realize there should be no conflict. They may be mutually exclusive, but they do not, and should not have to be at odds with each other. More importantly, he says they can help us create a life that integrates home and work in a more seamless, unified, comfortable, harmonious and joyous manner.

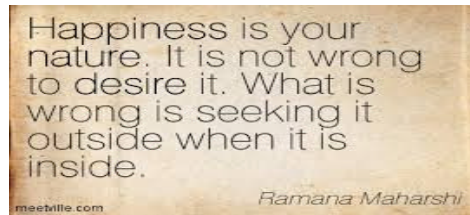
I've learned through experience and observation that one of the most important things for a person's well-being is having a job he enjoys. And, I've found all these axioms to be true: When you love your work, you find great pleasure in mastering it. The more you put in to it the more you get out of it. When you find something you love to do, you'll never have to work a day in your life.

Buddha said, "Your work is to discover your world, and then with all your heart give yourself to it." Researchers have evidence that an intrinsic passion for one's work is a key to rising above. Motivation that comes from enjoying your work makes a significant difference. In this regard, Steve Jobs insightfully noted, "Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So, keep looking until you find it. Don't settle." Charles Krauthammer declared: "If you realize you are doing what you were not born to do, and to be, you will immanently know, then you should quit. Don't be afraid to choose. Choose what you love; and if you don't love what you've chosen, choose again."

Finally, Lyubomirsky suggests, "When it comes to work life, we can create our own so-called "upward spirals". The more successful we are at our jobs, the higher income we make, and the better work environment we have, the happier we will be." This increased happiness will foster more of the same, and so on, and so on, in an upward spiral.

If you develop the right livelihood, and are engaged in interesting and rewarding work that you enjoy, and you maximize the utilization of your ability, it will undoubtedly lead in the direction of your happiness, satisfaction, and to your success in work and in life. Perhaps, Noel Coward said it best, when you find work you love to do, it is "more fun than fun." Lastly, Nobel laureate Albert Camus observed, "Without work, all life goes rotten. But when work is soulless, life slowly stifles and dies."





IS DESIRE A HAPPINESS SUPPRESSANT? ARE THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE FREE?

Happiness will help you achieve the best things in life. And, yes people, “they” were right; the best things in life are free. It is also important to note that, the best things in life... aren't things.

It has been said, "What we possess surely possesses us." Research shows that true happiness is not dependent on material things or the pursuit of pleasure. It also shows that there are many facets of desire that can affect our happiness.

A recent study in more than 65 countries indicates that even some of the poorer countries and less fortunate people in this world display a high rate of happiness. This reinforces the supposition that the “Hedonistic view of happiness” is in reality, a myth.

The pursuit of pleasure, and all the nice things that money can buy, do not necessarily add to your long-term happiness. Studies show that once people are free from privation, and their basic needs are met - security, safety and health - the link between money and happiness subsides.

Notwithstanding, there is nothing wrong with pleasurable experiences and lots of money, those are gratifying things. In fact, the experience of pleasure, an emotionally gratifying life, and financial security are quite important to our happiness. However, the researches for the *World Values Survey* found that many people throughout the world believe that the “*desire* for pleasure and material things” is in fact a happiness suppressant. It seems reasonable, especially when that *desire* turns into possessiveness, craving, addiction, jealousy, lust, and greed. These are all destructive characteristics to us and others; as well as being a detriment to our happiness.

The mechanisms of desire are also insatiable. In this regard, Buddhism teaches, “To eliminate suffering, eliminate desire” thus establishing happiness as beyond material and emotional possession, and attainable only through a conscious process of overcoming desire. Furthermore, through the alchemy of desire, wants can turn into needs, and unfulfilled needs often lead to disappointment, discontent, and unhappiness. Greek philosopher Epictetus believed that, “Contentment comes not so much from great wealth as from few wants.” There is also the self-contradictory nature of desire. In *The geography of Bliss*, Eric Weiner points out that Indian professor Sundar Sarukkas manages to capture this paradox of desire in two sentences. “Desire is the root cause of sorrow, but desire is also the root cause of action. How do we counter the paralysis of action when there is no desire to motivate us?”

He goes on to say that, everyone has desires and ambitions, it's human nature. It's how we deal with them that makes the difference. He says that in India, and in many Eastern cultures, one deals with desires, disappointment, and one's circumstances differently than we do here in the West. Our attitude is, okay, effort is important, and if you've done your best, now let the universe decide. The entire universe is chance and probability, and it never acts without cause. So, we accept it. It is what it is. That includes recognizing and accepting the apparent randomness of life, and situations that are beyond our control. Everything invariably has a reason for being, whether we understand it or not.

Laura DeVoe has learned that it's best not to necessarily judge a situation as being good or bad, but to accept it for what it is and don't let it rob you of your happiness.

We can gather happiness from both our positive and negative experiences. Laura says the choice to be happy is not simply our desire to be happy, but rather our intention to be happy along with our conscious decision to choose happiness over unhappiness, regardless of our circumstances. If we realize we've done the best we can, and we recognize we can't control everything in life, then our life and our world seem a lot lighter, a lot happier.

Tal Ben-Shahar, acclaimed former teacher of positive psychology at Harvard University notes in his book *Happier*: Happiness, not money or prestige should be regarded as the ultimate currency. Happiness is the currency by which we take measure of our lives. He says happiness is the end toward which all other ends lead. He also says, material prosperity (to a certain extent) can help individuals, as well as society attain higher levels of happiness. He explains that financial security can liberate us from work we do not find meaningful, and from having to worry about the next paycheck. Even so, it is not the money per se that is valuable, but the fact that it can potentially yield more positive experiences. For example, he says having money can free up our time to do the things that we find more personally significant and meaningful or it can enable us to support a cause we believe in. He continues, material wealth in and of itself does not necessarily generate meaning or lead to emotional wealth.

There are studies that seem to indicate that affluence produces rapidly diminishing returns on happiness. These studies apparently show material success does in fact bring happiness. But, the amount of happiness acquired makes only a small contribution to our feeling of well-being.

Dr. Michael Fordyce describes this phenomenon as *The happiness law of diminishing returns*. His hypothesis states that our personal achievements or improvements to our standard of living usually contribute to our happiness, but only up to a certain point. Relative to income, every thousand dollars or so that you earn, can produce meaningful increases in your unique range of personal happiness, particularly on the lower end, or very bottom of the economic ladder. But, once you reach the median income level, each incremental improvement in your income and standard of living, produces an ever-diminishing return of additional happiness for your efforts.

After our basic needs are satisfied, and we reach the median income level, our well-being moderates and levels off, despite further increases in income. This hypothesis is also consistent with the happiness set-point theory, and the findings of studies undertaken with people that win the lottery. They adapt rather quickly - hedonic adaptation - and gravitate back to their equilibrium, biological happiness set-point.

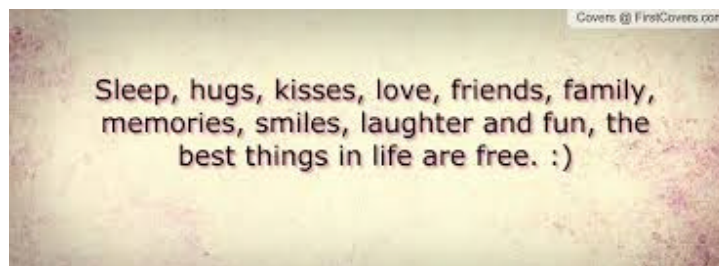
So, while life can be a constant struggle if deprived of our basic needs, it appears that happiness is a lot more responsive to the satisfaction of basic needs, than to the satisfaction of affluence or more ambitious desires.

"No man can tell whether he is rich or poor by turning to his ledger. It is the heart that makes a man rich. He is rich according to what he is and what he does, not according to what he has." Words of wisdom by Henry Ward Beecher. Professor of Psychology David G. Myers states, "There is much more to well-being than being well-off. Wealth is like health: Its utter absence can breed misery, yet having it, is no guarantee of happiness." J. S. Wankchuck, former King of Bhutan, observes, "Gross national happiness is more important than gross national product." Henrik Ibsen had his say on this matter too, "Money can buy the husk of things, but not the kernel. It brings you food but not appetite, medicine but not health, acquaintances but not friends, servants but not faithfulness, days of joy but not peace or happiness."

Finally, I must clarify that Buddhist teachings do not believe that all desires should be eliminated. The desirable ones are positive and virtuous and should be cultivated, such as happiness, love, compassion, kindness, forgiveness, etc. The undesirable ones are negative and non-virtuous and should be purged, such as hatred, lust, greed, abuse, and any desire or action that leads to mistreatment, suffering or misery. All non-virtuous actions are negative i.e. lying, stealing, sexual, emotional and physical abuse, etc. The distinction between a positive and negative desire or action is not whether it provides you with an immediate feeling of pleasure, relief, or satisfaction, but whether it ultimately results in positive or negative consequences. It helps when we learn to recognize our desires, but not be overwhelmed or controlled by them.

In conclusion, Robert Kennedy warned against measuring ourselves by wealth alone. Our gross national product doesn't reflect the beauty of our poetry, or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate, or the integrity of our citizens. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our spirit; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our liberty, or our country's other noble values. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

*The
Best things
in life...
aren't things*





DOES FREEDOM HAVE AN IMPACT ON OUR HAPPINESS ?

Yes, there are many kinds of freedoms that can impact one's happiness, such as the more fundamental political, economic and religious freedoms. Other personal freedoms and rights guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution include, but are not limited to: freedom of speech, assembly, petition, and the press; the right to bear arms, equal justice, and the right to own private property. There are many other freedoms and rights, which include clear limitations on the government's power, all of which are established in the Bill of Rights and other Constitutional amendments.

Volitional type freedoms of will and self-determination as well as other natural laws, ethical beliefs, and fundamental freedoms inherent in human nature allow us as individuals to consciously choose, think, decide and act voluntarily, deliberately, and willingly. By virtue of his intelligence, ability, and free will, man is the master of his conduct. He can determine many of his own values, beliefs, attitudes and actions. And, abiding by basic moral principles common to man, he can choose his own way, without creating victims, or unreasonably harming others.

Freedom is the power to exercise choice and make decisions without constraint from within or without. The more intense the power of optimism, self-confidence and self-determination, the more intense the freedom. In addition to free will, virtually all other freedoms can have an impact on one's happiness.

Other less conventional freedoms that many of us don't often give much thought to is our freedom from desires or attachments i.e. emotional, psychological and temporal of any nature, which includes people, places and things; and we shouldn't forget the powerful freedom of embracing forgiveness; the freedom from fear; and the freedom that comes from the truth. These are just a few of the freedoms that will be addressed briefly below, that can affect one's happiness.

The concept of freedom and liberty forms the core of all democratic principles; and not surprisingly, studies show that people who feel free, and feel in control of their circumstances generally feel happy or happier than those who feel, or are in fact repressed by others. This includes prisoners, citizens of totalitarian or authoritarian run governments, and others who are deprived of liberty, or are kept in restraint in some form or fashion emotionally and/or physically, or who otherwise feel stripped of their sense of control of their life. But more, especially unrestrained freedoms are not necessarily and not always better than less.

If everyone was free to do whatever they wanted to do, with little or no limitations, it would inevitably lead to an unhappy conclusion. No laws, no morals, no restrictions and unlimited or unbridled freedoms - a society without morality, government regulations or laws is impractical, untenable and incapable of being defended, morally, practically, or otherwise. It would bring about total anarchy, turmoil and misery. Therefore, absolute, unbounded privilege, complete discretion, and limitless freedoms in society are not possible without severe consequences.

What you may want to do in the name of your exclusive freedom, self-interest or happiness could cause harm to another.

Throughout human history, there have been countless examples of this, not only on the exclusive individual level, but on the corporate, political, governmental and religious level as well. In a free, democratic society, one must also restrict the absolute will of the majority in order to protect the rights of minorities.

People who advocate for a social system that is free of all laws and regulations, with no semblance of order, and the absence of any guidance or government controls, and one that promotes disorder, violence or excites revolt against any established rule, law or custom are referred to as anarchists. People who abide by these same principles and live without morality or fairness, yet they hope that others will abide by the laws, are often referred to as criminals. Throw in a person that exercises absolute power and unrestricted controls, then you have a dictator.

If we value security, safety, morality and some semblance of order, we will have to give up some of our freedoms, for the common good.

Throughout our world, restrictions of freedom to some extent are warranted, necessary and reasonable in exchange for a more stable, predictable, secure and functional society. In society we need moral norms, and related mutual expectations. The normal, well adjusted civilized human condition and our need for mutual interdependence and our interconnectedness requires it. Otherwise, without certain restraints, and without any moral guidance and uniting principles, history has taught us that by default, the law of the jungle and other inhumane conditions, confusion and chaos will likely prevail.

A good government ensures that its citizens enjoy every reasonable right and privilege possible so they can live and work together in peace and harmony, and enjoy the blessings of life. It also helps provide the many services that citizens alone could not perform themselves. Services such as to protect and preserve individual liberties, and to protect those who live within the laws from those who do not. Also, to provide the framework to help their citizens collectively to live better lives, and take the measures necessary to safeguard their natural and constitutional rights, safety, prosperity and happiness.

I think most people realize that absolute privilege, unrestricted rights, unbridled or limitless freedoms, and complete and total individual independence is an untenable situation that is simply not practical or acceptable for reasons noted above. On a more pragmatic, democratic socio-political level, we generally accept and refer to, or define freedom as an absence of undue restrictions, and an opportunity to exercise one's rights and powers, without harming others or creating victims.

In his book, *Gross National Happiness*, Arthur C. Brooks poses the question, "What degree of freedom and what kinds of freedoms contribute most to our gross national happiness?" He says, "Throughout the world, for reasons cultural, philosophical, and historical, people define and value freedom in different ways." He uses examples such as, no posted speed limits on the Autobahn in Germany, freedoms we here in the U.S. choose to relinquish, for reasons of public safety. Americans are willing to accept this restriction of freedom of limiting speed limits, whereas the Germans are not. He uses other examples such as motorcycle and bicycle helmet requirements, seat belt laws, and airport and homeland security as other abridgments to our freedoms. These are all former freedoms that our government has traded away for the apparent sake of our safety. Measures that can detract from one's happiness.

Other restrictions of freedom such as additional motor vehicle statutes, and other civil and criminal laws seem to be appropriate, expected, and necessary for obvious reasons, even though they can also detract from one's happiness.

When it comes to choosing or compromising one's freedoms, rights, and liberties, like other accommodations or concessions in life, there are trade-offs and choices to be made. These choices include: weighing the pros and the cons, the risks and the benefits, and deciding what's best for you and yours. Do you want more freedoms? Can you tolerate more risks associated with more freedoms? Or, are you willing to sacrifice some of your freedoms for more security, stability, and safety?

We all have our own tolerances, distinctions, beliefs, and values. Different people, different cultures, and different political systems will of course weigh these trade-offs differently.



ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND MORAL FREEDOMS

However, giving up or compromising your freedoms for what the government decides is best for you can lead to a slippery slope. Claims of "national security" or "national interest" should always be viewed skeptically when they are used to justify limits of individual rights. Totalitarian governments can only survive with severe restrictions of freedoms, usually brutal government controls, imposed fear, and little or no regard for other liberties and human rights.

Research indicates that freer economies usually mean happier populations. The freer economic, more democratic government regulated societies are happier than the former communist nations or other totalitarian or dictator run governments. Countries like North Korea, Cuba, and Nigeria are apparently at or near the very bottom of the economic freedom list.

Comparative studies regarding freedom and happiness in over 40 countries show that the higher the opportunity for exchange of goods and services - economic freedom - that exists, the happier the citizens are. The Cato Institute reports that higher economic freedom correlates with higher self-reported happiness.

Studies seem to indicate that the harder and smarter workers who have humble, optimistic, and winning personalities tend to be the happier and more successful individuals. Naturally, the reverse also seems to be the case. The lazy and pessimistic workers, and those who feel entitled, I suspect feel less happy. Studies also reveal that pessimism about opportunities and freedoms, especially about economic opportunities and freedoms is clearly linked to unhappiness.

Many argue that economic and political freedoms are both linked and mutually dependent. Economist and philosopher Ludwig von Mises believed that it is no accident that the age of capitalism also became the age of government by the people. My research seems indicate that economic, political, and religious freedoms can, and in fact often do contribute to our happiness. The *Freedom and Happiness* comparative study by Ruut Veehoven suggests that "economic freedom deserves priority. Their data strongly suggests that economic freedom leads to more happiness, especially for those in conditions of poverty and low capability."

However, as noted above, uninhibited and non-constrained moral freedoms, and having too many choices in our lives can actually contribute to our unhappiness. Furthermore, psychologist say humans are often inept at knowing with certainty what will make them happy and content, particularly long-term.

Too many choices and so many options, especially at the consumer level, can create what psychologists call *The Paradox of Choice*, which can actually be harmful to our sense of well-being. According to Prof. Brooks, we are dazed and confused by the proliferation of choice and a dizzying array of options on almost every matter. Options which include: selecting a college, choosing a car, who we should marry, where we should live and work, where we go out to eat, what computer and cell phone we should buy, and so on. In democratic societies, it seems we have an almost infinite number of choices in life.

Many of us are blessed and fortunate enough to be able to make numerous choices every day. Choices such as what time we wake up, what we eat, what we wear, how we respond to others, how many cups of coffee are we going to have, how much time are we going to spend on our smart phones, computers, Face Book, what books we will read, what news and TV programs we'll decide to watch, etc.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive to some, limiting choices and even limiting certain freedoms can make life easier, for reasons noted above. Further, too many choices can overwhelm us; and may not be as liberating as one might think. They can leave us feeling insecure, anxious and/or regretful about the choices we actually make or don't make. We often ask ourselves, could we have chosen something better? However, it seems to me that the challenges posed by this paradox of choice will ultimately provide benefits that outweigh the possible disadvantages, compared to little or no choices, and can surely contribute to our happiness, sense of empowerment and self-control. Nonetheless, if one eliminates unnecessary and superfluous choices and freedoms, excessive options, and focuses on what's important, not necessarily perfect, it can provide for a simpler, less confusing, less anxious, less stressful, happier, healthier, and a more incisive and satisfying life.

However, it is important to know in the concept of freedom, that if people do not have a strong sense of self and the confidence, courage and the maturity to choose, or are overly dependent on others, or are otherwise incapable of choosing, they will tend to fear or relinquish their freedom. They will default on their limited ability or lack of capacity or confidence to choose, and rely on what they perceive as their authoritative guidance in life. Therefore, they are more apt to give up their autonomy, authority and individual freedom to others to determine what's best for them.

People often behave as if they were helpless when they believe they are not capable of choosing, and they believe choice and circumstance is beyond their capability and/or control. It can cause acute anxiety and a corresponding crippling effect. Relinquishing one's choices, voluntarily or otherwise, can have other serious consequences. Remember what H.L. Mencken said, "Any man who yields up his liberty, in however slight the measure, is bound to become a slave."

The good news is, if we maintain our liberties and our freedoms, and a strong sense of consciousness, self, courage and conviction, we should always have a choice.

I think we can agree that choice is a good thing. Through choice comes empowerment. Aine Belton says, choice opens you to the realization that each moment is filled with possibilities. She notes, choice is a gateway to the possible.

When we feel we have little or no choice we can feel frustrated, subjected, and deprived. However, as noted earlier, all choices have ramifications which may be good or bad. I guess it depends on one's perspective. The same can also be said for our freedoms. Gerda Lerner said, "We can learn from history how past generations thought and acted, how they responded to the demands of their time and how they solved their problems. We can learn by analogy, not by example, for our circumstances will always be different than theirs were. The main thing history can teach us is that human actions have consequences and that certain choices, once made, cannot be undone. They may foreclose the possibility of making other choices and thus they can determine or undermine future events." Therefore, I think we can also agree that neither our choices nor our freedoms should ever be taken lightly, especially without understanding and realizing the ultimate consequences. The history of mankind has taught us this. It has also taught us that there are many unexpected and unforeseen consequences regarding our choices. So plan and act accordingly, as best you can.

Regarding our planning, there's an old Yiddish expression that says, Der mentsh trakht un got lakht. It means, Man plans and God laughs, acknowledging the fortuitousness and unpredictability of life itself. No matter how good your plans are, your actions, no matter how well thought out, often have some surprises and unintended consequences.

Regardless of the circumstances or the consequences, invariably, we can have the moral freedom to plan, choose, and do what we think is right and good, or not.

Prof. Brooks points out, "That the government should not be in the business of judging behaviors and attitudes about private, moral matters, if we can claim they do not unreasonably harm others. So long as we do not create victims, it is the job of individuals, families, communities, and houses of worship to decide what we do to ourselves individually, and with others consensually. Our government serves us best when they protect our economic, political, and religious freedoms. The evidence on moral freedom tells us that the recipe for happiness is a combination of individual liberty, personal morality, prudence, and moderation. He says this age-old formula is overwhelmingly supported by the data."

In summary, contrary to what some might think, research indicates time and again that happiness generally follows not money or affluence, but the opportunity for upward income mobility, our earned successes in life, our optimism, economic, political and religious freedoms, and a sense of control, moderation, morality and meaning in our lives. Cultivating a kind, forgiving, and loving attitude, making loving choices, embracing and integrating contentment, tolerance, compassion, gratitude, appreciation, enjoyment and developing realistic expectations about ourselves and the important people in our life and about life itself, are also fundamental ingredients in the recipe for enduring happiness.

The above noted principles are consistent with the vision and ideals of our nation's founding fathers who considered life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as serious, self-evident, absolute, presumptive, inalienable human rights. A paradigm essential to one's individual constitution, natural rights, and to our declaration of independence for all of humanity. Throughout our nation's history our forefathers not only believed in and valued these noble principles, they fought for, suffered and died as needed, in order to defend them. They decided that freedom is worth fighting for.

Freedom is not merely the opportunity to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them, and then, the opportunity to choose. - C. Wright Mills

Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. - Jean-Paul Sartre



SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

Sartre believed every decision made by man wills itself toward its own creation. That man is responsible not only for his own individuality, but he is responsible to all of humanity for his actions, conduct or behavior. That each decision one makes plays a part in the collective formation of mankind.

I think most people believe, at least to some extent, and many religions profess that: we are born and empowered with the ability of free will; human beings are free agents that have the faculties of intellect and volition; we have the capacity to make a choice without coercion, choices that are unconstrained by

external circumstances or by an agency such as fate or divine will; we are empowered to believe what we want, and to live and love as we so choose; we have the ability to make choices and determine one's action unimpeded by certain factors, but not necessarily under the supposition that the mind is equally free or stable in all respects.

Sartre maintains that because of one's free will, we are predisposed to, and more importantly, responsible for, in an absolute sense, everything we do. One's conduct, one's behavior is a personal choice, the result of one's deliberations. We are, unquestionably the authors of our own actions. Our destiny is in our own hands; and there are no excuses for evading one's obligations and one's free will.

Daniel Reban said, man is not only implicitly compelled to be free and is accountable for his actions and for all that he does, he is born to become spiritually emancipated - to completely and permanently awaken to his full potential.

Hannah Arendt had a similar characterization of freedom as the capacity to begin, to start something new, to do the unexpected with which all human beings are empowered by virtue of being born and becoming alive. She says, action as one of the realizations of freedom is rooted in natality, and that each birth represents a new beginning, each unique in their own way and able to do whatever is possible, and even what is infinitely improbable. So, don't underestimate the power of your internal inclinations and volitions themselves, which includes your freedom of imagination, thought, vision, will and action. History has shown that one person's courage and vision, with the right choices and actions can truly change the world.

We are endowed and blessed at the beginning of life with an innate free spirit, the ability to choose, think, and act voluntarily, to determine our own values, beliefs, attitudes and actions, to choose our own destiny.

Spiritual freedom embraces our unbridled pursuit of spiritual growth and knowledge. It is our desire for inner freedom; freedom from the demands of the social and physical environment. It's freedom from the ego and its identification with the conscious body-mind and its temporal values, desires, needs and fears. It's our inner sense that we don't have to be compelled by our conditioning, that we are free to act rather than merely react.

Both our innate spiritual freedom and self-awareness allows us to reflect on what we have become, and empowers us with the freedom to choose whether we want to remain that way.

Our spiritual freedom, and our spirituality, and our search for meaning and truth may or may not be peculiarities inherent within us, but they appear to be qualities, traits or attributes that many of us cherish, embrace and value. They also seem to be an essential part of humanities constitutional nature, character and being.

In its purest sense, your spiritual freedom is comprised of your ability to think for yourself without guilt, to reason, to consider, and to decide independently. It allows you the freedom to not be limited or necessarily shaped by dogma, conventional, religious or societal norms, or by habit.

On the other hand, one's spirituality, and one's spiritual character, according to psychologists also provides the structure of one's internal law. This conceptual internal law structure apparently governs our inner thoughts and volitions subject to one's control under the jurisdiction of one's conscience and moral agency. This duality of free will and moral obligation, if true, limits our spiritual freedom in this regard, and with a sense of right and wrong that urges one to act morally, it will influence our spiritual character, one would think, in a good and wholesome way.

I think most people and most religions believe human beings are not only free agents, they are also moral agents. It is a presumption that free will seems to be required for moral responsibility. And, if moral agents have free will, they can and should be held responsible for their decisions and behaviors. Our spirituality, conscience, and moral agency appear to be an essential part of our inhibiting sense of what is prudent, impelling one toward truth and right action. These faculties also seem to be an integral part of our instinctive craving for happiness, righteousness and virtue, and abhorrence of suffering, immorality and evil. Therefore, providing the inner frame work and foundation for the human conscience, our innate sense or awareness of what's right or wrong.

Studies show that children are born with the moral sentiments of fairness, duty, sympathy and self-control. Paul Bloom, professor of psychology said, a growing body of evidence suggests that humans do have a rudimentary moral sense from the very start of life. He says studies show that even within the first year of life, babies possess certain moral foundations that appear fundamentally intuitive, such as the capacity and willingness to judge the actions of others, some sense of justice, gut responses to altruism and nastiness. Gregg Henriques, professor of psychology says, just ask any five-year-old about what kinds of actions are good and what kinds are not, and you will likely be reminded that we humans have a deep moral sense that transcends what we are socialized to believe.

I find that when one is discussing certain topics, especially more esoteric things like spiritual freedom, definitions can be helpful and necessary.

Our spirit is defined as an incorporeal being, the force or vital principle of conscious life, animating the body or mediating between body and soul.

Rebentzen defines spiritual freedom as the liberation of those who live by spirit and not by human ego or worldly values. Others say, it's to become our highest selves, to be able to exercise our inalienable right to personal liberty in our spiritual journey to find meaning and purpose, and fulfill our destiny in life. It is an inner path enabling a person to discover their deepest values, and the true meanings by which they live; to catch sight of, recognize and understand the essence of your true nature and the vital connection you have with your heart, your spirit, and your soul. It can include being connected to a larger reality or joining with other individuals; with nature or the cosmos; or with the divine realm.

James Park believes nothing is more characteristic of the human spirit than freedom. He says we are persons of spirit to the degree that we shape our own lives, yet we experience a connection to all of life.

Your spiritual freedom exists regardless of your nurturing, circumstances or your environment. My friend KG says your spirituality is like a sixth sense. He says this spirituality is intuitive, limitless and infinite; unlike the innate restrictions associated with the other human senses or physiological capacities we generally use to perceive, understand and enjoy the temporal world around us. He says although your

acts are profoundly shaped by your genes, culture, and environment, the freedom inherent in the human spirit, one's spirituality and free will enables one to transcend one's inclinations and go beyond empirical evidence, outer appearances, one's sensory limitations, nature and nurturing. The human spirit also makes it possible to rise above and become independent of one's social circumstances and enculturation.

Many people believe that your spirituality is a profoundly powerful innate force. A force that transcends yet can contain religion, science and philosophy. Our spirituality can be an unlimited source for one's inspiration that realigns your sense of self, and can help you realize your highest potential and empower you in ways that you may not have believed possible, or have yet to recognize or imagine. David Steindl-Rast says it's a vital awareness that pervades all realms of our being. It enables us to look within and find what we need within ourselves, beyond the external world; to become greater and more powerful than just effecting outer changes.

Sharon Janis in her book, *Spirituality for Dummies* writes, spiritual awareness itself inspires you to be naturally virtuous. The more you understand the spiritual nature of this world, the more sense it will make for you to act with honesty, compassion, surrender and humility. She says, when you understand, realize, experience and express the greatness that you, knowingly or unknowingly, already are, spiritual virtues naturally manifest through the way you think and the things you do. When you see life with an expanded spiritual awareness, virtuous actions are the only ones that make sense, and you realize they maybe the best, and perhaps the only truly dignified, intact and morally sound way to respond to others and the world.

The highest and greatest of the human freedoms is to choose your attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in the most horrific, disturbing, brutal and inhumane conditions like the Nazi concentration camps. Even under such unimaginable and in the most nightmarish of circumstances, we all have a choice to maintain a sense of human dignity, and become something more, better and different says holocaust survivor, psychiatrist, and author Victor Frankel. "If we do not consciously decide what sort of person we want to be, and then work to become that person, it will be our environment, circumstances and our nature that will likely determine both our identity and our destiny."

Brutal, barbaric, ruthless and unconscionable people, tyrants, and oppressive governments can control many of our freedoms, liberties, and our lives if they so choose, under certain circumstances. However, no person, nobody, no government or no entity can control our love, compassion or our agency of morality, and our human spirit, unless we allow it.

There are psychological brainwashing techniques and other conditioning, torture, fear, the human ego, worldly values, false beliefs, pride, envy, greed or other negative influences, desires, environments or circumstances that can adversely affect the human spirit. But, when we choose and work together to become enlightened through the knowledge of what is possible, and guided by rational thought and tolerance for our differences, and challenge ideas grounded in false beliefs, lies, fear, hate, superstition, or arbitrary authority, we can help remove the obscurity and darkness from our eyes and from our heart. We can help free ourselves from the bondage of fear, bigotry, resentment, ill will, hatred, ignorance, envy, ego and other self-defeating attitudes, feelings, beliefs and ideas. Otherwise we may never know or experience the full meaning of our freedom of spirit, compassion, tolerance and love.

Because of our spiritual freedom, moral agency, and our ability to think and act independently, we will always have a choice to do what is right or wrong, and to help others and ourselves.

With a stable state of mind, you will always have that freedom and the cognitive power to reason, decide, act, and to change. You will be able to consciously assess, and determine your own actions, help influence others, and help control your own course of events. You know what they say, it's never too late to do what's right. Your freedom to choose, and choosing to do what's right because it is right, will ultimately make you a happier, more liberated, and better human being. And, the logical extension of same will help create a better world for all of us.

To quote the divine, "I am what I am, and I shall become who I am becoming."

Besides the human capacity to think and act independently, our spiritual freedom allows us to gain true knowledge about ourselves, the human condition, and life itself. It enables us to transcend our temporal limitations, and to improve and add to our life in infinite and limitless ways. Truth and righteousness is the path to our spiritual freedom.

Spiritual freedom allows us to recognize and understand each other's perspectives more readily. It supports and favors the expansion of one's consciousness, and one's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth. It also can facilitate and empower the development and formation of inner peace and serenity that can form a foundation for inspiration, acceptance, kindness and respect; love, hope, happiness, and compassion, and so many other human attributes and virtues. Spiritual freedom is the empowerment of compassion and enlightenment, one's clarity and wisdom to understand and become aware of the sacredness of all life; to realize certain principles, in which all of the great spiritual thinkers espouse, such as, the salvation of man is through love and in love; and man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated, and the other timeless, absolute and true spiritual principles of life.

In conclusion, by exercising our spiritual freedom, our spirituality and our biological capacity to feel a spiritual connection, we might understand better who we are, and better understand our place in the greater scheme of things; our sense of peace, purpose, significance and unity, which includes the connection we have to others and the world around us.

Yale professor, Dr. Sherwin Nuland says, "Our brains developed a capacity for spirit, for seeking lives *of integrity and equanimity and moral order*. He maintains, *the human spirit is the result of the adaptive biological mechanisms that can protect our species, sustain us, and serve to perpetuate the existence of humanity*." However, based on his writings, I believe Dr. Nuland agrees that the human spirit and our spirituality is so much greater than a basic instinct for survival. It is an enrichment, seemingly without limits, that involves an emotional or spiritual response, and intrinsically rewarding feelings such as significance, wonderment, awe, joy, blessedness, acceptance, and the like. It is also an amazing transcendent quality that can overcome our human frailties, expand one's consciousness in every direction, and enrich our lives in infinite ways.

It is important to note that one's spirituality often involves a cognitive context as well. In other words, a set of beliefs about oneself and the world, which can both inspire the spiritual response and provide an interpretation of it. Our ideas about what ultimately exists, who we fundamentally are, and our place in the greater scheme of things form the cognitive context for spirituality. By contemplating such beliefs, we are temporarily drawn out of the mundane into the realization of life's deeper significance, that involves the very purpose or essence of our existence, and this realization generates emotional effects. It is taken to reflect our basic beliefs and the ultimate truth of our situation as we conceive it, according to an article published in the *Humanist*.

Whether it's through an evolutionary or cognitive process, or divine nature, our spirituality is a way to realign one's sense of self, and to transcend one's self imposed limitations. Such limitations may include one's limited means of perception, conditioning, circumstances, and one's individual perspective in the quest for discovery, creativity, meaning, purpose and truth.

Our spirituality is a state of consciousness that reflects our faith, our belief, our need to know and understand. Further, by exercising these spiritual capacities it can help one change the world by influencing the scientifically measurable, yet unseen collective consciousness. This collective consciousness is the connection and awareness human beings generate through the energy that exists around us, which include but are not necessarily limited to, mirror neurons and electromagnetic fields that helped shape our self-awareness, our species and civilization itself.

Lynne McTaggart in her book, *The Field*, cites numerous studies by medical scientists, quantum physicists or other preeminent scholars of various disciplines that substantiate the quantum properties of the human energy field.

Scientific studies show that these particular intangible human energy fields, and other unknown and unidentified forms of energy, i.e. dark energy pervades our world and the universe. Scientific studies also show that our minds and our hearts produce measurable electro-magnetic fields of energy. And, our conscious and unconscious thoughts and intensions influence these dynamic human energy fields, and a host of corporal biochemical reactions as well.

It seems that our collective consciousness begins to develop when our identities expand beyond our egos, and when we can sense the thoughts and intentions of others. Some may express or manifest it differently, but I believe most, if not all of us have experienced this connection.

On a scientific level, Robert Kenny says, I've studied a good deal of intriguing research about collective consciousness. Although these scientific studies appear to be in their embryonic stages Kenny says these studies suggest that we influence each other in many subtle, yet powerful ways, and that our collective wisdom and creativity can be harnessed for the common good much more than we do presently. Further, he says research indicates that groups of people also produce stronger results than individuals acting apart. This research indicates that people with an emotional connection, when acting in concert, are more influential than individuals acting alone. He goes on to say the results of this research suggests that focused collective attention or intention can create significant order in otherwise random and chaotic reality. He believes it is precisely this effect – the transformation of randomness into coherence – that underlies insight, learning, healing and creative manifestation. It seems logical that the collective group would also generate more energy compared to just one individual alone.

On a quantum scientific level, physicists at the turn of the nineteenth century started to explore the relationship between energy and the structure of matter, and according to the world of quantum mechanics everything in the universe is made out of and/or connected by some type of energy. Corresponding to this quantum theory we are all connected by this universal energy field, and we also radiate our own unique energy signature. And, by extension we are much more connected, and we are much more in every respect than what we perceive ourselves to be.

On a sociology level, collective consciousness is defined as the set of shared beliefs, ideas and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society.

On a spiritual level, I believe the essence of our spiritual connection and collective consciousness is a shared framework and a part of a unified biological energy field which individuals experience by virtue of our collective connection, our region of influence associated with the heart. Research explains how the physical and energetic heart plays an extraordinary role in our lives, beyond what we typically consider.

According to Arjun Walia's article in *Collective Evolution*, the heart generates the largest electromagnetic field produced in the body. He states researchers have analyzed the spectrum analysis of the magnetic field that's produced by the heart. He says the results have shown that emotional information is encoded into, and transmitted to those around us through this electromagnetic field. So, by shifting our emotions, we are apparently changing the information that is encoded into these electromagnetic fields that are radiated by the heart.

Studies prove the heart, like the brain, generates a powerful electromagnetic field. Researchers apparently found that energy fields like these electromagnetic or bioenergetic ones, like mirror neurons can create a vital living force, that becomes part of a unified energy field that can impact, and help us understand, emulate or empathize with the actions, intentions, and emotions of those around us. Walia reports that when we are feeling positive emotions such as compassion, love, gratitude and understanding, the heart beats out a very different message, compared to other self-inflicted, usually less fleeting, longer lasting negative emotions, which are often counterproductive to our individual and collective well-being.

Because of free agency, one's capacity to act with free will, and making use of our innate heartfelt spiritual and emotional connection, and by paying attention to our thoughts and feelings, I believe based on experience and scientific research, we can consciously or unconsciously send out negative vibrations of energy or positive vibrations of energy. This is similar to what we sense when we make a connection with others, such as optimists or pessimists, and people we feel comfortable with or not. There are certain people we connect with or disconnect with almost instantly. We naturally develop this positive or negative chemistry. It is usually a feeling we initially experience when we first meet someone.

Studies show that negative emotions can create nervous system chaos, but positive emotions do the exact opposite. Therefore, our heartfelt thoughts, intentions, feelings, and other states of consciousness, and of course our behavior, attitudes, and the way we act, react, and perceive things can change the world and help shift global consciousness by influencing a unified, heartfelt energy field. This field of influence although invisible, is present and accessible to those around us; and by extension, through our innate spiritual connection and collective consciousness, everyone and everything that exists.

Further, I believe our spiritual connection, unlike our sociological collective consciousness is not necessarily limited to one's respective society or even to humankind's exclusive region of influence on human social behavior.

Our spiritual connection appears to be a more universal collective connection that embodies not only human spirit, but all creatures and all living things, and a respective heartfelt connection with them. It also appears to be a connection that due to the apparent ability of spirit, energy, and consciousness, may operate beyond the constraints of space and time, extends beyond the physical world, and goes deeply into the heart of every matter.

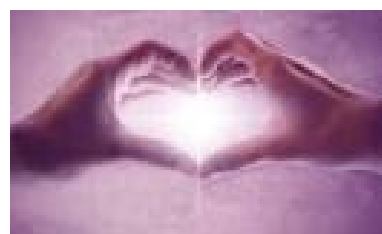
The heart is the center of your spiritual activity and one's character. It is the fundamental and vital connection to your body and soul, your search for meaning and truth, your unshakeable knowledge, and the core of your true and invariable nature. The heart is the projected power, energy, consciousness and life of the human spirit. This consciousness that originates in the heart, is manifested in thought, perception, emotion, will, memory, imagination, and especially in the human spirit, and is deeply profound.

Our temporal circumstances inevitably change with time, but our connection with the heart doesn't.

The heart is the essence of who you are. It is also the lifeblood and crossroads of all operations of human life. Our connection with the heart goes beyond our dominant intellect, and transcends one's conventional reasoning. This heartfelt connection also facilitates and completes our collective consciousness. Rosemary Fillmore believes, like Sartre, that the world we are experiencing today is the result of our collective consciousness, and if we want a new and better world, each of us must begin taking responsibility for helping create it.

Spiritual freedom is the empowerment of one's beliefs, and one's individual self-expression without control, limit, or manipulation.

If I could give you one key, and one key only to more abundant life, I would give you a sense of your own worth, an unshakeable sense of your own dignity as one grounded in the source of the cosmic dance, as one who plays a unique part in the unfolding of the story of the world... Greta Crosby



Beyond borders, beyond religion and politics, beyond hatred and ignorance -- lies hope, love, and a common heartfelt bond that is an innate part of our true spiritual freedom,



FREEDOM FROM ATTACHMENTS

Psychologist Gail Brenner in her article, *The Secret Path to Finding Freedom from our Attachments* asks the question, "Who among us doesn't struggle with attachments?"

The attachments we are discussing here relate to the emotional dependence we put on things. It is a feeling that binds one to a person, thing, cause, habit, addiction, belief, ideal, or the like. Our dominant physical, mental, and spiritual attachments help shape our lives individually and collectively.

Attachment tends to magnify and overstate the apparent qualities of what we feel we have to have and hold onto, such as objects, thoughts and desires. When you hold on to things dearly, the things you believe you cannot or should not live without, they can take control of, impact, define and tend to perpetuate your existing identity, priorities, interests, values, beliefs, personality, relationships, and the habitual way you have lived your life. Attachments inhibit change, growth and development, and can weaken our spiritual, psychological and emotional well-being.

If we were to develop a list of possible attachments, it would seem almost endless. Whatever we are attached to - people, places, things, ideologies, thoughts, feelings, desires, excuses, the need to be right, limited beliefs, anger, resentment, our health, success, prestige, power, our mortality, the particular way we do things, our habits, and life itself, etc. are all attachments that could become restrictions to our freedom or limit us in other ways. Brenner says, "The holding on can be so strong, the need to have things just as we want them can become overpowering. Attachment is all about being tied up and constrained." It is antonymous of our independence and our freedom.

However, attachment is rooted in our survival. Remember what the Dalai Lama said. We survive here in dependence of others. We come into this world as a result of others actions. As a helpless baby and as a child we need people to support us, to provide for the development of our emotional security and for our means of sustaining life. We are not capable of surviving on our own, especially at the beginning stages of life.

So, it starts with our survival and evolves into a myriad of other things. Nothing is necessarily immune from our attachment - good or bad - which not surprisingly includes our relationships, emotions and our possessions; or anyone or anything that is or may become an object of thought, desire, control or ownership. These are the emotional bonds you develop with people, places and things that you believe are important to you and your way of life.

Attachments can lead to excessive possessiveness and avidity which can cause us to believe we must take more interest in, desire or crave more stuff, more money, more power and more control of others and the world around us. Defining our life in terms of wealth, status, relationships, and other things external to us, beyond what we really need to live a meaningful, engaged and virtuous life, can become a detriment to those innate things that fuel our essential drives for one's purpose, autonomy, spiritual emancipation and our freedom.

Instead, we should look inward for our happiness, spiritual freedom, independence and our true successes in life. They should not be measured by the quality or quantity of our attachments and our possessions and the accumulation of things. There is nothing outside of ourselves that we need to have in order to experience profound peace, happiness and joy in the present moment.

Attachments - emotional, psychological or temporal of any nature - can abduct our consciousness, and according to psychologist Judith Sills could create an array of related specific behaviors that can mire us in the past, cloud our vision, and inhibit positive change. Freedom from our attachments can lead us to a higher level of consciousness, purpose, faith, self-awareness, spiritual and emotional freedom, optimal health, independence, well-being, greater love, future growth, and our development to see things more clearly without emotional overtones, and while learning to be more present, less constrained, and to a greater extent more mindful. Krishna taught that the purpose of things in your life is not for you to love them, but to love the self in all things.

A good example of learning to let go is portrayed in an episode of the Showtime series *Masters of Sex*, where the character Libby Masters, played by Caitlin Fitzgerald counsels a young woman who is having a bad acid trip while traveling to the Woodstock Music Festival in New York, and she asks for Libby's help. Drawing from Libby's recent experience of getting a divorce from her famous husband Dr. Bill Masters, and starting a new life, Libby has the following advice, and is counseling the young woman, with the intention of gently guiding her out of this psychedelic crisis. Libby speaks to the young woman in a self-assured, relaxed and calming hypnotic manner, and says to this "tripping" young woman:

Take a step forward,
begin to let go,
let go of everything you're holding onto,
let go of everything that's weighing you down,
all of the people who have hurt you,
all of the disappointments, the betrayals,
I want you to leave it all here,
it's of no use to you anymore.
In the same relaxed and nurturing manner Libby continues,
Now, this is going to be the hardest part,
now you have to let go of you.
Are you ready?
I'm going to count to 3,
1, 2, 3... You did it, Libby says.

Then the girl experiencing the bad trip awakens from the disturbing experience and asks: What happened?

Libby replies: You died. The young girl responds: Oh, that's so sad. Then Libby gently smiles at her, and in an encouraging and loving way says: No, no, you had to; It's the only way you could be reborn.

This may be an unconventional, yet an appropriate example or metaphor for letting go. It's surrendering all of the things that are hurting you and holding you back; forgiving yourself and others; letting go of the "bad trip", the hate, the heartbreak, the fighting, the pain, the feelings of victimization; and having the courage and wisdom to move on in a more positive and loving manner; to taste independence, peace, harmony, positive growth and real freedom. We should realize that no matter how much we want things to stay the same, life is all about change. Buddha said, "You can only lose what you cling to".

Resistance to letting go is usually counterproductive to the removal of your old, functionally obsolete "baggage" such as the habits, attitudes, false beliefs, and the variety of excuses and people that are holding you back, and not serving your best interest.

No matter how hard you cling to things, you should understand and realize that you own nothing permanently. Everything that surrounds you is temporary, always changing, and transitory by its very nature. Science has proven that the world we live in, and the entire universe is in a constant state of flux and degeneration, and inevitably breaks down regardless of external circumstances. Ultimately, everything we hold dear in this temporal world will have to be relinquished.

Eventually, this letting go is inevitable and unavoidable, and it's also natural. Only the love in your heart, your spirit, and your soul will last forever. The Dalai Lama maintains that most of our troubles are due to our passionate desire for and attachment to things that we misapprehend as enduring entities. He says, and science has proven that all things are transient, impermanent and subject to decay.

The idea of entropy - deterioration, degeneration, and a gradual decline into disorder - seems to be both a scientific and spiritual reality of our temporal world. The second law of thermodynamics states that entropy inevitably and always increases, concluding that no material thing, no physical state or energy is permanent. Therefore, according to many religious and spiritual teachings, attachment to that which is impermanent, and in an inevitable and steady state of deterioration and disorder often leads to suffering. Lori Deschene says something to the effect that, defining yourself by possessions, roles, and relationships breeds attachment, because deterioration and loss entails losing not just what you *have*, but you also lose the freedom of who you truly *are*.

So, where is the freedom? Fr. Lancy Prabhu maintains that freedom would be, you understand your attachments and your desires, the compulsion and addiction that they can create, and then you are able to transcend them. Otherwise, your affinities and your passion for holding on to your attachments or other emotional bonds and your fear of losing them is determining or restricting your behavior, and inhibiting your freedom.

Interference, constraint, conflict or compulsion in one's life often comes from not letting go. We seem to cling to our attachments with great tenacity.

To be truly free, we must gather our power and ability to let go, and don't allow the attachments we develop in our life to constrain, overpower or control us. The act of letting go of things that hold you back or weigh you down involves putting it behind you. Don't suppress it. Face it. Bad, uncomfortable and regrettable things do happen to most if not all of us. You must learn to move on. Acknowledge it. Accept it. Learn from it. Adjust, and eventually let it go.

From non-attachment comes independence and an unfettered life of real freedom. But, as noted above there is a serious caveat. If everyone was free to do whatever they wanted to do, with little or no attachments or limitations, it would inevitably lead to an unhappy conclusion. Our non-attachment to, or letting go of family, friends, society, work, laws, morality, virtuous behavior, and other individual and mutually beneficial cooperative and prudent efforts would bring about a sense of separation, alienation, disunity, and disconnect. This type of non-attachment can also bring about a false sense of one's security and self-sufficiency in which a person is so self-absorbed, so isolated and withdrawn, so unnaturally independent and disconnected, that the needs and feelings of others do not matter, creating a lack of empathy, indifference to or remoteness from the concerns of others. It can also bring about a possible regression to an infantile stage of development, or a narcissistic personality disorder where you believe everything is about you, and no one else is of real consequence. Therefore, non-attachment, absolute unbounded privilege, complete discretion, and limitless freedoms are not possible without severe consequences.

Also as noted above, and worth repeating is the point that like our desires, all our attachments should not be eliminated. The desirable ones' are positive, prudent and virtuous and should be cultivated, such as happiness, friendship, love, compassion, empathy, kindness, forgiveness, etc. The undesirable ones' are negative and non-virtuous and should be purged, such as hatred, lust, greed, abuse, and any desire or attachment that leads to mistreatment, suffering or misery. Remember, what Dr. Cutler said, the distinction between a positive and negative desire or attachment is not whether it provides you with an immediate feeling of pleasure, relief, or satisfaction, but whether it ultimately results in positive or negative consequences. It helps when we learn to recognize our attachments but not be overwhelmed or controlled by them.

The freedom from attachment can help one's dependency, self-centeredness and stubbornness, along with one's boundaries, notions, and identities associated with attachment to dissolve. The dissolution of counterproductive internal inhibitions and flawed personality traits can help break down our resistance to change for the better, and the act of letting go also reinforces Max Dupree's fundamental belief that we cannot become who we need to be by remaining who we are. In other words, our seemingly inherent and notable human reluctance to change, even for the better, inhibits us from letting go and moving forward.

Sometimes we forget that in order to change things, we ourselves need to change. We need to be willing and able to go beyond our past, beyond our limiting set of behaviors and beliefs, become less complacent and more proactive. We need to have the courage to let go of certainties, push the boundaries of our comfort zone, test our limits, but not to the point of recklessness, and gather the strength, courage, character, and determination necessary to reach our full potential for whatever we want to achieve in our life; to take you from where you are, to where you want to be.

If we remain attached or bonded to things, especially the same old things, and hang onto only what's familiar or comfortable, we can limit our perspective, limit our opportunities for positive growth and change; and inhibit our sense of adventure and excitement.

Detachment is not that you should own nothing. But that nothing should own you. - *Ali Ibn Abi Talib*

Through detachment, Alan Alda says, you have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. What you'll discover will be wonderful. What you'll discover is yourself.

You are confined only by the walls you build yourself. There's an old Buddhist saying, if you want to fly, give up everything that weighs you down.

Aine Belton asks, what can you let go of for greater peace, growth, and happiness in your life? What pain, grievance, resentment, belief?

In life, change is inevitable. Growth is optional. Attachment, emotional dependence, and operating from a place of joy, freedom, compassion, tolerance, and love is a choice.

Learning to appreciate and choosing to enjoy your freedom and the moment, regardless of what you have or don't have, or what you are attached to is a skill, discipline, and mind-set we should all develop to improve our happiness and our state of being satisfied, content and free.

Carpe Diem. Take full advantage of your present opportunities. Don't be restricted by your attachments. Seize the day! J C Watt said, it doesn't take a lot of strength to hang on, but it does take a lot of strength to let go. Steve Maraboli's wise and beautiful advice is: Cry. Forgive. Learn. Move on. Let your tears water the seeds of your future happiness. The beautiful journey of today can only begin when we learn to let go of yesterday.

Without making a concerted effort, our current state of affairs reinforced by the status quo naturally perpetuates itself. As humans our predisposition or tendency is, we cling to what we know. We are creatures of habit, and it's normal to be uncomfortable or fearful of change, the future and the unknown. You know what they say about the devil you know. Even if not ideal, the status quo is easier, certainly more ubiquitous, and may be superior compared to other alternatives. Additionally, people favor the existing and longstanding state of things relative to change because it requires less effort, intention, control, courage and risk. We become content and complacent with our current situation and the way things are. People say it is often better to deal with someone or something you are familiar with and know, even if they are not ideal, and even if you do not like them, as opposed to taking a risk with an unknown person or situation that could be even worse. These are some of the biases or rational we often use that help develop, support and maintain one's barriers to change.

Although letting go isn't easy, and it often comes with trepidation and feelings of distress, anxiety and risk, choosing to let go, unleashing your inner mechanism of surrender, can provide you with many practical benefits such as: broadening one's perspective, reducing negativity, and removing one's inner barriers to more happiness, joy, love, better health, success and spiritual growth; and it can be the most rewarding, positive, life-changing, liberating choice you will ever make.

A wise man was asked by another, "What did you gain by praying? The man replied nothing... but let me tell you what I lost: Anger, ego, greed, depression, insecurity, and fear of death." Sometimes the answer to our prayers is not gaining but losing. Learning to let go and detaching from things is a choice. It can eventually lead to one's ultimate gain. It allows you to make room for new people, ideas, and experiences creating more adventure, excitement, and positive growth; and to achieve greater emotional clarity and self-discovery in the process.

Lionel Fisher's advice for detachment is to simplify. He says, modern life has become so complex, so chaotic, hyperactive and overburdened with needs, obligations, possessions and people that a conscious, sustained effort to uncomplicate and de-clutter ourselves is essential if we are to follow Thoreau's suggestion: "To live deliberately...live deep and suck out the marrow of life. To live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms." This represents Henry David Thoreau's reasoning and apparent need for detachment and self-reliance; and it became part of his *Life in the Woods* strategy to simplify his personal life, and to complement his voyage of spiritual discovery. His experiences at Walden Pond emphasize the importance of: letting go, prudent self-reliance and simplicity, and makes the point that any outward improvement in one's life cannot bring inner peace and contentment. He says man is a part of, rather than separate from or above nature, and becoming a student of nature can give us a new perspective about natural laws, life and letting go.

Jeffrey Mc Daniel said, I realize there's something incredibly honest about trees in winter, how they're experts at letting things go. So my advice for growing, regenerating and moving forward into the light of life is similar to what we learn about the nature and honesty of trees in the winter, and it rhymes with the lyrics in the winter holiday song that many of us are quite familiar with: Let it go, let it go, let it go.

In conclusion, letting go is an action of the mind that can release you from the emotional dependence you put on things, to uncomplicate and simplify your life, to more clearly see the numerous possibilities and the many wonders that life has to offer. It can help you to feel the energy, freedom and excitement of a new beginning, and to empower you to make the necessary changes you need to make it all happen. Lao Tzu said, "When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be." Our surrender can become our salvation.





FREEDOM FROM FEAR

Another relevant freedom that can affect one's well-being is one of our personal, emotional based freedoms. That is, the freedom from fear, and fear-induced beliefs of the mind, real or imagined.

A psychological definition I like to use for fear is: an unpleasant, distressing emotion, often an intense mental state and conscious experience which causes both a biological reaction and feelings of dread or apprehension, usually induced by a threat.

The capacity to fear is part of the human condition. However, researchers believe most of our fears are learned, and they arise as a consequence to what is actually happening inside and around us. They are caused by the presence, imminence or sense of danger to a persons' well-being, such as a particular imagined or actual event, observation or experience. Our fears like other intensive emotions are usually subjective conditioned responses that are created, perpetuated, and sustained in our minds.

In addition to one's emotional distress, medical research shows that fear can also be accompanied by certain physical and/or physiological changes. These changes may include: increased heartbeat or respiration, shortness of breath, crying, trembling or shaking, loss of sleep, headaches, nausea, chest pain, panic attacks, among others. Also, the distress caused by fear tends to disturb the balance of body and mind, which can change one's behavior, thoughts and perception, or stimulate other physical and emotional health issues that can unfavorably affect our well-being, and psychological freedom.

There are certain widespread, psychological fears that I believe many of us may share or have in common, such as: the fear of failure or success; the fear of heights, flying, or public speaking; the fear of commitment, loneliness, emptiness, or rejection; the fear of ridicule or criticism; the fear of not getting what we want or loosing what we have; the fear of particular people, places, and things; the existence of evil powers, and the fear of violence, war, your mortality, death, and the unknown; and of course there is the fear of fear itself. These seem to be some of the most prevalent of our fears. However, the list of potential fears, anxieties, and phobias, seems almost endless.

Although fear and anxiety are a normal part of life, there are a number of fears that can negatively impact one's long-term happiness, and profoundly affect and influence one's behavior, emotional and psychological freedom and liberty, if realized.

These distinct fears include, but are not necessarily limited to: the fear of losing your freedom of choice, self-determination, expression, belief, and loss of autonomy, such as the freedom to come and go as you please, what you should believe, what you should do, and the power to control your own future, etc.

The individual rights and personal freedoms established to counter these types of fears have been effectively instituted by regulation, constitution, or law, and are honored, respected, and protected in most democracies. The ability to express one's views, opinions, and grievances, freely and without fear, persecution, punishment, or discrimination are basic human rights that fundamentally, and inherently belong to each individual.

Psychologists say we are often unconscious to the impact fear, worry, and anxiety can have in our lives, even when psychic changes are taking place. Research clearly shows both our real and imagined fears can influence our behavior, thoughts and perception, and numerous other aspects of one's life, never mind one's happiness.

When our fears begin to overwhelm us, and spiral out of control, they can have many negative and unpleasant consequences. They can adversely affect or dominate our thoughts, ego, and emotions; they can be divisive, create barriers, separation, and false perceptions; inhibit us from taking risks necessary for our personal growth and development; reduce productivity; limit our actions, achievements, goals, and cognitive abilities; deflate our self-esteem, and therefore, unfavorably impact one's overall quality of life. Further, they can be pervasive, debilitating, and self sabotaging by turning their dark visions into self-fulfilling prophesies. They can breed resistance, insecurity, paranoia, and distress. They can make situations seem more critical and unbearable. Additionally, they can obscure our reasoning and our intellect; cause panic, hysteria, and other mental, emotional or functional disorders. They can also rob you of energy, opportunity, rewarding experiences, mutually beneficial relationships, and they can also weaken and distress the physical body, and the mind.

Therefore, it's no surprise that in an article entitled, *The Physical and Mental Effects of Fear*, it states that fear is one of the greatest threats facing human beings today. It goes on to say that fear has more power, and can potentially create more stress than any external force or influence, that can profoundly affect your physical, mental, and emotional well-being over the course of your lifetime.

Medical research seems to indicate that stress is one of the most common, if not the most common cause of ill health in our society today. Doctor David Hunnicutt agrees, stress is pervasive, it's everywhere in our lives. He says it dogs us at work. It plagues us at home. It travels with us on the road. It shares our relationships; and ironically, it even sleeps with us. It is now believed that the vast majority of all disease may be stress-related.

Fear not only causes distressful emotional problems such as feelings of dread and apprehension, the stress triggered by fear can wreak infinite havoc on your physical health, and can adversely affect your overall well-being, and every aspect of your life.

However, experts say the complete prevention of stress, regardless of our fears or other negative emotions or lack thereof, is neither possible nor desirable. Their reasoning states, that stress is an important stimulus or motivation for human growth and creativity, and our experiences prove it is an inevitable, and necessary part of life.

Fear is not only one of the most prevalent, intense, apprehensive, and distressing emotions, like stress itself, it also has desirable qualities. Some of our greatest joys follow relief from some of our worst fears. Fear also acts as a survival mechanism.

Fear is aroused by either real or imagined threats. It can be an instant action, involuntary response, or physiological reaction to something that's presently happening, and it can trigger acute stress such as the fight or flight response. But it is usually an emotional response related to future events, such as a situation that could, or is becoming more troublesome, or the continuation of a situation that is currently unacceptable.

Fear is somewhat of a unique intense mental state, unlike most other emotions. It is apparently one of only two primary human emotions related to, but not exclusively to, the future. Hope is the other. Also, the attitude of pessimism is associated with the emotions of fear, as well as with the emotions of helplessness, and depression.

Our fears can be totally debilitating at times, especially if we feel helpless, depressed, insecure, and overwhelmed. Psychologists say, a proven and successful approach to overcoming them may not necessarily be easy. However, because our fears are emotional responses, we have the control to do something about one's individual reactions to them.

Outside events are only triggers. Psychologists say the cause of every emotion is within. You create your emotions by the way you think, and the way you respond to stimuli. What you focus on grows.

They say our fears can be overcome, treated or effectively managed by understanding the root causes, and by utilizing cognitive and behavioral therapy techniques, or other skillful and appropriate, simple and sensible, self-help strategies. Strategies such as: resisting the impulse to avoid or ignore, repress or resist, over analyze or obsess on them. Instead, you may benefit from finding out what your fears are trying to tell you.

Psychologists say your emotions exist for a variety of reasons, often to help you in some way. On a conscious level our fears and other emotions can offer us knowledge and understanding, if we choose to acknowledge, accept, and constructively act on them.

However, if we choose to employ avoidance, repressive or resistance type strategies, we will come to realize that course of action will likely not end up alleviating one's fears, if anything they'd probably perpetuate them. In other words, we cannot escape our fears of today or tomorrow by evading them now or in the future. What we choose to avoid in life usually doesn't go away, it usually stays alive, it persists and worse, it can get stored in one's subconscious. There it can silently cause great distress and anguish in the part of the mind below the level of conscious perception. If not effectively addressed, these fears and anxieties can also intensify with time, and tear at one's gut.

Instead, psychologists recommend you seize command of these fearful situations, and develop more effective coping behaviors and strategies. Strategies such as validating, understanding, and repeatedly recognizing and confronting your fears in a more constructive, rational, confident, courageous, and affirmative manner. Psychologists also say that this 'recognition and exposure therapy' strategy will usually suppress or possibly eliminate the fear-triggering memory, thought or stimulus, resulting in prescribing little or no clinical treatment or medication, and apparently achieving a very high percentage rate of success.

Studies show that if you effectively use these strategies, you will realize that your freedom from fear and other emotional freedom is within your grasp, and within your power to control. You possess the ability to liberate yourself from fear, worry and other negative emotions, which can transform your life, and allow you to achieve true emotional freedom, more serenity, and peace of mind.

The ability to allay your fears, attain or accomplish what you require and need, fears be damned, and to accept and see what you can learn from these fears, can allow you to gain a new, and a more positive, cathartic, more comprehensive and integrated relationship with them. This more positive proactive approach can also help you prevent recurrences, gain strength, and become a more confident, productive, courageous, successful, healthier, and happier individual. These more effective proactive measures can also enhance one's emotional healing, to be able to grow, develop and move ahead into the unknown and into your future with a certain type of confidence, discipline and relaxation with a more realistic, rational, and less fearful state of mind.

The more clearly, calmly, and rationally we address the root causes of our fears, the less our fears will frighten and control us. The strategies we use to address our fears, and one's attitude towards life has a profound effect on our mental and spiritual development, and on our physical and emotional health, which includes our self-esteem.

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” - *Eleanor Roosevelt*.

She is saying don't be fearful of, but rather, embrace the quality of mind and spirit that enables you to face difficulty, danger and pain without fear. She realizes that every time you boldly face a fear you will not only gain strength, courage and confidence, each and every experience respectively, will make it that much easier to manage future fears and anxieties. This can help you see life more clearly and help you push past your fears. An article in *Psychology Today* reinforces this point, and concludes that exposing yourself to your personal "demons" is the best way to move past them.

It is relevant to note that fear might trigger the fight or flight response, but if we choose to flee and don't fight our emotional fears, one thing seems almost certain, our fears can act as a 'mind killer' that doesn't prevent death, but can prevent life, literally or figuratively, emotionally or physically, one way or the other.

As noted above, our minds have a natural negative bias under normal circumstances, and especially under stress, creating conditions conducive to fear, dread and anxiety.

Some fears may be inherent, such as the fear of heights, but psychologists maintain our fear is often created by one's imagination alone; i.e. fearful of not what is actually happening or even likely to happen, but nonetheless, we unreasonably imagine and unfortunately still experience a very real unpleasant or disturbing feeling. These fearful imaginations form mental images of things that either are not physically present or have never been conceived or are not based in reality, yet they can profoundly influence our perceptions. In other words, our fears can be and frequently are, in this regard, a mere mental creation, often a baseless anticipation of a mind forged fear that has little likelihood or no real possibility of coming to fruition. The humorous, yet insightful quote noted by Mark Twain is a good

example of this baseless mental creation of one's fear: "My life has been filled with terrible misfortunes, most of which have never happened."

In other words, from a distance, things may seem difficult or frightening. We often imagine the worst or have extreme concern and anxiety, especially under stress, but these imagined "terrible misfortunes" rarely come to light. Hale Dwoskin says, think of the acronym for fear - FEAR equals False Evidence Appearing Real. Like Twain, and many psychologists, he believes most people's fearful expectations are totally unfounded. He says, even when fears seem to have a foundation in reality, these are usually blown way out of proportion to the actual risk, if there even is any. He maintains that anything that can help us let go of, but not ignore fear more easily can make a tremendous difference in our lives.

Another fear related issue that is the dichotomy of one becoming overwhelmed by fear, is when one totally dismisses or ignores fear. Without fear one can become an extreme and uncontrolled risk taker adversely affecting one's judgment, which includes one's survival mechanism. This can lead to taking excessive and unnecessary risks impairing one's financial and physical health and safety. It can also over inflate or unrealistically exaggerate one's confidence and sensibilities, resulting in questionable judgment, poor choices and harmful consequences.

Although your emotions may help define you, you should realize that they are subjective responses to one's stimuli, and usually the product of conditioning. Accordingly, you should further understand fully, that you are not your thoughts or your emotions, regardless of your conditioning. And more importantly, you should realize that you have the power and the inherent ability through rational thinking alone, to control how you react to them. This includes your fears, anxieties or other distressing emotions, traumatic memories, and other negative and subjective psychological states.

Psychologists say, you are only affected by your emotions to the extent that you identify with them. The good news is that this control of your emotions is clearly in your hands. It is a choice one makes.

When you sense your negative and distressing thoughts and emotions arising, scientist who study behavior and the way in which the mind actually works say that practicing cognitive and behavioral therapy techniques, mindfulness or other effective self-healing processes, you will discover that you can have the power to release such anxieties. Once you realize that fact, these practitioners maintain that by utilizing your abilities of awareness, discernment, rational thinking, and other sensibilities you can let these distressing thoughts, apprehensions, and other negative or counterproductive emotions go, just as easily as they arose. Again, don't dismiss them. Acknowledge and address them; then, let them go. After all, simply ask yourself, who's the boss, who makes the choices - you, or your thoughts, or your emotions?

When you realize you have the power and control, and you are the one choosing, you can no longer blame others or your circumstances. You don't have to be a victim. Then, you are on the way to gaining your freedom, and independence from these negative emotions, and the associated distress and anguish that they cause.

Without one's unnecessary or illusional fears you become truly free, and you feel more connected to yourself and others.

As noted above, fear is one of the primary causes of stress that can profoundly affect and weaken your physical, mental and emotional well-being over the course of your lifetime. Scientific evidence and medical research have proven that your body and your mental processes have this innate and natural ability to heal or correct themselves. Your body and your mind are within the sphere of your influence. You have this natural ability to contribute to, or even accelerate the healing process. Research indicates you can restore the damage and inner communications in the body and in the mind respectively, which have become compromised. For many decades now, medical research has shown how mind, body and spirit can work together for the body's self-repair.

Physical healing takes time, the more severe the injury, usually the longer it takes to heal. It's a natural and often time-consuming process. But the healing process can be hastened and advanced with positive thoughts, feelings and beliefs, and the proper management of our fears, and other anxieties.

Emotional healing may also take time. Also as noted above, emotional healing usually starts with acceptance, understanding, and exercising one's capacity to reason, and one's ability to take control.

The more we rationally look at our fears, and then acknowledge, understand, and logically accept them for what they are, the more quickly, naturally, and less painfully they will begin to dissolve, abate, or weaken. By successfully completing this process, psychologists say that our fears can be sufficiently managed or released.

Cultivating a more positive, optimistic and upbeat attitude, along with a stable state of mind, free of fear, can also improve and hasten the process to more quickly restore one's physical and emotional health.

As noted earlier, the mind can influence biology and can change the character of our health. When you have optimistic and positive thoughts you can generate a healing response.

One's optimism and mental stability can also aid, or enhance our clarity of thinking, and the human developmental processes that are imperative for the effective development, and management of one's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health, and well-being.

Helping others accept and overcome their fears; cultivating self confidence, faith, and trust; eliminating irrational excuses, self sabotaging thoughts, negative operant conditioning, and fear-induced beliefs; developing a more amenable, courageous attitude and perspective, and becoming more rational, optimistic, relaxed, broad-minded, and expanding one's comfort zone, are additional strategies that can help in combating your fears.

Overcoming and managing your fears, anxieties, fear-induced beliefs, and other disruptive forces can provide for more personal and spiritual freedom. It will also allow you to reduce your emotional suffering, improve your self-esteem, and your relationships, and live your life with more love, acceptance, gratitude, and more respect for yourself and for others.

Courage, commitment, understanding, rational thinking and a stable state of mind, developing your confidence and self belief, and applying the other strategies noted above may not only help you overcome your fears, or effectively manage them, they will enhance your fundamental freedoms and your happiness. They can also help create more opportunities and potential; and help you achieve what you really want out of life without the anxiety, concern, distress, and the many other problems that are driven by our fears, both real and imagined.

Finally, as noted earlier, freedom from totalitarianism, tyranny, and the domination of any oppressive or unjust severe government that is unconstrained by democratic limits, and that controls all private, political, social, and economic activities is a basic human right to which all human beings are entitled.

These basic rights and freedoms are conceived to be natural and universal human rights. They include the right to life, liberty, freedom of thought and expression, and equality before the law.

These inalienable fundamental rights, and inherently entitled freedoms are also consistent with the nature and character of a free democratic society. They are central to most reasonable people's conception of a humane culture, an acceptable civilized community, and a more idealistic, and dignified life. Aine Belton says, buried underneath your deepest fears you may find your greatest gifts, and the keys to liberation.

"On the other side of every fear there is freedom." - Mary Ferguson.

"Life begins where fear ends." - Osho

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it." - Nelson Mandela

"Without fear, we are able to see more clearly our connections to others. Without fear, we have more room for understanding and compassion. Without fear, we are truly free." - Thich Nhat Han

**WE FEAR THE WORST, BUT OFTEN WHAT TURNS OUT IS FOR THE BEST. NEVER LET YOUR FEAR
DECIDE YOUR FUTURE.**





FREEDOM THAT COMES FROM THE TRUTH

Another freedom that can impact one's happiness is the one that comes from truth. Veritas liberabit vos, *The truth shall set you free.*

The insightful Dutch politician Geert Wilders said, "Truth and freedom are inextricably connected. We must speak the truth, otherwise we shall lose our freedom." In general, at least in this country, and in our culture, people expect to be told the truth; and if you take that away intentionally or even with benevolent forms of deception, you're making a judgment that will diminish their ability to act freely.

The definition of truth is a verified or indisputable fact, proposition or principle; conformity with reality.

However, a belief does not fit this definition. Yet, most people think what they believe is the truth. Remember what Demosthenes said, the easiest thing of all is to deceive oneself, for what a man wishes he generally believes to be true. So one might ask, what truths are really objective?

When one looks at the facts and finds them indisputable and real, they are objective truths. But, in most cases one's opinion of the truth and reality, especially the truth and reality of events are subjective.

All events are neutral, they are what they are. Through one's perception, we try to clarify, understand or explain the meaning, as well as construe the significance, value and intention of these events. We filter them through our own particular biases and judgments, and subjectively interpret them through our personal believe system.

You will literally believe that what you perceive is out there, when, in fact, you're merely looking at it through your own distinct filters. Each mind may interpret them similarly or differently, with a different significance, value or meaning. The reality is that one's individual reality and beliefs are merely the product of perceptions which are filtered through one's particular senses, biases, limited experiences, knowledge, and current state of mind. The reality of your world is occurring inside your mind. Not necessarily, and not exclusively outside of it. To put it simply, our life and our reality is the creation of our mind.

We have been taught, and I think that most of us believe that the truth is a worthy goal and it's important to be honest with yourself and others. When you don't tell the truth or what you believe to be true you are deceiving yourself and others. This is counterproductive to your own well-being and to how others perceive you i.e. dishonest and unreliable. Also, untruths, falsehoods, misrepresentations and lies tend to compound and multiply, one leads to another. You eventually start to drown in your own sea of deception, when you can't recall what you said is the truth or not. Life gets much more complicated and confusing. Sir Walter Scott said, "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive."

You forget which lies you told and why. Mark Twain said that, if you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.

So, why do people lie, convey false impressions, mislead themselves, or practice other forms of deception?

Not surprisingly, the answer appears to be self evident. When you think about it, people have an obvious incentive to lie, deceive and hide from the truth. Besides the more obvious reasons - greed, expedience, and other forms of opportunism and self-interest, acknowledging the truth could be costly, uncomfortable, shameful or humiliating, embarrassing and extremely anxiety producing. Conscious, deliberate, premeditated or even spontaneous blatant lying is by and large uncomfortable, often guilt-inducing and not easy for most people.

Despite that premise, studies show that people often lie when they feel trapped or pressured, fear punishment, want to please others, cover-up one's failures, or when they feel that their reputation or self-esteem is threatened. Further, lying to yourself, what psychologists refer to as self-deception, is the way we rationalize or justify false beliefs about ourselves to ourselves, especially as to the true nature of one's feelings or motives. Evolutionary biologist Robert Trivers in his book, *The Folly of Fools* essentially says in an article in *Psychology Today* by Mathew Hudson, that we consciously and unconsciously fool ourselves in all realms of life - when overestimating our looks or abilities; when justifying our righteousness; when defending our power, privilege or paranoia; when constructing false historical narratives and trying to gain special attention or peer acceptance. He says it's all part of advancing our own agendas, and I add, justifying our ego, and our subjective and biased opinions and thoughts. It seems the need to always justify ourselves, and our capacity for self-deception and wishful thinking has no apparent limits.

Even though there can be and often is a convincing number of momentary advantages for one's lying and deceit, when we are deliberately untruthful, we have a natural tendency to live in the moment. With this limited foresight, we might narrowly look into the proximate future, but unfortunately, we naturally do not want to think about the significant and costly long-term effects of dishonesty and deception. Robert Ringer explains that truth can often be harsh, and, as human beings, we quite naturally gravitate toward less pain and more pleasure. He says we simply do not like our little self-delusive worlds to be upset by such a trivial matter as truth. We don't worry about the consequences we may have to deal with tomorrow; we just want to feel good today.

Eventually, lying to others and fooling yourself will have negative if not devastating consequences. As an example, one of the casualties of most if not all active alcoholics and other substance abusers is the truth. Most become practiced, profligate, and even pathological liars in all matters related to the defense and preservation of their addiction.

Lies and deceit, never mind addiction, eventually lead to one's undoing. They can destroy your happiness and cause irreparable harm to both your character and your reputation. People will inevitably lose trust in you. Sooner or later, your lies become overwhelming and will end up ruining your relationships. They can also damage your self-esteem and cause inner conflicts like psychotic thinking or cognitive dissonance - the conflicting way you view or act upon the world or with other people.

Moreover, lying never solves the problem in most cases (but there are arguably some legitimate exceptions, see such an example below), and lying can severely limit your future in unforeseeable ways. Pearl Bailey said, you never really find yourself until you face the truth.

So it seems to me, in most circumstances, that the truth is a liberating experience that can set you free. It leaves your conscience clear and unburdened. It allows for less confusion, conflict, dissonance, deception and distress. It can improve your health and your relationships. It sets a good example for others, and it can make you feel better about yourself, while improving your confidence, credibility and well-being. Besides, others can appreciate, respect, and rely on your honesty and dependability.

Other advantages or benefits associated with telling the truth, can include the enhancement of your mental and physical condition, contributing to more happiness, less stress and peace of mind. However, there is an exception to telling the truth; a situation that seems to be a logical argument, or even an altruistic and moralistic reason as well as a legitimate motivation for outright lying to someone. See below for an example of the circumstances that might justify such lying.

Nonetheless, the truth provides the proper foundation for our reasoning, our individual and mutual beneficial societal growth, and it supports the factual communication of knowledge and understanding.

Further, individually and collectively the truth contributes to our veracity, our belief in one another, our integrity, morality, justice and the welfare and righteousness of humanity.

Kami Garcia said, we don't get to choose what is true, but we do get to choose what we do about it. When you have to choose, no matter how severe the short-term pain of accepting or telling the truth is, it will surely be significantly better than the long-term consequences of deceiving yourself and others. It is said that truth is the utmost of importance, and only with truth can one move forward in the right way.

Remember that telling the truth ultimately is always in your own best interest. Remember too, that if you are consistently confronted with easy choices in life you don't build much character.

According to Kenneth Blanchard and Norman Vincent Peale in their book, *The Power of Ethical Management*, free will puts us into situations that when we are confronted with difficult dilemmas, working on them helps strengthen us. They say, having this freedom to choose and exercising it with integrity and humility actually makes us strong. It's analogous to building strength. Every time you work out, you deal with resistance. If the weights are too light to provide that resistance and therefore are easy for you to lift, you won't increase your strength.

Also, the book points out that many experts agree that ethical behavior is related to self-esteem; that people who feel good about themselves have what it takes to withstand outside pressures, to tell the truth, and to do what is right, rather than what is merely expedient, politically correct, popular, lucrative, or what makes you look good presently when you know it's a lie.

Psychologists say that the human mind quite simply inclines toward improper or aberrant behavior in the face of negative influences around it. Telling the truth and goodness does not necessarily come easily to everyone. It is not natural to everyone to be kind, unselfish and honest, especially in the wrong

environment or functioning under extreme stress or with a fragile, disturbing or unstable state of mind. Special effort is often required to do what is right, and to be honest with yourself and others.

One's deception, dishonesty, and wrong-doing is not simply a question of being evil, unsound, injurious or criminal. The potential to lie, mislead, and do wrong is in all of us. Greed, dishonesty and deceitfulness are common traits awaiting only the opportune moment to surface whenever moral or ethical slippage occurs. At some point, the question of personal ethical responsibility must be raised. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, what lies before you and what lies behind you are small matters compared to what lies within you.

It has been said, the truth transcends all boundaries we seek to erect. It allows us to live in reality.

A good example of why living in reality and telling the truth is worth it, and it is expressed in an episode in the Showtime series, *Masters of Sex*, where Martin Sheen, acting as Dr. Bill Masters, puzzles over a moral dilemma posed by him, when he asked his colleague and friend, Dr. Martin Scully, played by Beau Bridges this question: "I guess I was just wondering whether there are times in one's life when it's better not to know the truth or the answer to a question of what's really going on. Further he asked, are there just some doors that should never be opened? Is there a circumstance where you think, no matter what the consequences, whether it's always worth pursuing the truth, no matter what?" Beau Bridges, playing Dr. Scully, a closeted, guilt-ridden homosexual, replies, "In my experience, the truth can come at a very high price. You can lose people in your life, pieces of your life, but in the end it's worth it; it's worth it to know where you stand." In other words, there is no doubt you can get hurt, profoundly hurt, by revealing the truth. But it's better, in most cases to know the truth, the reality of a situation, rather than to deceive yourself or others, live a lie and go against your true nature, what you really stand for, and who you truly are, regardless of your fears and insecurities.

Pascal says, we will know the truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart. Living and expressing the truth empowers you, and is always in your own best interest.

With a sound mind, the truth resides within our conscience, our soul, and in the recesses of our heart, and it is compelling to our very nature because it never damages a cause that is just, it only makes it more powerful, and it enables you to feel liberated, right, and good about yourself.

John Wooden, the legendary UCLA basketball coach said it well, there is no pillow as soft as a clear conscience. The truth which has made us free will in the end also make us happy - Felix Adler.

St. Augustine said, The truth is like a lion, you don't have to defend it, let it loose, it will defend itself. St. Augustine also said it's important to tell the truth, but never out of fear or to punish.

When it comes to truth, Emerson also said, the greatest homage we can pay to truth is to use it.

And finally, a Buddhist proverb tells us: "There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not starting and not going all the way". However, there appears to be a logical argument and justifiable reason for not telling the truth and "not going all the way". Such a justifiable reason would include, when telling the truth would bring about or would likely have the opposite effect of the above noted benefits and advantages related to telling the truth; when telling the truth would inhibit you from

feeling liberated, right or good about yourself; when telling the truth may not "set you free"; may not contribute to one's well-being; and more importantly, where telling the truth is simply too high a price to pay compared to lying about someone or something, even when you know lying is not right. In fact, telling a lie may be, relatively speaking, the right thing to do under the following circumstance.

I believe many, if not most people would argue for what one could consider to be a moral exception or value judgment, where in fact you realize that it would be better to lie and deceive knowingly, rather than be fully open, totally honest and tell the truth. This value judgment and moral assessment or departure from "telling the truth and nothing but the truth" comes into play when one's intentional lying is an attempt to prevent harm, especially irreversible harm or other severe adverse consequences to innocent persons and those that did no wrong; a principle or action known as beneficence - to do good and prevent or remove harm for the benefit of others.

An example often used in this regard involves the question: "If the Nazis were at your door, and asking if you are hiding any Jews - knowing and accepting responsibility for a family of Jews that were hiding in your basement - how would you answer?" Once again, I believe most or all loving and compassionate people would consider your intentional lying or deception to be appropriate in this particular instance. I also believe most people would consider one's participation in this deceit to be a higher moral imperative; to be virtuous, even heroic, noble and good. Therefore, one may not consider "telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" to be a moral absolute under all circumstances or conditions.



FREEDOM THAT COMES FROM EMBRACING FORGIVENESS

The last of the freedoms noted on this select, nonexclusive short list is the freedom that comes from embracing forgiveness.

Forgiveness can lead to personal and spiritual transformation, and freedom for both, and particularly the one that forgives, as well as the one that is forgiven.

Holding on to anger, resentment, fury and other negative emotions is harmful to your physiological well-being and it diminishes or robs you of your spiritual and emotional freedom. Harboring these kinds of negative emotions is about as beneficial as...say...nothing.

"Refusing to forgive others leads only to personal bondage. The bondage of an unforgiving heart can make you feel powerless, hateful and bitter. It disconnects you from others", says Dr. Michael Youssef. Someone said, "Holding a grudge and harboring resentment or anger is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die."

Psychologists tell us that it is better to let go of resentment and come to grips with our painful feelings of hurt, anger or rejection. We need to learn to forgive others and ourselves, to create space for imperfection in our lives. Besides, forgiving is something you do for yourself. Lyubomirsky says, it is a positive response to human wrongdoing that can lead you down the path of healing and peace of mind. She says, it doesn't mean you excuse or condone the wrongdoer's transgressions, which includes oneself. But, holding on to anger often harms you more than the object of your anger. Let it go.

Embracing forgiveness and moving forward mitigates or eases your negative emotions and feelings of resentment, anger, bitterness and ill will; and it opens up the path to more positive affective states of consciousness that are likely to be experienced such as compassion, kindness, affection, peace of mind, happiness, liking and love.

The physical, psychological and spiritual benefits to you and the one's you forgive, could be enormous. Hannah Arendt said, "without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would... be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell."

Forgiveness is freedom, divine, and it is one of the highest and most beautiful forms of love. We often hear the wisdom of Alexander Pope, "To err is human; to forgive, divine."

Life is full of conflicts. Forgiveness and reconciliation are age old practices that are important teachings of many of the world's religions. Knowing the nature of how and why we should forgive plays a big part in many faiths, religious doctrines or philosophies. In the teachings of Christianity and other world religions it is the basis for all relational healing both horizontally (within community) and vertically (with God). These doctrines explain that love does not condemn, and all beings are to be forgiven if they are willing to transform their orientation from fear, anger or hate, to love. These teachings maintain that forgiveness is not an intellectual gesture, but a radical transformation of one's being, to return to original wholeness.

In conclusion, forgiveness is the key to our spiritual and emotional freedom. Forgiveness has the power to restore to health and promote the closure of our emotional and metaphysical related wounds, and the "cancerous" or malignant conditions that they can cause to body, mind and spirit. Our freedom of forgiveness is a choice that will help us reconnect and heal our broken heart. It can relieve our feelings of resentment, anger and bitterness; allow us to love even more; establish new beginnings; help us move forward; strengthen our compassion, faith, and connection with one another; enable us to look past our desire for retribution or revenge; overcome our differences; and most importantly, it can become an invaluable gift you give yourself that can make you whole again. These are some of the powerful, virtuous and morally justifiable affirmative reasons for embracing our forgiveness.

Furthermore, the concept of forgiveness is not exclusive to the religious and philosophical domains.

The medical profession and social scientist also recognize the powerful and practical therapeutic benefits that come with both giving and receiving forgiveness. Studies show that people who forgive are both happier and healthier than those who hold onto resentment and anger. In many beneficial and curative ways, forgiveness is a proven prescription for better relational healing, physical and mental

health, and spiritual growth. Forgiveness sets you free, enables you to give more to yourself and others, and it empowers you to choose how past and future events affect you. Therefore, you don't have to feel like a victim, essentially creating a more liberated, harmonious and better life.

As your thoughts, attitude, relationships, perspective, health and spiritual growth improves through the power of forgiveness; it seems natural that all aspects of your life should also improve. Altogether, this can enable you to become both stronger and more capable; ultimately helping you achieve your unmitigated and true potential, and a more helpful, consonant, kindly, fulfilling and enjoyable life.



PERSONAL FREEDOM

In his book, *The Four Agreements*, Don Miguel Ruiz offers four simple, yet profound principles that can enhance one's code of personal conduct, while acting as a practical guide to achieving more personal freedom, enlightenment, and contribute to more happiness and love in one's life.

The four agreements noted in his book are these: 1st: **Be impeccable with your word.** 2nd: **Don't take anything personally.** 3rd: **Don't make assumptions.** 4th: **Always do your best.**

Janet Boyer, author and teacher summarizes and defines the four agreements as follows:

Be Impeccable With Your Word: Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.

Don't Take Anything Personally: In many circumstances, nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is often a projection of their own reality, their own character or lack thereof. When you are immune to the [inaccurate, hurtful and hostile] opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

Don't Make Assumptions: Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness, unnecessary drama and false justifications. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

Always Do Your Best: Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret.



FREEDOM OF WILL

In conclusion, it seems that Viktor Frankel was right. The highest and greatest of the human freedoms is the freedom of will, to choose one's own way.

It is human nature to resist compulsion or coercion by others. Most people don't like to be compelled to act against their will. They don't like to be forced into decisions that they believe they are capable of making themselves, even if the results ultimately might be better, or "good" for them.

Free will is a gift and a fundamental human right that carries great power and responsibility. It allows us to make conscious choices, to act in certain situations independently of natural, social or divine restraints.

Free will is connected to the philosophical concept of, and it seems to be a necessary condition for the performance of free actions. In other words, free action is engaging in one's conscious and voluntary action, right or wrong, for goodness or for evil, as a result of utilizing one's careful consideration and one's free will.

Free will is about being your own person regardless of one's inclinations and rationality.

Our sense of empowerment, autonomy, and control of one's destiny are just some of the reasons we love to believe in free will.

Free will is also related to the philosophical issues of one being accountable for one's actions and one's moral responsibility. We use free will to hold ourselves and others accountable, morally and legally, for one's respective actions and behaviors. However, it's important to note that psychologists say you control your actions and behavior, but only to a point. They maintain that multiple forces beside one's free will are often at work when it comes to one's behaviors, beliefs and choices. Such forces can include our emotions, perspectives, one's self interest, and preceding events (cause and effect) or other external constraints. Marianne Williamson said, "As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Free will, other liberties, rights and privileges may be simple ideas or conventional democratic, spiritual or philosophical principles, but when they are gone, not much else in this world seems to matter; and they surely can impact and contribute to our individual and our collective well-being, and to a more joyful, natural and happier life.

Victor Frankel wrote, "A human being is a deciding being. Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space there is our power - free will - to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom. Freedom to make choices that will determine our destiny. Freedom is just the other side of action."

The Church of the Later-Day Saints points out that, "It's important not to trample on other people's freedoms in pursuit of our own. Even when we feel our way of thinking may be for someone else's "own good," it's important that everyone has the right to their own opinions and beliefs."

Friedrich Nietzsche said, "Freedom is the will to be responsible to [and for] ourselves." And, a natural progression of that thought is the paraphrased fusion of two quotes respectively. The first is from James Baldwin, writer and playwright, and the second is from the actor Denzel Washington playing an attorney from the movie *Roman J. Israel, Esq.* "Freedom is not something that anybody can be given." "[Absolute] freedom is something you can only give yourself."

Based on the values enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, Paul Nitze, assistant Secretary of Defense under President Gerald Ford declared that, "The fundamental purpose of the United States is to assure the integrity and vitality of our free society, which is founded upon the dignity and worth of the individual."

JFK said, "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Finally, Ronald Reagan in his Inaugural Address said, "Above all, we must realize that no arsenal, or no weapon in the arsenals of the world, is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women." We are the land of the free because we are the home of the brave.



"What people have the capacity to choose, they also have the ability to change." Madeleine K. Albright



DOES GIVING AND GENEROSITY CONTRIBUTE TO OUR HAPPINESS?

Altruistic people tend to be happy. Studies have established that generosity and good deeds are actually the direct cause of an increase in well-being. Our generosity, kindness, and giving unconditionally of any nature, enriches our lives.

If you're fortunate enough to recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate your life's blessings, sharing these blessings, which may include your love, hope or kindness; compassion, attention or advise; time, efforts or finances can benefit not only the recipients of your generosity, it can also contribute to: new and deeper relationships, a sense of connection with others, improved health and subjective well-being, reshapes our self-image, and rewards us in many other ways. Aine Belton says, "Some of your greatest gifts are giving of who you are. Just being happy in itself can be a wonderful gift to people in your life."

Our minds are wired to mimic others, according to psychologist Ron Friedman. He says the tendency to imitate is a powerful force in our lives, influencing us in more ways than we can recognize. By consciously or unconsciously mimicking those around us, we better relate to one another.

When we witness others being happy, generous and performing good deeds, or we see someone acknowledging their gratitude, behaving honorably, unselfishly, or acting heroically, we take comfort in, and can be inspired by these caring and compassionate acts of others. It can also makes us feel better about the decency of people, and the goodness of humanity.

Studies apparently show that our observations of these caring behaviors can provide the perfect stimulation for our mirror neurons. These neurons apparently allow us to directly experience, internalize and ultimately emulate what we observe. This could help explain how we learn through mimicry and why we empathize with others. Some psychologists and neuroscientists have referred to it as the biology of empathy.

In the context of generosity and emotional awareness, our intellectual identification with altruism, nobility of thought, or other virtuous behavior, and our power of understanding can reinforce a desire inside us to help others and become a better person.

Our generosity provides us with a strong sense that we are doing something that matters. When you do good, you feel good, and you make others feel good too. Giving from the heart does so much for others, and it makes you feel empowered. When you feel empowered, you feel worthy, competent and capable. Giving also allows you to redirect your energies away from your own anxieties, thereby reducing stress and providing consequential psychological and physiological benefits. When we give of ourselves, and care for others, we not only serve others, we serve ourselves, all of humanity, and something divine and higher than ourselves.

There's an old relevant paradoxical proverb which goes something like this: In giving our lives away, is when we find the real riches in life.

All of the factors noted here, epitomize and exemplify why giving often feels better than receiving.

When we receive a gift, we are grateful and happy. When we bestow a gift or help others in any fashion, we create these same good spirits and good emanations which include happiness and joy, in both the recipient(s) and in ourselves. As a result, your generosity and kindness multiplies the benefits, and creates at least twice the happiness, joy and cheer. That's a pretty good return on your investment, and emotionally hard to beat besides. Our generosity is the only investment that never fails.

It's true, the more you give, the more you have. I believe, based on experience and observation that whatever we impart to others will come back to us many times over. These good or bad emanations and this theory of inevitable consequences are often referred to as karma.

There's a passage from a poem by Edwin Markham that co-incidentally provides a good poetic definition of karma: *There is a destiny that makes us brothers; none goes his way alone; all that we send into the lives of others, comes back into our own.* Belton says giving and receiving are inextricably linked; each gives birth to the other. The more you give, the more you will receive, and vice versa.

When you really think about it, giving unconditionally is more about love than anything else. We cannot share with others what we do not have within ourselves. Generosity and love represent some of the noblest attributes of humanity, and are significant factors that contribute to our happiness, sense of purpose, connection to others, and to living a meaningful life. Few things in life rival the joy of making someone else truly happy.

“Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profoundness. Kindness in giving creates love.” — Lao Tzu





IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEELING GRATITUDE AND HAPPINESS?

I think most people would say yes. As noted herein, fostering an attitude of gratitude for what we do have in life, will help us fulfill our happiness. David Steindt-Rast said, "Gratefulness is the key to a happy life that we hold in our hands, because if we are not grateful, then no matter how much we have we will not be happy... because we will always want to have something else or something more."

Research shows that truly happy people notice and appreciate what's right instead of constantly focusing on what's wrong. They avoid comparisons with what others have, and are grateful for the opportunities and the many blessings they do have. Further, they celebrate the goodness in people, and treat life as the wonderful gift that it is. Gratitude is something that can be learned, practiced and developed.

Positive psychologists encourage us to make gratitude lists, write gratitude letters, and to acknowledge our gratitude when we experience or realize something to be thankful for. This can help us to see, and not forget the bright side of common, everyday activities that we might otherwise take for granted.

Some of the distinguishing characteristics, qualities, and/or benefits of living a grateful life may include: being more aware of, and thankful for, the good things that happen; becoming more optimistic and helpful; enhancing emotional healing, helping people achieve closure to negative events, and becoming more relaxed, more trustful, and more social; fortifying old friendships and nurturing new relationships; creating a sense of purpose in our lives; making us feel a greater sense of wonder and connection to the world, and more appreciation for the lives of those around us; and instilling in us a willingness to take action to show the gratitude we feel. It enhances our personality, helps us build social bonds, encourages caring for others, and can boost our career, make our work place more friendly and enjoyable; promotes a stronger immune system, spiritual development, and helps us sleep better, gives us more energy, improves our self-esteem, makes us feel good, and so on. The benefits of gratitude are many.

"There is as much greatness of mind in acknowledging a good turn as in doing it" - Seneca

Grateful people often make it a habit to encourage others, and to say something positive to every person they meet, even when they are having a bad day, or are experiencing hard times in their life. Recent research also shows that people who are more grateful are happier, more optimistic, less self-centered, less depressed, less stressed, appreciate and value the little things, become more satisfied with life, and

cope better with life's transitions. Psychologist Dr. Michael McCullough says, "Every good trait you'd want for yourself or others seems to go along with being grateful."

On the other hand, research also shows that the lack of gratitude is a characteristic of self-absorbed and narcissistic personalities. Unfortunately, as writer, world traveler and social entrepreneur Chris Guillebeau denotes, "These people do not realize the boost in energy, enthusiasm, and social benefits that come from a more grateful, connected life." They also don't realize or possibly don't value the fact that gratitude diminishes and helps defeat arrogance, self-centeredness, feelings of entitlement, vanity, resentment, and envy, as well as hostility, defensiveness, bitterness, loneliness and other negative or depressive feelings that one may harbor within oneself.

Of all the habits and dispositions that lead to enduring happiness and life satisfaction, gratitude and appreciation, which includes counting your blessings, and being thankful for what you do have in life, should be at the top of the list.

Also, we don't want to forget to be grateful for our most important blessings, the most consistent ones, the ones we often take for granted, such as family, friends, health and home, our gift of love, caring and joy, and our sense of wonder, beauty, and appreciation of life itself.

It helps to live everyday expressing our appreciation, kindness, compassion and gratitude. When you express your gratitude, the result is similar to love. You create happiness and joy within yourself, and within all the others you share it with.

"The deepest craving of human nature is the need to be appreciated." - William James

I love this prayer which I believe represents the spiritual substance and nature of why gratitude, which includes being thankful for your troubles and your setbacks, is important to your well-being. Being thankful for your setbacks can provide other benefits which include greater personal development, more joy and strength of character, improved resilience, and more effective coping skills.

BEING THANKFUL

Be thankful that you don't already have everything you desire, if you did, what would there be to look forward to.

Be thankful when you don't know something, for it gives you the opportunity to learn.

Be thankful for the difficult times, during those times you grow.

Be thankful for your limitations, because they give you opportunities for improvement.

Be thankful for each new challenge, because it will build strength and character.

Be thankful for your mistakes, they will teach you valuable lessons.

Be thankful when you're tired and weary, because it means you've made a difference.

It's easy to be thankful for the good things. A life of rich fulfillment comes to those who are also thankful for the setbacks.

Gratitude can turn a negative into a positive.

Find a way to be thankful for your troubles, and they can become your blessings.

☺ Author unknown ☺

Dr. S. Ignacimutau points out, "The path of life is often beset with difficulties. But let those not discourage us. Difficulties and misfortunes are meant to strengthen us, to ennoble us. Life is a challenge and an opportunity. Our attitude determines how we look at setback. To a positive thinker, it can be a stepping stone for further improvement and success. To a negative thinker, it can be a stumbling block, and stop us from going forward. There is some positive in every person and every situation. Sometimes we have to dig deep to look for the positive, because it may not be apparent. As Andrew Carnegie says, dealing with people and dealing with life is like digging for gold. When you go digging for an ounce of gold, you have to move tons of dirt to find it. But when you go digging, if you're resourceful, you don't go looking for the dirt, you go looking for the gold."

Martin Walsh said, "When you look for the good in others you discover the best in yourself."
How we respond to setbacks and other challenges and life itself is the key.

Rumi's poem, *The Guest House* is also relevant here. He makes the point that your troubles can be providing you with another opportunity for personal growth, or to help you clear a pathway for some new delight or insight in your life. He seems to be saying that your life isn't an empty structure or just exclusive to your individual wants and needs. It's a guest house. It will house some expected and pleasant and some unexpected and questionable visitors - emotions and feelings. Surely, they will not all be up to your liking; but you should be grateful for all of them. The more visitors you welcome and receive, the more you can learn about yourself and the benefits of acceptance, and embracing whatever life sends your way, be it sorrow or joy. You can learn from these visitors what is good and helpful and what is not. Each one is sent to teach you something. They are guides to your state of mind, and you should realize that you have the power to prepare for your reactions to them. In everything that you experience there is a gift, be it obvious or not. Be appreciative of, learn from, and be grateful for all the blessings around you and whatever comes your way. There is always something to be thankful for.

The Guest House

By Rumi

*This being human is a guesthouse.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

Jonathan Haidt said, "If you can find a way to make sense of adversity and draw constructive lessons from it, you can benefit." Finding a way to benefit from your hardships, psychologically painful and traumatic circumstances or events, is also the key that unlocks posttraumatic growth. Sheri Rosenthal noted another significant benefit in her article, *Got forgiveness?* "If you have gratitude for life's hardships, you will always find your joy in life, and never feel victimized by your circumstances."

Finally, most of us usually get a lot of e-mails every day. We may forward the ones that we feel can provide great humor, or could help the people we care about, or are meaningful in other ways. This particular one is relevant here, and although it's simplistic in nature, I think it has value, reinforces the point, and is worth sharing. The author is unknown, and it's entitled, *I am thankful*.

I AM THANKFUL...

For the wife,

who says it's hot dogs tonight, because she is home with me, and not out with someone else. She knows I love hot dogs too.

For the husband,

who's in on the sofa being a couch potato, because he is at home with me, and not out at the bars. She knows he likes a beer or two.

For the teenager,

who is complaining about doing the dishes or is working around the house because it means he is helping out, and learning the moral benefit and importance of work and its inherent ability to strengthen character.

For the taxes I pay,

because it means I am employed, and capable of work.

For the mess to clean after a party,

because it means I have been surrounded by friends, and fortunate enough to be able to host a party, and have a place to live.

For the clothes that fit a little too snug,

because it means I have enough to eat.

For my shadow that watches me work,

because it means I am out in the sunshine.

For the lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning, and the gutters that need fixing,

because it means I have a home.

For all the complaining I hear about the government,

because it means we have freedom of speech.

For the parking spot I find at the far end of the parking lot,

because it means I am capable of walking, and I have been blessed with transportation.

For paying my huge heating bill,

because it means I am warm, during the cold days of winter, and have the resources to pay such a bill.

For the lady behind me in church who sings off key and wears that funny hat,

because it means I have my hearing and my sight.

For the pile of laundry and ironing,

because it means I have clothes to wear.

For the weariness, and aching muscles at the end of the day,

because it means I have been capable of working hard or working at all.

For the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours,

because it means I am still alive, and have something to do.

And finally, for too much e-mail,

because it means I have friends who are thinking of me.

This list could go on and on. The point is, we should realize, and not forget that we all have so much to be thankful for in our lives.

"He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for those which he has." - Epictetus

**EVERY DAY
MAY NOT BE
GOOD.
BUT THERE IS
SOMETHING
GOOD IN
EVERY DAY.**

"The miracle of gratitude is
that it shifts your perception
to such an extent that it
changes the world you see."

— DR. ROBERT HOLDEN —



CAN WORRYING DESTROY YOUR HAPPINESS?

Yes, of course it can. Incessant worrying, like our negative thinking, negative feelings and other chronic or prolonged negative emotions can destroy both our happiness and our love for life itself. Constant, incessant worrying can create conditions conducive to literally worrying one's life away.

Worrying usually emanates from living in our dark past, and worrying about the future, the actual or potential problems that we will or might face.

However, there are people whose distressful life events, or their emotional and/or biological makeup predisposes them to chronic, daily uncontrollable worrying. This includes the stress filled, anxious or neurotic person - we all know at least one - who tends to worry habitually and needlessly about everything and anything, and often about things that are not important. This is the person who continually anticipates, and constantly frets unduly on difficulty or troubles that are conceivable, yet unlikely to occur; a person who often creates (imaginary or exaggerated) problems and worries, when none exist, at least to the extent they imagine. These worry warts think if they worry hard and long enough that this hyper vigilant strategy will or may prevent the bad things from happening. They falsely believe that if they don't worry continually, things will be difficult to control and might get out of hand. Worrying in and of itself solves nothing, but disciplined or productive worrying can serve a purpose.

Sensible, or what I refer to as practical and productive worrying about actual threats and our foreseeable future can be beneficial and healthy. To some extent, this prudent and circumspect worrying can help you to avoid unfavorable surprises by allowing you to think and plan more realistically and constructively about the future, based on what is known now, then prepare and act accordingly. It can motivate you to take action, help you to avoid or solve threats or other problems, prepare for the worst, and help you to proceed on your life's path more prudently, with less fear, stress and worry.

Further, it's important to realize that regrets about all the things that have gone wrong in the past, and might go wrong in the future is both futile and pointless; and it hinders rather than serves one's purpose.

People have a tendency to get trapped in their own negative thoughts. Such thoughts or feelings include one's uneasiness and apprehension often caused by one's anticipation and one's preoccupation of future uncertainties and worrisome (usually ill-defined) misfortunes, and worst-case scenarios (the imagined "what-ifs") or awfulness that could happen; often regardless of the likelihood that it will happen. Unrelenting worrying and doubt negatively impacts virtually every aspect of one's life.

However, everyone worries to some degree at times, about our kids, jobs, family, friends, finances, health, etc. And, this act of what I define as normal worrying seems to be part of our biological makeup. Further, professor Seligman maintains its part of our evolutionary history and our instinctual "catastrophic" nature to be on the lookout to identify possible risks, dangers, and other life-threatening situations that could arise. History has shown that dismissing or ignoring these instincts, possible, likely or known risks, dangers, and other worrisome situations could be critical for our survival.

Worrying is not only a function of your conscience or disturbing thoughts, such as what you have done or think you have done wrong, and/or the things that you presently regret, worrying is also a function of the things you could regret, mismanage or misjudge, and the possible unfortunate or undesirable consequences of your choices and the bad things that could happen to you now and in the future.

"Hakuna matata" is the Swahili expression for "no worries". It was the phrase used, and the song sung in the Disney movie, *The Lion King*. It was used in reference to teaching the main character, a lion cub name Simba that he should forget worrying about, and say goodbye to his troubled past, with the understanding that needless worrying cannot do anything to change it. But Simba was also taught you can learn, benefit and grow from the lessons your past can teach you.

Simba learned to accept himself, his troubled past and all. He realized he can be flawed, and he will still be loved, especially when he makes his amends for the troubles he's caused, and when he makes the effort to learn from and tries not to repeat his mistakes. Simba also learned by accepting and acknowledging responsibility for what he has done, he can engender the respect of others, strengthen relationships, become stronger, move ahead, and live a more enlightened, mindful and loving present and a better future life because of it.

As Dr. Alex Lickerman noted above, bad things happen all the time, but how we internalize them, how we react to them, is what ultimately determines their final effect on us.

Although it's a normal part of life to experience worry and occasional anxiety, worrying about the past and excessive worrying in general is not only futile and needless, it creates a great deal of stress, is often counterproductive and toxic to one's physical health and emotional well-being. Constant worrying and apprehension about future uncertainties can become an intolerable burden that can infect one's presence, drains one's energy, and can negatively impact the way you think, feel, behave and function. It can also cause significant distress and anxiety that can adversely affect your relationships, job and other critical areas of your life.

Prolonged, excessive worrying allows us to be invaded with the fruitless ruminations of anxiety and despair about unfavorable future events or conditions that will likely never occur. Leo Buscaglia said, "Worry never robs tomorrow of it's sorrows, it only saps today of its strength and joy ". Eckhart Tolle declared, "Worry pretends to be necessary but serves no useful purpose."

John Locke's thoughts on this matter also ring true when he said, "What worries you, masters you".

Nonetheless, we cannot and should not be devoid off, or sheltered from every worry, risk, challenge, fear or life-shattering tragedy that in reality, from birth to death, is inseparable from, and forged into the crucible of life that we all have to contend with. If we were protected from, and did not experience these

naturally difficult undertakings, hardships and tests of one's resilience and one's coping abilities, we would learn very little about overcoming life's seemingly endless supply of worries, troubles, problems and other trying circumstances.

If your worries are all you listen to, your solutions get drowned out, and your world becomes awash in worry, apprehension and fear. As a result, you can become overwhelmed, and start to live in a constant state of hypersensitivity, exhaustion, stress, confusion and despair. But more importantly, you need to realize that this constant state of anxiety is only in your mind. And, even more importantly, your anxiety and negative state of mind is within your power to control and change.

When all you do is worry, and you don't act to rise above these anxieties and troubled circumstances or perceptions of same, whether they are real, exaggerated or entirely false and totally imagined remains academic. And, until you learn to overcome such circumstances, your worries will never end. With the right attitude, the act of undertaking these challenges and trying circumstances can give us the experience, and help us develop the skills, confidence, courage, strategies and adeptness needed to dissolve our rampant worrying and achieve other relevant goals such as:

- ⊗ Become stronger than our negative voices of despair; and don't become a victim of needless worry.
- ⊗ Don't try to control what one cannot control.
- ⊗ Don't give up on life no matter how frustrating, difficult, discouraging and impossible it may seem.
- ⊗ Plan strategically to successfully solve these and other significant problems or trying situations.
- ⊗ Develop the strength and wisdom to become more resilient and complex, more accepting and mindful of the problems and challenges we all have to contend with throughout our lives.
- ⊗ Master change.
- ⊗ Surmount our worries.
- ⊗ Learn to let go, and overcome the interminable, difficult and seemingly overwhelming circumstances that these trials and tribulations and the crucible that is life inevitably throws our way.

Mo Seetubtim's wise advice regarding this issue seems suitable, and goes something like this: when you go through life's challenges, you have the choice to either fall apart and become a victim of the circumstances, or you can rise up high, above others and choose to overcome them.

Finally, some of the things that might help you to minimize or eliminate your excessive, needless and prolonged worrying, in addition to the above noted objectives include:

- ☺ Broaden your perspective, and get positive. This brings everything into the realm of possibility.
- ☺ Enjoy, appreciate and take advantage of the present. Mindfulness practices bring our focus and awareness back to the present. This is where we make the most of our life. This is where we can remove

the unnecessary worry, suffering, conflict and confusion from our life. This can help us to realize we are not alone in helping solve one's challenges, and to help us disengage in obsessive worrying about what might be coming, while improving our minds operation to do so. Because of this improved insight, we can change our way of thinking and not allow our worrying, pain and suffering of the past to linger in the present, and to perpetuate further this unnecessary distress and misery into our future, because of past circumstances. Clear mindfulness diminishes, and can eventually dissolve your anxiety and worrying; and it can enhance your relationships, your understanding, insight and wisdom, and your ability to become more fully aware of yourself, your circumstances and others in a less anxious, less emotional, less judgmental, less self-absorbed, more objective, insightful and skillful way, enabling one to move on in a more productive manner, without the needless worrying.

☺ Lighten up and simplify your life. Let go. Realize that most of the things you worry about will not materialize, or will never be as bad as you think they will be. Our anticipation of, and our exaggerated and limitless imagination of the illimitable "what ifs" in life that could happen, no matter how improbable, play a significant part in our excessive and needless worrying.

☺ When overwhelmed with worry, and feeling sorry for ourselves, one of my favorite strategies to keep things in perspective, and to diminish, alleviate and let go of worry is: No matter how bad things may seem to you right now, look at the world and realize how fortunate you really are, especially compared to the billions of others on this earth who probably have it a lot worse than you.

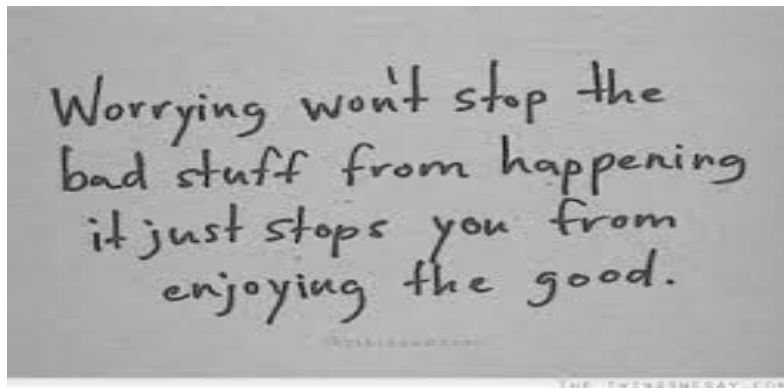
☺ Don't worry about the things you can't control, and focus on the things you can control, enjoy or appreciate. Your time and life is precious, don't waste it on needless worry. Worrying creates a great deal of stress and heart ache, and it never gets you anywhere. When you accept the inevitable and your human fallibility; and the uncertainty of life and of our future; and the things you can't control; you should be more able to realistically assess and redefine your expectations and your goals; gain more clarity about yourself and your future; plan accordingly, and realize you don't have to worry, even when things don't work out your way. You live and learn; you face your fears, your sorrows and mistakes; take responsibility for your life; live more respectfully, fully, meaningfully and mindfully; learn from your worrisome situations, mistakes and regrets; grow and develop; and continue to make things better.

☺ Don't obsess over every detail. You know what they say "Don't sweat the small stuff", especially when the small stuff is a major part of our everyday life. Follow Richard Carlson's advice: "Keep the little things from driving you crazy and taking over your life. Remember, life isn't an emergency." Don't get hung up with getting everything done. The small stuff may be urgent at times, but it is often not important in the long run. Concentrate on the most important tasks first, on what really matters most.

☺ Solve the problem that's causing the worrying. Make a list of possible solutions, then act. When plan "A" fails, move on to the next one, and never lose faith even in the worst of times. No matter how vexing, no matter how worrying a situation it may be, there is a solution to almost any problem. Worrying is a waste of time. Instead, put your time and energy into solving the problem, and not into the worrying. When approached with the right attitude and effort the solution will come eventually; you will prevail in the end. On the off chance the problem cannot be solved, move on, don't make excuses, do the best you can, and realize that worrying, complaining and crying will do you no good.

☺ Focus on compassion for others and yourself.

☺ Be grateful for what you do have. Gratitude shifts your perception and changes the world you see. Appreciate being alive, and all the things you can do to help yourself and others.



WILL ACTING THE PART MAKE US HAPPY?

“Be an actor!” wrote William Shakespeare, “All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts.”

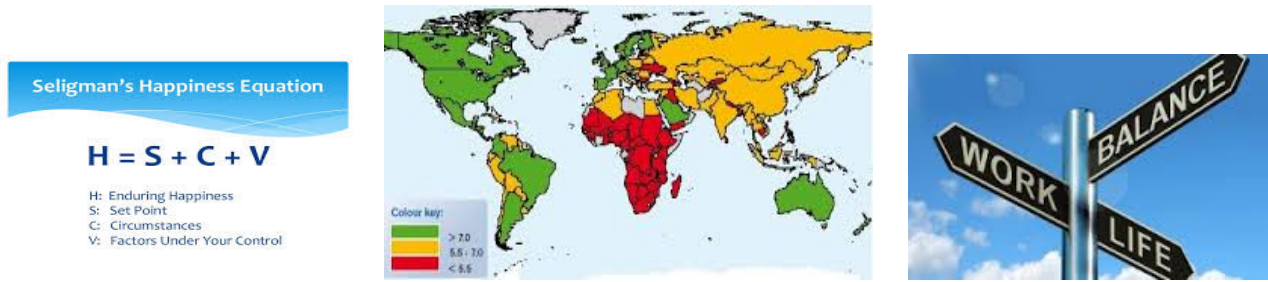
There is evidence that playing the part of being happy can indeed create happiness. We’ve all heard the stories of actors using various techniques in order to get into the mind-set of the characters they’re portraying. Their own personalities, as well as their attitudes and behaviors are often transformed, at least temporarily, by speaking and acting the part. In fact some actors isolate themselves for periods of time to allow them to really absorb those characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors.

The more time, and the more intensity we put into our role playing, the more conditioned we become to those tendencies we are trying to emulate. Professor of Psychology David G. Myers says, talking and acting as if you have the traits and attitudes of a happy person and pretending that you are truly happy can actualize your happiness. He says, “Going through the motions can trigger the emotions.” To a degree, our feigned attitudes and actions can literally transform us into a state of well-being. You know what they say, “Fake it, till you make it.”

Many of us realize that our attitudes often affect our behavior. According to Professor Myers, what many of us don’t often consider is, the reverse can also be true. Our behaviors - actions and words - can actually modify our attitudes. So, the reversal is, “walking the walk” can indeed elicit us to “talk the talk”. Or as Professor Myers more aptly expresses it, “We are as likely to act ourselves into a new way of thinking as to think ourselves into a new way of acting.”

Acting happy can actually make us happy, at least momentarily. But enduring happiness inevitably requires a different script.





WHAT ARE THE PRECEPTS THAT CAN HELP YOU UNDERSTAND and/or ACHIEVE ENDURING HAPPINESS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION?

Many of the happiness researches and positive psychologists agree that living a *meaningful life*: to experience a sense of purpose in life in accordance with one's own values and passions (subjective significance) and, living an *engaged life*: the depth of involvement and connection we have with one's self, one's family, friends, work, romance, activities and hobbies (enjoyed absorption) - are important keys to achieving enduring happiness and life satisfaction.

Additionally, living a meaningful and engaged life are the keys that can help us bring about and sustain the pleasures and joyful experiences that we long for and need by satisfying what we deem to be our most important and cherished values, passions, and relationships. And altogether, this manner of living may engender a deeper sense of purpose, fulfillment, emotional well-being, inner peace, and serenity that can give one a sense that their life is truly satisfying and worthwhile.

Many of us have been conditioned throughout our lives to look outward for how we view the world. But, creating a deeper sense of purpose, meaning, fulfillment, and joy will involve changing our inner world as well: one's attitude, perspective, thoughts and beliefs. Change requires shifting our consciousness and its capacity for interacting with the environment. When you reflect on your past, experience the present, and think about the future with positive and optimistic feelings such as: excitement, hope, gratitude, curiosity, open-mindedness, love, forgiveness, etc. as opposed to negative and counterproductive feelings such as: pessimism, fear, hopelessness, victimhood, hate, envy, entitlement, guilt, ungratefulness, etc. you will not only become happier, less stressful and more productive, studies show you will become psychologically and physiologically healthier, feel more optimistic and hopeful about your future, your relationships, and life in general.

Happiness like life itself is about choices. Choosing, welcoming in, establishing and reinforcing a positive mental attitude about life will improve your chances of becoming a happier, healthier, more successful, more productive, and a more likeable person, compared to choosing and welcoming in the negative, pessimistic, or fatalistic approach to life.

A simple positive mindset brings everything into the realm of possibility.

Research shows that positive emotions are not only symptoms of a happy life, pursuing, cultivating, and experiencing them on a regular basis actually causes us to become happier. So, positive emotions not

only feel good, they are desirable and beneficial feelings in and of themselves that can contribute to one's happiness, one's health and well-being.

Although all emotions come and go, positive emotions compared to negative ones by nature tend to be more subtle and fleeting according to psychologist Barbara Fredrickson. She says the secret is not to deny their transience but to find ways to increase their quantity. Cultivating positive emotions and establishing a realistic positive attitude - not a "Pollyanna" approach to life - can enhance virtually every aspect of your life to help you flourish and thrive - mind, body, and spirit.

So, now that we have identified and briefly defined certain important key elements, principles, and values that can help us achieve enduring happiness and life satisfaction, such as subjective significance, enjoyed absorption, and positive states of consciousness, what is a practical first step to enhancing our well-being? How do we proceed to unlock the door for achieving more happiness and a better life?

The Dalai Lama's suggestion for achieving happiness is to begin by identifying the manageable factors and conditions in your life which lead to conflict and suffering, and the one's which lead to happiness, and bring you joy. Having done this, you then gradually eliminate those manageable conditions which lead to conflict, adversity and suffering, and of course cultivate those which lead to happiness and bring you more contentment, satisfaction and joy. This strategy appears to be logical, reasonable, practical and productive; it's a good and appropriate basic step to bring more happiness, and less stress, sadness or misery into your life. How can you argue with that?

But, the fundamental method of achieving happiness that he repeatedly emphasizes in *The Art of Happiness* is inner discipline. The book goes on to explain that inner discipline involves combating negative states of mind such as anger, hatred, and greed, and cultivating positive states such as kindness, compassion and tolerance. The Dalai Lama believes that a happy life is a virtuous one, built on a foundation of a calm, secure, and stable state of mind; and that we are capable of using our intelligence and awareness to control our emotions.

Based on the above noted precepts, one might conclude that there are four fundamental elements required for living a happy life; and the formula would be:

Living a meaningful + engaged + optimistic + virtuous life = Happiness

The virtuous life, in its most simplistic form, is doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong (moral excellence), may already be an ingredient which exists in your present way of living. But, if you happen to be living a meaningful, engaged, optimistic, and non-virtuous life, or if you are lacking in any of the four fundamental ingredients, you might find that your recipe for a happy life is flawed and incomplete.

The practice of virtuous behavior, to have and show virtue, actions which are prudent and wholesome, and to behave in accordance with moral principles are admirable qualities, attributes, or actions which are acknowledged by spiritual leaders, ethicists, psychologists, and philosophers, as noble and desirable. Virtuous behavior is also widely recognized by most cultures, societies, and reasonable people as a more elevated, useful and admirable way to live one's life. This respectful, wise, more thoughtful, reasonable, prudent, moral, and vigilant way of life is quite important to one's spiritual growth and character development, as well as one's authentic, long-term happiness.

So, practicing virtuous behavior contributes to our respective, connective and collective well-being, and therefore yields beneficial results for individuals and society.

The *Virtues for Life* web site maintains that the more we recognize the potential impact that practicing virtues can have on our lives, the more our lives open up to new possibilities and to greater joy and fulfillment. To paraphrase Voltaire, men are equal; it is not birth or circumstance but virtue that makes the difference.

A virtue is considered a positive trait or quality deemed to be morally good and thus is valued as a foundation of principle, obligation, and good moral being. It is the capacity and desire or firm disposition which inclines a person to act with prudence, integrity and goodness. It is also a state of mind in which we are motivated to give our best efforts, and to live a good and wholesome life. It is said that this motivation often comes from realizing the suffering and misery that unwholesome and injurious actions produce in ourselves and others.

As noted earlier, there is a symbiotic or mutually beneficial relationship and correlation between virtue and happiness, and one's overall well-being. I believe that living a virtuous life - doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong - is the most important ingredient of the several fundamental and essential ingredients needed to achieve genuine, sustainable, long-term happiness, and good moral character.

Again, my reasoning is simple, and I believe self-evident. If you choose to do the wrong things in life, and don't treat people right, it will be difficult or impossible to achieve enduring happiness and life satisfaction, regardless of what else you do, or how much other external and materialistic success you acquire.

As previously noted, Utilitarian's were guided by an ethical doctrine that virtue is based on utility. They believed that the greatest happiness or greatest good, for the greatest number of people, is the foundation of goodness, and the quality or practice of moral excellence (virtue).

However, living a virtuous life involves abiding by many detailed moral principles, other than just utility, or doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong. It is characterized by possessing and remaining faithful to virtue and moral excellence.

St. Paul said, by living a virtuous life your thoughts should be wholly directed to all that is true, all that deserves respect, all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous or worthy of praise.

The Virtues Project says, virtues are the essence of the human spirit and the content of our character.

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines virtue as, practical dispositions in conformity with standards of excellence or with principles of practical reason; not unlike the Utilitarian definition and their ethical doctrine.

Wikipedia says, a virtue is a characteristic of a person which supports individual moral excellence and collective well-being.

The Greek philosopher Anon said something to the effect that our virtues, character strengths, and one's conscience are God's presence in man.

In his excellent article *Living a Virtuous Life*, Fr. William Saunders explains that characterized by stability, a virtuous person not only strives to be a good person, but also seeks what is good and chooses to act in a good way. He further explains that in addition to divine inspiration and adherence to Christian principles, an individual can acquire human virtues through his own effort under the guidance of reason. Through education, by deliberately choosing to do what is good, and through perseverance, a person acquires and strengthens virtue. He maintains that prudence, what he refers to as the "mother" of all of the virtues, is the virtue by which a person recognizes his moral duty and the good means to accomplish it. He also believes that prudence is essential for the formation and operation of one's conscience. He points out that prudence is part of the definition of goodness, and a person can be prudent and good only simultaneously. No other virtue can contradict what is prudent. Therefore, he concludes what is prudent is substantially what is good. He maintains that prudence is the measure of justice, temperance, and fortitude. Along with prudence, these specific virtues have philosophically and historically been recognized as the four primary moral virtues, or what are more commonly referred to as the cardinal virtues.

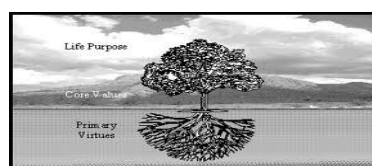
Furthermore, there are a number of essential and universally accepted character strengths, and other moral virtues that appear to be valued not only by spiritual leaders and the relevant professions noted above, but they are highly regarded in virtually every culture, and by all humane, civilized, reasonable individual, moral and societal standards.

Most if not all of the following listed character virtues seem to support behavior conducive to high moral standards, and conscious awareness of one's ethical nature, actions, and thoughts. These virtues and character strengths represent the qualities or traits that support truth, open-mindedness, individual moral excellence, righteousness, humility, social harmony, collective well-being, and they give inner significance and meaning to our life that will empower and endure.

As noted above, the cardinal virtues or what some claim as the most important moral qualities are a set of four virtues recognized in ancient philosophy. They consist of: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. It is said that these four virtues are called "cardinal" (cardo is the Latin word for "hinge") because all other virtues are categorized under them and hinge upon them. The theological virtues are generally known as: faith, hope, and charity. These cardinal and theological virtues are further defined, and are included and recognized in either the following list of virtues and/or the 24 Character Strengths described below.

By embracing and integrating virtue into our daily lives we may not only enhance one's joy, inner peace, and happiness, we can help improve all aspects of, and provide inestimable advantages for one's spiritual and emotional well-being, and by extension improve the interests and welfare of society.

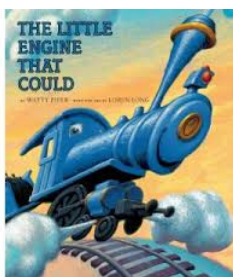
Wikipedia lists five core characteristic virtues which are categorized and subdivided as follows. Also added to, and included herewith are a few of the inestimable advantages, in the form or concept of transcendence (rising above, without limitation to a superior state) that such virtues may provide:





1. Virtues of self control:

- Temperance - self-control regarding pleasure and behavior; It transcends: indulgence, excessiveness, carelessness, wildness, debauchery
- Good temper - self-control regarding anger; It transcends: anger, impatience, resentment, irritability, annoyance
- Ambition - self-control regarding one's goals; It transcends: lethargy, idleness, indifference, pessimism
- Curiosity - the desire to learn; self-control regarding knowledge; It transcends: disinterest, apathy, normality, ignorance, neglect
- Frugality, Thrift - self-control regarding the material lifestyle; It transcends: extravagance, indiscretion, squandering, waste
- Industry - self-control regarding play, recreation and entertainment; It transcends: inactivity, indifference, disregard, recklessness, abandonment, irresponsibility
- Contentment - self-control regarding one's possessions and the possessions of others; acknowledgement and satisfaction of reaching capacity; not comparing and worrying about what others have; It transcends: dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration, unhappiness, unrealistic expectations, unnecessary comparisons and judgment.



2. Virtues of self-efficacy:

- Courage - willingness to do the right thing in the face of danger, pain, significant harm or risk; It transcends: cowardice, weakness, fear, self-doubt, victimhood
- Patience - the bearing of provocation, annoyance, misfortune, or pain, without complaint, loss of temper, irritation, or the like; It transcends: frustration, resistance, intolerance, impatience

- Perseverance, Fortitude - mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation courageously; It transcends: indifference, laziness, dishonor, cowardice, weakness, timidity, helplessness
- Persistence - ability to achieve objectives regardless of obstacles; It transcends: apathy, indolence, lethargy, inaction
- Effectiveness - capacity for producing a desired result or effect; It transcends: impotence, failure, disability, incompetence, powerlessness

Self-Control
Honesty Excellence
Respect
Responsibility
Courteous

3. Virtues of regard:

- Fair-mindedness - an honest and fair way of thinking, in cooperative arrangements of mutual respect and impartiality; It transcends: inequality, injustice, prejudice, deception, dishonesty, disrespect
- Tolerance - willingness to allow others to lead a life based on a certain set of beliefs differing from one's own; It transcends: bigotry, narrow-mindedness, intolerance, self-righteousness
- Truthfulness, Honesty - being honest, forthright, free from deceit, corresponding with reality; It transcends: dishonesty, distrust, immorality, deceit



LEARN IT. LIVE IT. PASS IT ON.

4. Virtues of respect

- Respect - regard for the worth of others; It transcends: disdain, disregard, disrespect, ignorance
- Self respect - regard for the worth of oneself; It transcends: unsureness, instability, self-deprecation, unworthiness, incompetence
- Humility - respect for one's limitations; It transcends: arrogance, pretentiousness, pride, ego
- Social virtues: Politeness, Charisma, Unpretentiousness, Friendliness, Sportsmanship, Cleanliness; They transcend: rudeness, discourtesy, repulsion, ego, shyness, hostility, unfairness, dishonesty, disorder, filth, indecency



NO ACT OF KINDNESS NO MATTER HOW SMALL IS EVER WASTED.

5. Virtues of kindness:

- Kindness - regard for those who are within an individual's ability to help; It transcends: intolerance, indifference, animosity, selfishness, cruelty, ill will
- Generosity, Charity - giving to those in need; It transcends: greed, unkindness, selfishness, ungiving
- Forgiveness - willingness to overlook transgressions made against you; It transcends: hurt, anger, bitterness, hatred, rejection, powerlessness, hostility
- Compassion - empathy and understanding for the suffering of others with a desire to help; It transcends: animosity, ill will, indifference, judgment, intolerance

Jonathan Haidt in his book, *The Happiness Hypothesis* makes note of another happiness formula developed under the founder of positive psychology, Professor Martin Seligman, by distinguished psychologists Sonya Lyubomirsky, Ken Sheldon, and David Schkade. This formula shows there are three key elements of your life that determine the level of your happiness:

$$S + C + V = H$$

(S) your *Set-point* represents the range as well as the sum of your biological or genetic capacity for happiness. It differentiates from others one's distinctive emotional quality or character, especially as it relates to one's subjective well-being. It is the inherited biological component of a person's pervasive and sustained emotional temperament, which can influence not only the range of one's potential happiness, but one's whole personality and their perception of the world. You probably already know whether you're an optimist, pessimist, or somewhere in between. Similarly, your set-point has a range between low and high, and again, it not only represents your specific characteristic level of happiness, it acts as the equilibrium or balance point that you naturally return to after both positive and negative experiences.

(C) represents the *Conditions or Circumstances* (both controllable and uncontrollable) of your life. The controllable one's include the factors you can manipulate to enhance or inhibit your well-being, which includes how you internalize the past, anticipate the future (optimistically or pessimistically), and how you interact with the world around you (subjective significance, enjoyed absorption, optimistic attitude, pleasures and gratifications).

(V) represents your *Voluntary or intentional activities* (the voluntary and willful actions and choices you make under your volitional control. Most important because psychologists say they play a significant part in your happiness, and they are within one's ability to manage and control. They have the potential for long lasting results, important to your enduring happiness and life satisfaction)

(H) represents the (*enduring* as distinguished from the momentary) level of your *Happiness*

These psychologists determined that there are two fundamentally different kinds of what they call "*externals*" that affect your levels of happiness. The first *external*, (C) represents the conditions and facts about your life that normally can't be controlled or changed i.e. age, sex, race and disability; as well as the conditions or circumstances you may control or change such as, marital status, and who you marry, where you live and work, friends and other relationships, level of wealth, education, belief system, character, attitude, and behavior. Again, they represent conditions which you can willfully or intentionally control, by your talents and abilities, and by your power or faculty or capability of conscious choice, decision, and intention.

See further comments below regarding these controllable conditions. The one's you manage, exercise restraint or discretion over. They seem like they contribute far more than the apparent 10% value assigned, relative to one's happiness. The controllable conditions noted above may be better classified, or may be presently, and more appropriately grouped under (V) below - one's voluntary behavioral, cognitive, and volitional conditions.

The second *external* (V) represents these *voluntary behavioral and cognitive activities* or the things that you choose to do in your life such as, when and where you take vacations, learning skills and hobbies, volunteering and helping others, rest and relaxation, i.e.: reading books, watching movies, TV, learning, playing and viewing sports, meditation, yoga, etc.

So, to help enhance your happiness, you should ideally be participating in activities that you find enjoyable, engaging, rewarding, and/or meaningful. The more you do, and the greater variety of activities that you're involved with, that have subjective significance to you, the happier you will be.

There are apparently three basic types of voluntary or intentional activities: behavioral, cognitive, and volitional. These are the states of consciousness in which a person manages, decides on, and commits to a particular course of action, activity, or thought. Your behavioral activities include your actions or reactions and the manner in which you behave. Your cognitive, thinking activities pertain to your mental processes of perception, awareness, comprehension, judgment, memory, and reasoning. These involve higher-level functions of the brain and encompass language, imagination, perception, planning, and any process whereby one acquires knowledge. They are an expression of intellectual capacity. Your volitional activities are the willful choices and decisions that you make regarding a particular course of action or activity that is under your control. Volitional processes can be applied consciously or they can be conditionally programmed into your subconscious, habitual mind.

The third element in this formula for happiness is (S). This represents your *biological happiness set-point*. It is a genetically determined level of happiness which tends to keep this individual and particular level of happiness from increasing or decreasing. It also acts as an emotional equilibrium point. Apparently, each person has their own characteristic level of happiness. These psychologists believe

there is an emotional set-point or base line of happiness in each one of us. This set-point is determined by our unique genetic make-up, which is inherited from one's biological parents. And, which end of your happiness range you operate on - high or low - is influenced by your external elements: your conditions or circumstances, plus your voluntary or intentional activities and conditions (C+V).

Note: Sonja Lyubomirsky in her book, *The How of Happiness*, actually assigns a percentage weighted value to each of the above noted elements that contribute to our happiness, in a similar equation, which would correspond accordingly:

$$(S=50\%) + (C=10\%) + (V=40\%) = (H=100\%)$$

However, if one would consider who you marry, where you live and what type of work you do, friends and other relationships, level of wealth, education, belief system, character, attitude, and behavior, and other factors like subjective significance, enjoyed absorption, virtues and morality to be controllable *conditions*, categorized under (C), as opposed to *voluntary activities* categorized under (V), then it would seem that these particular conditions and factors would have a far greater impact, and would have a significantly greater percentage weighted value in the formula for enduring happiness. This is based on my very limited understanding, observations, and the research noted here. My interpretation of the above formula may be incorrect. The formula itself seems to be quite valid, and apparently has wide support in the field, and was developed by some of the most prominent psychologist in the field of positive psychology. It's the classification of conditions and factors, and their respective percentage weighted value that I'm unclear about. If the specific conditions noted above are considered *voluntary* or intentional *activities* (V), it seems to make more sense relative to the degree and impact they have on one's happiness. Based on a recent mega-study or meta analysis (a study of 225 studies) by prominent psychologists Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ed Diener, and Laura King, it concludes that (besides your nature and biological, genetic capacity for happiness) the single biggest predictor and the highest correlation with our well-being is related to one's work, and then one's social relationships.

Nonetheless, your genes are apparently sensitive to your environmental conditions and according to the above formulas, it appears that your nature and nurturing as well as these particular "externals" - the controllable conditions and the voluntary activities undertaken by your own free will, using your talents, abilities and character strengths, and particular state of mind and attitude - optimistic, pessimistic, worry free, etc. - become the critical factors that will determine the overall level of your happiness.

But, in its most elementary and simplistic form, happiness is simply a mindset, and a choice which relies heavily upon one's perceptions and expectations. Accordingly, here's another formula:

$$\textbf{reality} - \textbf{expectations} = \textbf{happiness} \text{ (positive net result) } \textbf{or} \textbf{ unhappiness} \text{ (negative net result)}$$

When one's perception of reality in one's life is complementary to, or better than what they expected (reciprocal or surpasses your belief about or mental picture of the present or future), they're usually happy. On the other hand, if they perceive it to be worse than expected (more severe, unfavorable, or less pleasant than imagined), they tend to be disappointed, frustrated, or unhappy. "Blessed is the man who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed" (Alexander Pope *letter to Fortescue*).

It is important to note, and reiterate that besides one's expectations, one's perceptions play a critical role in one's subjective well-being. It's not what you experience, but how you perceive what you experience that will have a major impact in your life.

How you perceive things - people, places, situations or other life events, and especially one's own self perception - will help determine your course of events, your character, and how you present yourself to the world.

Your perceptions will be the primary ingredient in the creation of your experiences. These experiences include your impressions of the world around you, and even more importantly, what you think about yourself. Do you admire and respect yourself, do you see yourself as a person of good character, do you see yourself having a positive impact on people, are you helpful, kind, caring, grateful, etc.?

Perceptions, especially how you perceive yourself and your life, will most definitely affect, limit, or enhance your life experiences, enduring happiness and life satisfaction. Therefore, "Happiness is simply the manifestation of how you perceive your life, and the circumstances that continuously unfold throughout its course. So, ultimately, happiness is a choice which relies heavily upon perception." according to Laura DeVoe.

Dr S. Ignacimuthu agrees, he explains, "Happiness is a state of mind. It can never be found in the material things about us, in such things as wealth, position or power. The correct way to happiness contains certain norms, like keeping your heart free from hate and your mind free from worry; living simply; expecting little; giving much; filling your life with love; forgetting self, and thinking of others."

"As a matter of fact, your world will not be the same precisely because you are not the same anymore when your attitude, perceptions, beliefs, expectations and values change. What you are determines the world in which you live; so as you change, your world also changes." If you are positive, happy, caring, and loving, your world will be a better place. If you are negative, angry, intolerant, hateful, and ungiving, that's what you will see, expect or anticipate, and that's what you will be inclined to summon and attract in life; in order to rationalize and reinforce your own negative perceptions and beliefs.

Often, life is predictable. It tends to give us whatever we think about or expect. Our predominant thoughts take form in our lives; they will themselves toward their own creation. We become a product of our own thoughts and expectations. Remember what Henry Ford said, "If you believe you can or you can't, either way you're right." Our thoughts and beliefs lead us to form certain expectations that can affect our behavior which causes the expectation to be realized. This is commonly referred to as a self-fulfilling prophesy. Also, remember what was said earlier, "Life is like a mirror. What happens to us on the outside is a reflection of what is going on, on the inside."

There is a story they tell of two dogs. Both dogs at separate times walk into the same room. One comes out happy and wagging his tail profusely. The other comes out looking angry, growling, and ready to attack. Curiously, a woman watching this goes into the room to see what could possibly make one dog look so delightful and happy, and the other look so surly and menacing. She's thinking, a strange dichotomy for sure. To her surprise she finds a room filled with mirrors. The happy dog found a thousand happy dogs looking back at him, while the angry dog saw only angry, threatening dogs growling back at him. What you see, what you think about and expect is a reflection of who you are.

There's another relevant anecdotal story about an old Indian Legend mentioned in the Disney movie Tomorrowland, that goes like this: There are two wolves and they are always fighting. One is darkness and despair. The other is lightness and hope. The question is, which one wins? The answer is: Whichever one you feed.

The Law of Attraction, like self-fulfilling prophecies applies to both the positive and the negative. The theory is, you attract into your life whatever you think about. Your dominant thoughts will find a way to manifest. The assumption here is that one's thoughts will themselves toward their own creation, and one's beliefs influence one's actions and therefore can manifest as self-fulfilling prophecies. Remember Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu poem, and what he says about the progression of one's thoughts: *Watch your thoughts, for they become your words. Watch your words, for they become your actions. Watch your actions, for they become your habits. Watch your habits, for they become your character. And watch your character, for it becomes your destiny. What we think, we become.*

Also, The Law of Attraction can be found in the concept of subjective reality. Like our subjective well-being, our happiness and our reality is both personal and distinct, and they emanate from one's beliefs, perceptions, biases and expectations. In other words, whether your thoughts, intentions and expectations are positive, negative or conflicted, that's often what you'll manifest, perceive and experience. So, the belief is by focusing on positive or negative thoughts, one can bring about positive or negative results respectively. This phenomenon applies to all our relationships.

In an article entitled, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies in Psychology: Definition & Examples*, it explains that in one study psychologists led some male college students to believe that a female student was attracted to them, and others to believe that she was not attracted to them. The social psychologists later observed interactions between the men and the female in question. The woman was much more likely to act as if she was attracted to the first set of men. Why? Because the men who thought she was attracted to them acted in a way that seemed to lead her to actually be attracted to them.

The article goes on to say that you can think of this phenomenon as a circular pattern. Our actions toward others impact their beliefs about us, which dictates their actions towards us, which then reinforces our beliefs about ourselves. This, in turn, influences our actions towards others, which brings us back to the beginning of the cycle. This pattern can be negative or positive. It's your choice. Therefore, the Law of Attraction states if you don't like what's happening in your life, change what's causing it - your negative thoughts, negative beliefs and expectations, and their corresponding counterproductive attitudes and actions.

Although there may be little scientific basis to this Law of Attraction, other than the placebo/nocebo effect, studies show this corresponding psychological effect is quite relevant, and is not an insignificant scientific factor regarding the real contributions they can have on one's health, one's relationships, and one's happiness.

Clinical trials show the same mind-body power (positive or negative thoughts and beliefs) can either help or harm your health and well-being respectively. Furthermore, most psychologists agree it is usually more productive, desirable and satisfying to serve one's purpose, one's health, and to approach one's life's challenges with a positive outlook, rather than letting the negativity, doubt, problems, and the difficult times keep you feeling trapped, disappointed, frustrated, unhealthy and unhappy.

Dr. Lissa Rankin, MD, says, shifting your thoughts and beliefs from negative ones to positive ones will help activate your body and your mind's innate self-repair mechanisms. Dr. Rankin believes there's no such thing as an incurable illness. She says, if you or someone you love is suffering from a "chronic," "incurable," or "terminal" illness and you want to optimize the chance for spontaneous remission, you have to start by cleansing your mind of any negative beliefs that will sabotage your self-healing efforts.

Dr S. Ignacimuthu recommends you, "Change your mental habits to belief instead of disbelief. Learn to expect, not to doubt. In so doing you bring everything into the realm of possibility. Look for the positive aspects in every person and every situation. Resolve to be happy."

Natalie Ledwell, one of the founders of Mind Movies, Inc. expresses some patterns of behavior for happiness that entails a similar mindset which comprises ten important components or habits.

She says: do you know those people who always seem to be happy? Even faced with challenges or adversity, there are certain people who seem to maintain their joyful state and love for life, no matter what.

She maintains that joyful people tend to have a few habits that help them to get the most out of life and keep them looking on the bright side.

Natalie says, if you want to infuse more happiness and well-being into your life right now, keep these 10 habits in mind:



Habit #1: Appreciate life ~ Develop an attitude of gratitude and count your blessings! When you start looking for things to be thankful for, you'll discover more reasons to be grateful.

Habit #2: Keep learning ~ Invest time and energy into continually learning and developing new skills. Keep your brain stimulated with exciting information and hobbies.

Habit #3: Do what you love ~ This may seem obvious, but a majority of people dislike their job! Choose a career that you enjoy and make time in your schedule for your hobbies and to pursue special interests.

Habit #4: Laughter ~ Don't take life too seriously! Laugh at yourself, make light of your circumstances and infuse fun into daily activities. You know what they say, laughter is the best medicine.

Habit #5: Forgiveness ~ Holding onto anger, resentment or jealousy will only hurt you. Learn to forgive others & yourself for mistakes. Learn from your mistakes, don't surrender to them, let it go and move on.

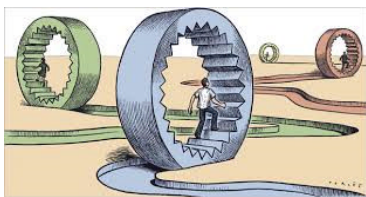
Habit #6: Meditation ~ More and more research is showing that meditation has major benefits on health and well-being. It reduces stress, increases positive emotions, life satisfaction and immune function.

Habit #7: Love ~ Nurture your relationships with friends & family and make it a priority to spend time with and to support your loved ones.

Habit #8: Stop comparing ~ Happy people don't waste their time worrying about what other people think or have, or with gossiping. Let go of the need to judge or criticize, or keep up with the "Joneses". Instead concentrate on creating and living YOUR best life.

Habit #9: Be positive ~ Make an effort to see the glass half full and always look for the silver lining in any situation. If you notice negative thoughts creeping into your mind it can cause you not to try, or give up sooner. Shift your focus, counteract it with powerful positive affirmations, don't play the victim, be responsible and strong, make an effort, and look for the inevitable opportunities to turn things around.

Habit #10: Surround yourself with those who take you higher ~ Surround yourself with happy, positive people who truly want the best for you and support you, your well-being, and your journey to success.



Mac Anderson, Founder of Simple Truths says, we are all creatures of habit. He says they are programmed into our subconscious, habitual mind. They are difficult, but not impossible to break. They die hard. Marian Kraus, a metaphysicist agrees. He says, "Old" thinking and behavioral patterns are deeply engrained. The profoundly more powerful subconscious mind acts like a stubborn little child, not wanting to let go. However, the old obsolete and counterproductive habits, beliefs and behaviors can be reprogrammed. It's a physical process, as noted above.

Anderson maintains that if you make good habits, good habits will make you. Naturally, the same would hold true for bad habits. He says this wisdom has been around since ancient times. He mentions, Aristotle once said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

Brandon West says, our habits dictate the quality of life that we lead. He maintains they are responsible for our health, our happiness, our productivity, our freedom, our growth, and pretty much everything else.

As noted above, Sonya Lyubomirsky theorizes that while 60 percent of happiness is determined by our genetics and environment, the remaining 40 percent is up to us.

Regardless of one's emotional set-point, genetic blueprint, circumstances, hardships, disabilities and challenges, don't forget that your everyday habits and attitude are critically important. And, even more important is the fact that these habits, attitude, and your perceptions, expectations and beliefs are within your power to choose, control and change.

Jim Rohn said, "Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going."

Successful people understand the concept of, as well as the benefit and need for cultivating good habits. They except personal responsibility for their habits and their life. They don't want to feel like victims of circumstance. They will not feel helpless and surrender or give up control of their lives to others. They feel accountable, and take responsibility not only for their habits, but for their attitude, decisions, other behaviors, and actions. They understand what you do impacts not only oneself, but it often effects others, especially those around you. They don't look to place blame on others. They are the first to admit when they are wrong. They take responsibility for their conduct, and for how they react to everything, whether it's positive, negative, neutral, conflicted, and so on.

The habit of blaming others for your problems is as easy to employ as it is useless. It can close the door to developing better habits, and inhibit one's sense of responsibility, growth, and we end up giving away both our power and self control. The blame game is often deployed by our psyche or over-whelmed brain as a defense mechanism. This mental process, the habit of blaming others, can be a psychological projection of your own shortcomings. This defense mechanism is typically unconsciously employed to help you avoid cognitive dissonance or anxiety, accountability and responsibility; and over time blaming others perpetuates bitterness, resentment and you become a prisoner due to your own misperceived sense of victimhood. When you refuse to take responsibility or share apart of the responsibility for your actions or lack thereof, you can develop a wonted or habitual and self-perpetuating victims mentality, with a "oh poor-me", self-pity attitude. Remember, when searching for someone to blame, you will always be successful. But, true successful and insightful people realize every time you blame another person for your troubles, your shortcomings, misfortunes and your unhappiness you become a victim.

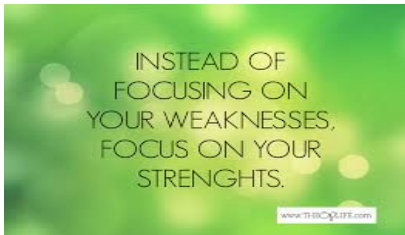
Remember too, your habits and your way of life is your responsibility. Take charge, let go of blame.

Aine Belton explains that taking responsibility for your life brings freedom and empowerment. It allows you to achieve greater understanding, wisdom and change. What you take responsibility for will allow you more control, and therefore, you can more easily do something about it. Stop blaming, take control, and restore your life to where everything seems possible, more peaceful, joyous, and right.

To help bring about a happier, and a more successful, and a more fulfilling life you should break self-defeating attitudes and behaviors, set realistic goals and expectations, and replace counterproductive and destructive habits with productive, more empowering and successful ones.

Your reward for having good habits, good character, and realistic expectations is more satisfaction, happiness, and success.

The happy and virtuous life entails "developing good habits, which come about only through repeated practice", according to William Bennett. He says Aristotle would agree that virtue and the practice of good deeds is connected to the formation of good character habits. So it seems that virtue and good habits are essential components of what Aristotle defines as the "Good Life"; and they are important ingredients in the recipe for happiness and life satisfaction.



DEVELOPING PERSONAL STRENGTHS

Renowned psychologist Martin Seligman, founder of the science of positive psychology says, real, lasting happiness comes from focusing on one's personal strengths rather than weaknesses - and working with them to improve all aspects of one's life.

To teach ourselves happiness, he recommends that we identify and develop our personal "signature strengths". These are strengths of character that a person owns, celebrates, and frequently exercises.

By incorporating these attributes into the crucial arenas of our lives, he says, we can enhance our lives and experience real fulfillment.

The University of Pennsylvania has enumerated the 24 character strengths that are taken from the Character Strengths and Virtues Handbook, authored by distinguished professors of psychology Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman.

These psychologists maintain that these 24 Character Strengths can be used by individuals to correctly identify their own strengths and use them to increase and sustain their respective levels of well-being. They state that each trait provides one of many alternative paths to virtue and well-being.

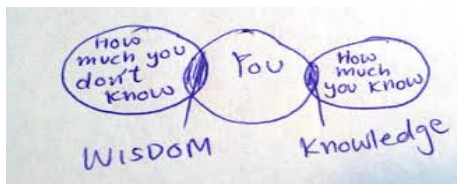
Their research indicates that almost everyone can readily identify a handful of strengths as very much their own; they say typically between two and five individual "signature strengths".

The VIA Institute on Character declares that the classification of these 24-character strengths, by the above noted psychologist have been referred to as the "backbone" of the science of positive psychology. It mentions that Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Education and Cognition, Harvard Graduate School of Education says, "This endeavor to focus on human strengths and virtues is one of the most important initiatives in psychology of the past half century." He goes on to say, this is the scientific study of the strengths, virtues, and positive emotions that enable individuals and communities to thrive.

SIX CORE VIRTUES

					
wisdom	courage	humanity	transcendence	justice	moderation
//creativity //curiosity //judgement //love of learning //perspective	//bravery //persistence //honesty //zest	//love //kindness //social intelligence	//appreciation of beauty //gratitude //hope //humour //spirituality	//teamwork //fairness //leadership	//forgiveness //modesty //prudence //self-control

The VIA Institute on Character and the above noted authors categorize each of the 24 "signature strengths" under six core virtues, as follows:



1. WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE – Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge:

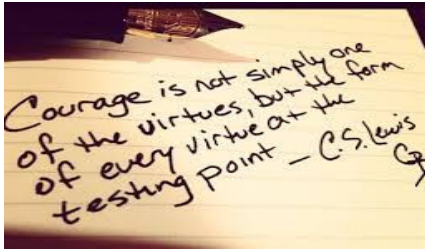
Creativity (originality, ingenuity): Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things.

Curiosity (interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience): Taking an interest in ongoing experiences for its own sake; exploring and discovering

Open-mindedness (judgment, critical thinking): Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; weighing all evidence fairly.

Love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally.

Perspective (wisdom): Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.



2. COURAGE – Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal:

Bravery (valor): Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; acting on convictions even if unpopular.

Persistence (perseverance, industriousness): Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles.

Integrity (authenticity, honesty): Presenting oneself in a genuine way; taking responsibility for one's feeling and actions.

Vitality (zest, enthusiasm, vigor, energy): Approaching life with excitement and energy; feeling alive and activated.

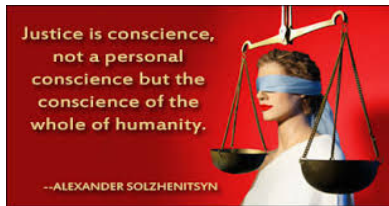


3. HUMANITY - Interpersonal strengths that involve tending to, and befriending others; the quality of being humane, thoughtful, benevolent:

Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated.

Kindness (generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”): Doing favors and good deeds for others.

Social intelligence (emotional intelligence, personal intelligence): Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself.



4. JUSTICE - Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life:

Citizenship (social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork): Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group.

Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others.

Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done, and at the same time maintain good relations within the group.



5. TEMPERANCE – Strengths that protect against excess:

Forgiveness and mercy: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.

Humility / Modesty: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is.

Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.

Self-regulation (self-control): Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions.



6. TRANSCENDECE - Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning:

Appreciation of beauty and excellence (awe, wonder, elevation): Appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life.

Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful of the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.

Hope (optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation): Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it.

Humor (playfulness): Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side.

Spirituality (religiousness, faith, purpose): Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose, the meaning of life, and the meaning of the universe.

In summary, people often remain unaware of, or don't fully recognize, and sometimes make light of, or undervalue their true character strengths and abilities, and the respective benefits that can be realized when incorporating these positive traits into the crucial arenas of their lives. So, don't overlook or underestimate your own personality strengths, and what they can do for you and others when fully recognized, appreciated, developed and effectively put to work. Discover your own personal strengths, your own unique talents, positive qualities and abilities, and put them to work to enhance your own life, achieve greater levels of success, help create the outcomes you want, fulfill your true potential in life, and use these strengths of character to improve all aspects of one's life as well as to bring out the best in others.





The following is a simple, yet profound expression and analogy of happiness, entitled: Life is Like a Camera, author unknown, and retitled here as: Happiness is Like a Camera. In other words, focus, develop, and don't give up. It's never too late to take another shot; to find the silver lining, happiness and joy in life.

HAPPINESS is LIKE a CAMERA

*Just focus on what's important;
Capture the good times;
Develop the negatives;
And if things don't turn out right;
Just take another shot.*



Finally, in his book, *How to Retire Happy, Wild, and Free*, Ernie Zelinski developed his own practical, philosophical script for happiness as follows:

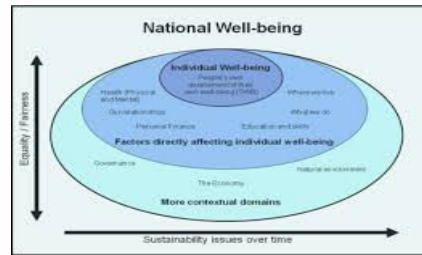
PRESCRIPTION for LIFE-LONG HAPPINESS

*Purpose enough for satisfaction;
Work enough for sustenance;
Sanity enough to know when to play and rest;
Money enough for basic needs;
Affection enough to like many, and love a few;
Self-respect enough to love yourself;
Charity enough to give to others in need;
Courage enough to face difficulties;
Creativity enough to solve problems;
Humor enough to laugh at will;
Hope enough to expect an interesting tomorrow;
Gratitude enough to appreciate what you have;
Health enough to enjoy life for all it's worth.*

Well said, Mr. Zelinski. I think Reinhold Niebuhr's *Prayer for Serenity* could be an appropriate addition, and compliment Mr. Zelinski's excellent philosophical prescription for happiness, which would be supplemented and modified as follows:

*Serenity enough to accept the things I cannot change;
Discipline, courage, and conviction enough to change the things I can, that need changing;
And wisdom enough to know the difference.*





DOES YOUR INCOME, AGE, IQ, OR EDUCATION PLAY A PART IN YOUR HAPPINESS ?

It depends. Some research shows that once your basic needs are met, additional income does little to raise your sense of satisfaction with life. However, achieving financial independence, beyond the minimal cash flow required to solely satisfy only your basic needs, allows for greater freedom, and it can liberate you from work that you do not find rewarding, enjoyable, and/or meaningful.

Also, as noted above, it can provide peace of mind from having to worry about the next paycheck, and potentially or likely yield more positive experiences. Experiences such as: being able to help or support the people and causes you care about; providing higher quality health care or other premium services; taking longer and better vacations; and retiring more comfortably, to name a few.

Money can also provide better and more access to more and better resources. This can help you further improve or remedy a wide variety of other financially related concerns and problems which otherwise may not be possible.

More money may afford you with more opportunities. It will enable you to acquire more "experiential" purchases, those that psychologists say contribute to one's happiness, compared to those purchases that do not, and compared to those with less money.

Additional income can also help you avoid or defeat bad stressors associated with financially related troubles which most of us experience at one time or another, thereby contributing to living a longer, healthier, and better quality of life. All factors that can make a difference, reduce stress, and contribute to our well-being.

Notwithstanding, Ben Franklin said "He that is of the opinion that money will do everything may well be suspected of doing everything for money." John Wesley's prudent and balanced approach and advise regarding money and life is: "Make all you can, save all you can, and give all you can." Lastly, Woody Allen said something deceptively simplistic that sounds like a Yogi Berra quote which is: "Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons."

Apparently, a high IQ and youth are not essential factors that directly contribute to our happiness. In fact, research indicates that older people, in general, are more consistently satisfied with their lives than our youth are. As we continue to grow and mature, the more our negativity diminishes, and the higher our self-esteem climbs, according to researcher Ulrich Orth. As we get older it seems we may lose some of our idealism, but we often develop more realistic expectations. In turn this can reduce one's

frustrations and disappointment associated with unrealistic and idealistic expectations of ourselves, others, and what we expect out of life.

As we age and attain majority, many blossom and flourish due to an increase in wisdom and self acceptance. We also develop an improved sense of self-awareness and insight, which includes an enhanced knowledge of our environment, character, feelings, motives, and desires, and we behave more sensibly. We also develop a greater sense of understanding and responsibility for our choices and actions. And, as we continue to mature, we discover why it is important to live a more meaningful and grateful life. Furthermore, older adults are often more effective at regulating their emotions than younger adults. With time we also hone qualities like patience, self-control, respect and altruism. We also learn new ways of thinking, and become more tolerant of one's own, as well as others shortcomings. We learn to admire the good qualities and respectful sentiments of others, becoming less stress filled, and thereby enjoying greater inner peace and harmony.

So, being older is often a strength, not a weakness as some, especially our youth and others might perceive. It's experience, judgment, discernment and knowing your resources, and personal signature strengths. These are all factors that can make a significant difference, and enhance your ability for achieving a more satisfying, successful and happier life.

Ben Franklin said, "Time is the stuff life is made of." It is an example of life itself. It seems that we are more cognizant of, and tend to appreciate and value our time more earnestly as we age. We become more intensely aware of how limited our time really is here on earth. It reminds us to cherish each moment, because it will never come again. Time is life. It is irreversible, irreplaceable, and precious. So it's wise not to waste it, no matter how old you are. By making the most of your time and your life, you will inevitably become a more productive, accomplished, satisfied and happier person.

A 2008-09 nationwide Gallup survey of more than 600,000 Americans between the ages of 18 to 90+ showed that happiness and enjoyment declined between the ages of 20 and 58, but increased steadily after 58 and into our 70s. The survey found that happiness drops among Americans in their 30s and 40s, and - in particular - among those in their 50s. These patterns were similar for both men and women, and held regardless of whether a person was employed, married, or have children in the house.

In general, the Gallop poll findings seem to indicate that life satisfaction is highest at ages 18-20, but gradually declines until about 58. Then, it starts to rise again into our late 70s, then gradually drops into our 80s, and rises once again among those older than 90. Men and women in most age groups had broadly equal happiness scores, with women scoring slightly higher than men in the middle-aged years and notably higher after age 80.

So, when you look in the mirror and eventually you see that your hair is graying, you're getting more wrinkles, and maybe you're experiencing a few more aches and pains, remember, you're not just getting older, more importantly, you're probably getting happier, more insightful, and wiser. Perhaps, that's why they call it our "golden years" and perhaps that's why they call them "seniors". Because wise citizens, regardless of their age, know that a person is not old, at least in spirit and attitude, until their regrets take the place of their dreams, and their resentment or dissatisfaction takes the place of their gratitude and their sense of wonder and appreciation of life itself. Remember, we should not regret growing old; because it usually beats the alternative, and it is a privilege denied to many.

A higher IQ may not directly contribute to one's happiness, but research does indicate that more intelligent people tend to make more cooperative decisions as opposed to more selfish ones. This research also indicates that more cooperative and intelligent people tend to be more willing to delay gratification, they make more money, improve GDP, and are less prone to moral slippage and corruption. This research referenced in an article in *Psychology Today* says, "Being part of a group, and particularly a country, that's smarter by even one IQ point can make a difference, provide big payoffs, and improve your quality of life."

According to what I read in Dr. Cutler's book, *The Art of Happiness*, he says "Educations' role as a vital factor in achieving happiness is widely overlooked. Studies have shown that even purely academic education is directly linked to a happier life. He states, numerous surveys have conclusively found that higher levels of education have a positive correlation with better health and a longer life, and can even protect an individual from depression. Dr. Cutler goes on to say, in trying to determine the reasons for these beneficial effects of education, scientists have reasoned that better-educated and informed individuals are more aware of health risk factors, are better able to implement healthier lifestyle choices, feel a greater sense of empowerment, autonomy, discipline and self-esteem. They also have more adept problem solving skills, and more effective coping strategies."

These and other recognized benefits of education can engender greater discernment, knowledge and wisdom. Which in turn, will supply the tools that can help build, and contribute to a happier, healthier, wealthier, and a more satisfying, and successful life.

Another aspect of education is knowledge seeking. Some research shows that happier people are more receptive to, and are often more capable of, dealing with the whole truth. The presumption here is when people are happier and more content, they are the least self-absorbed in their own problems, they become more open to the real facts, and are less likely to deceive themselves, especially about the unpleasant and negative aspects of a given situation.

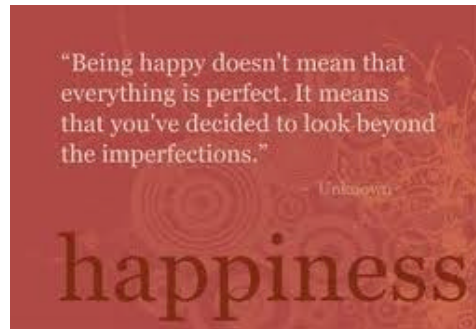
So, is there a correlation between knowing the truth and one's happiness?

It seems possible and reasonable that knowledge seeking can lead to positive feelings and provide a greater sense of meaning in your life, even if the reality turns out to be unpleasant or troublesome. Your desire to learn, question, and find your way to the truth seems to be a logical and natural upper that will ultimately contribute to one's happiness.

Knowledge provides the foundation for individual and societal growth and awareness. It contributes to the welfare of humanity, and allows us to evolve and advance. It also allows us to justify and track the truth.

Sharing and enhancing our knowledge, insights, and wisdom will help us put an end to our ignorance, narrow-mindedness, intolerance, and hatred, and it will contribute to a happier, safer and better world.

Knowledge and truth can not only effect power, more importantly as stated above, they are the antidotes to ignorance, insensitivity, disregard, bigotry, animosity, antipathy and hatred which are the root causes of many of the miseries in this world.



DOES YOUR APPEARANCE PLAY A PART IN YOUR HAPPINESS or VICE VERSA?

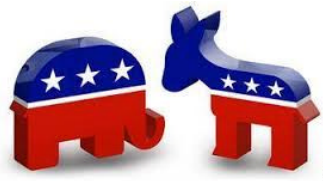
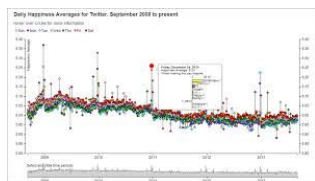
Studies show that when we are happy and/or when we look happy, we often look younger than we are, sometimes to ourselves, but especially to others. Although being younger in itself, doesn't necessarily contribute to one's happiness, feeling and/or looking younger and more attractive may help. You know what they say, "Looks Matter".

Since we tend to have more positive associations with a more youthful look than with old age, we naturally will have more positive emotions about ourselves when we are happy and look or feel more attractive and youthful. However, beware. There is a caveat that we should realize in this regard. According to an article in *Psychology Today*, when older adults look like they are trying to pass as more youthful versions of themselves, not happier versions, younger people see them as less likable and more deceitful, according to a University of Kansas study; explains psychologist Alexander M. Schoemann, who says: "Young adults dislike older adults who try to invade their group."

Nonetheless, happiness not only contributes to more positive emotions and feelings such as emotional warmth, empathy towards others, a general sense of well-being, and decreased anxiety, it apparently can contribute to a more confident, attractive and a more youthful appearance.

Finally, another article in *Psychology Today* says: "Psychologist report that physical attractiveness can indeed influence people's lives, and can shape one's social experiences and self-image". Studies show that more youthful looking and more attractive people - men and women - while being judged socially, at least initially, are often treated better and are looked upon by others in a more positive light. Nonetheless, due to hedonic adaptation and other factors, physical appearance plays only a small part in the overall happiness equation. Nonetheless, it seems the more positive emotions we experience, and the more positive image we have of ourselves, regardless of age, duration or causation, the happier we will become. There is no doubt that feeling attractive and good about yourself improves your self-esteem, enhances one's relationships, and can make you feel more confident, optimistic and happier.





WHAT DO SEX, GENDER, AND OUR POLITICAL AFFILIATION HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

Apparently, they all can have a bearing on one's happiness.

Research shows that women really are both happier and sadder, according to Dorothy Wade's article: *So What do you Have to do to Find Happiness*. She says, "Women experience more of all emotions except anger. Although women experience almost twice as much depression as men, they also experience more positive emotions than men, more frequently and more intensely."

Certain research also shows that older people, men and women, are generally happier than younger adults; and people that live above the poverty level tend to be happier than those that live below it; and people that are married usually are happier than those that are not, apparent generalities, and contrary to the findings of the 2008-09 Gallup survey noted above. Conflicting conclusions relative to one's happiness and life satisfaction as it relates to aging, being married or not, having children or not, shows diverse analysis suggesting that well-being increases, decreases, or varies over time, with age, and whether you're married, single, or have children or not. Therefore, it's important to note, and I believe most of us recognize that certain contradictions and inconsistencies are expected in life, "different strokes for different folks".

It's no surprise that different people, different cultures live in different ways, like or need different things. Everyone, every culture has their own way of doing things or approaching life.

There is no question that happiness, and the way one views life is inherently subjective. Although I believe there are certain ethical and moral absolutes, most things are relative, depending on one's point of view. Research, and life in general might be easier, not necessarily better, if we all had the same beliefs. But the reality is, we don't live in a world full of absolutes, and we certainly don't all have the same beliefs or the same perceptions.

History indicates that when it comes to the happiness gender gap, feminism and affirmative action have created more opportunities for women, outside of the home, over the past few decades. Our life, and our culture is considerably different these days, especially as it relates to our daily lives and gender responsibilities, compared to a generation or two ago. The award-winning TV drama *Mad Men* clearly shows how different things are now compared to the 60's. As a result, it seems that a lot of women these days, just like men, at times experience difficulty balancing their careers, family, friends, hobbies, households, and other activities, and obligations.

In Western cultures especially, life these days is more challenging, complicated, and more hectic for everyone. The “simple life” is a thing of the past for both sexes. Men are expected to pitch-in with daily household chores and help take care of the children. Women these days do as much or more, and are expected to work full time and have a career. Recent studies show that Americans have the longest workweek in the developed world. The need for a second income seems to be a necessity in order to achieve the lifestyle that most of us expect and work for. Studies apparently show that in any given week, women spend an average of approximately 2.0 hours more than men performing unpleasant and less gratifying tasks.

Researchers Plagnol and Easterlin used data spanning several decades to examine the role of unfulfilled desires of U.S. men and women. They report, when it comes to family and finances, women are generally happier than men, at least in early adulthood. However, after the age of 48, men’s overall happiness often exceeds women’s. Apparently, later in life, men come closer to fulfilling their aspirations, are more satisfied with their family lives and financial situations, and often are the happier of the two sexes, again, contrary to the findings of the 2008-09 Gallup survey noted above.

This research also reports the least happy period of the average man’s life is in his 20’s, when he’s most likely to be single, stressed, confused, and full of self-doubt. Apparently, young men are more prone to be dissatisfied than young women with their financial status, as well. Not necessarily because they are worse off, but because many say they have higher expectations for themselves and want more.

So, which sex prevails in the “happiness battle”? When all is said and done, I believe both men and women can look forward to becoming both wiser and happier with age and maturity. Like a fine wine, I believe our happiness and wisdom ripens and improves with maturation, regardless of our gender. The Gallup survey, and other research noted above could give credence to this belief.

The Pew Research Center’s Social and Demographic Trends suggests, men and women, that have more friends; that are more religious; that are healthier; that have loving marriages; that like their communities, where they live, like their jobs or their retirement; that have few financial worries; that see themselves – as opposed to outside forces – in control of their own destinies; and that have more of what they most value in life, will usually be the happier folks, regardless of their sex. Not surprisingly, most of these findings seem obvious, apparent and reasonable to me. Interestingly, and not so obvious, this research and these specific traits were identified as part of an on-going study, not to determine which sex is happier, but to determine why Republicans consistently report they are happier than Democrats. In the 2008 survey, some 37% of Republicans say they are “very happy” with their lives, compared with just 25% of Democrats who feel the same way.

What accounts for this disparity? How are Republicans different than Democrats? Do they have a different worldview, attitude or a more positive mindset? What are their secrets?

According to Pew research, republicans have more money and friends, are more religious, are healthier, have more successful marriages, like their communities better, like their jobs more, are more satisfied with their family life, like the weather better, have fewer financial worries, see themselves doing better in life than their parents did, feel that individuals control their own success or failure, and have more of what they most value in life (No, it's not money).

“This significant - 12% - GOP edge in life’s happiness sweepstake is not a new phenomenon”, according to Pew researchers. “Ever since the general Social Survey first asked the question in 1972, Republicans have always been happier than Democrats.” In spite of the Democrats' success in the 2008 election results, the 2008 gap is among the largest on record.

Are there other factors that account for this disparity in happiness? Along with the above identified traits, behavioral economist and business professor Arthur C. Brooks says, Republicans are more likely to believe hard work and perseverance can overcome disadvantages. Where Pew found that Democrats are more likely to say, success in life is most likely determined by outside forces. Republicans lean toward believing success in life is determined by one’s efforts. Brooks also points out, “Mental health professionals have known for many years, a perceived lack of personal control often leads to misery: it is terrible to feel you are at the mercy of circumstances or other people.”

Therefore, one might conclude: Those who believe they can control their own destinies, and do not consider themselves as victims of circumstance, and take a less fatalistic view of life, would feel empowered and free to act rather than merely react. By extension they would also feel more optimistic about their future, and would tend to be more positive, self-confident, energetic, secure, proactive, more enterprising, resourceful, less stressful, and therefore lead healthier and happier lives. Professor Brooks also believes social and cultural values such as faith, charity, hard work, optimism, and individual liberty are significant factors that can make a difference in the happiness equation.

Other research in psychology shows that all demographic variables combined, which includes sex, age, income, race, and education are responsible for only 15% of the difference in happiness levels between individuals. It appears, based on scientific evidence noted here, that our nature, activities, personal relationships, and our job end up playing a much more significant role in determining our capacity for happiness, than all of one's demographics or circumstances combined.

Beside the demographic variables, and how they might relate to one's happiness, does engaging in sex, and making love have a bearing on one's happiness?

Research suggests that regular, healthy sex - and its primary side effect, orgasm - not only can bring more happiness, it can apparently provide serious health benefits as well. "It can cure insomnia, relieve pain, and reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, depression, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, bladder problems, and more. Its power stems mostly from its aerobic element, and stress relieving effects. You can't be worrying about a problem when you're having an orgasm." according to Lauren Friedman’s article *The Love Limit*.

In addition to the above noted benefits, experts say healthy sex that promotes harmony in couples, not only reduces stress, and tension, it can also improve your memory, boost your immunity to infections, and strengthen your self-esteem.

Scientific studies have found that there is a link between sexual behavior and reported happiness. And, that sexual activity can provide a strong and positive influence in the happiness equation. Experts say that people who consider themselves happy are usually richer in sexual activity and are more likely to have more frequent and better sex.

So, does sex lead to more happiness, or are more happy people prone to having more sex? The research appears to be inconclusive. But, either way it's good. Research shows there is a symbiotic or mutually beneficial relationship and correlation between healthy sex, and one's happiness. Like "the chicken or the egg", which one comes first seems academic relative to the benefits due to its' reciprocal, fulfilling and complementary nature.

Sex also provides the environment for other feel-good benefits such as touching, caressing, and cuddling. This promotes feelings of affection, connectedness, and love. Furthermore, experts say that ongoing physical contact and sexual climax triggers the release of endorphins. They say this elevates our mood level and provides us with a sense of euphoria and excitement. Research also indicates it reduces tension, stress, and anxiety, and can help control pain and reduce cravings for potentially addictive substances. Research also shows that it reduces symptoms associated with eating disorders. Moreover, a 10 year study involving 3500 people shows it helps postpone the aging process between loving couples who have frequent enjoyable sex.

Although there are many reasons why two people choose to maintain a close and loving relationship, endorphins may be a factor, according to apparent research printed in an article in *The Road to Health newsletter*.

So, sex like happiness, not only feels good, it does good for our relationships, health, and overall well-being.





DO WE TAKE THINGS FOR GRANTED?

Definitely. "Most human beings have an almost infinite capacity for taking things for granted." proclaimed Aldous Huxley. It appears that people usually adapt rapidly to the positive changes in their world, and soon thereafter, begin to take those things for granted. Remember that term, hedonic adaptation?

Many of us don't stop to appreciate how truly fortunate we really are; particularly compared to the vast majority of people on earth. There are hundreds of millions of people in our world, including babies and children that are starving and living in squalor. You know what I mean. Have you visited a third world, developing country? Have you seen the movie, *Slum Dog Millionaire*? Who hasn't clicked-on a TV channel which is showing those heartbreaking, distressing images? The ones displaying the despondent, starving mothers and their babies, all skin and bones, trying to survive in dirt huts. They are living with flies and disease, with no plumbing or electricity, in total impoverishment and despair. It is so terribly sad to see and fully comprehend, that we usually change the channel and try not to give it a lot of thought. It is unbearably disheartening, hard to relate, and it makes us uncomfortable. It is easier to look the other way. These people are struggling every day just to stay alive. Certainly, it is difficult or impossible for these people to be happy.

Many of us take our food, shelter, running water, and electricity, and the numerous luxuries we have, as well as our freedom and liberty, for granted. We feel entitled to these things and more, right? Some of us complain when we have to wait a few extra seconds for a web site to open-up; or about the waitress who was a little late delivering our meal at the restaurant; or we got stuck in traffic for an extra ten minutes.

Think about it. Hundreds of millions of people or more don't have computers, and many of them don't have electricity, running water or any reasonable sanitary conditions for that matter. They are malnourished, afflicted with disease, and deprived in every conceivable way, and certainly don't have money or access to go to restaurants; they don't even have roadways in their villages or ghettos, never mind owning their own vehicles and being lucky enough to get stuck in traffic some day.

Billions of people in our world are so accustomed to living with severe hardships that their desire or even thoughts about real freedom or liberty are so removed from their reality, it becomes virtually non-existent. Most of them are just too busy struggling to keep their families and themselves alive.

In retrospect, how many times do we complain about the inconsequential and meaningless things in our lives? Besides taking things for granted, there are times when we get immersed in self-pity, become self-absorbed, and begin to dwell on every superficial problem or annoyance. Therefore, it may help to try and change our frame of mind.

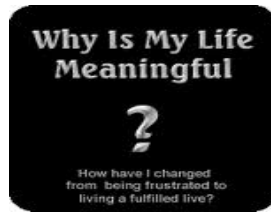
When you realize you're taking things for granted, or you're experiencing problems and feeling sorry for yourself, and you say, "Why me?" think of them. The vast majority of people on this earth that have it far worse than most of us would ever trade places with, possibly conceive, or want to imagine. The millions of starving mothers, babies, and innocent children; the millions of people being unfairly imprisoned, unmercifully beaten, tortured, murdered, and maimed for expressing their political or religious views, or being of the "wrong" ethnicity, faith or creed. The millions of young women and children being sold into a horrific life of sexual slavery. The countless individuals that are being ignored, can't get help, and continue to die from the Ebola crisis or other devastating diseases and terrifying illnesses.

Sadly, these and other maladies, atrocities and crimes against humanity occur daily throughout our world. Bringing to mind those realities alone invariably snaps me out of my "funk", and it puts my negative feelings or emotions, and problems in their proper context real quick. Then I realize, once again, how truly lucky and blessed I am. And, how grateful and appreciative I need to be for what I have, which includes: my friends, family, freedom, and my life, and all the other "gifts" I've been blessed with. And, how fortunate I am to be born and raised in a more tolerant country, which has noble values, unlimited opportunities, and is teeming with compassionate human beings.

So, it helps when we never forget to count our blessings and be grateful for what we do have. It helps when we stop our complaining, and realize that it could be a whole lot worse. And, it helps when we remember that our happiness, our freedom, and our life are precious and special. We should never take them for granted. We should take them with appreciation, cherish them, and not let them go to waste.

"Men are undoubtedly more in danger from prosperity than from adversity. For when matters go smoothly, they flatter themselves, and are intoxicated by their success." - John Calvin





HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE A MORE MEANINGFUL AND ENGAGED LIFE ?

Although there are many factors that affect our happiness, which includes the ones noted here, the following are what I've learned to be some of the notable and important principles, activities, or strategies which could help us achieve a more meaningful and engaged life. Whereas, some may call them truisms or mere platitudes, I believe they are relevant, meaningful, truly significant, and employing them could help improve one's outlook, well-being, and overall quality of life.

These principles are simple to apply, they are practical, effective, beneficial, and free, and I know they can work...they have done so for me. In fact, numerous studies prove them to be incredibly powerful and effective ways to improve one's happiness:

Help others whenever you can; practice acts of kindness; show your gratitude; count your blessings; be grateful for what you have, and savor life's joys. Live simply, care deeply, speak kindly, stay humble; show affection and appreciation; have faith; be joyful, remain hopeful, and love generously.

Love is so powerful that even while struggling for his existence, and trying to help others through some of the most horrific, disturbing, dehumanized and unspeakably cruel conditions, an existence infinitely beyond any humane description, Viktor Frankl while surviving in Auschwitz, and other Nazi concentration camps realized that the salvation of man is through our compassion and love for one another. "A thought Transfixed me, he said, for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth - that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: ***The salvation of man is through love and in love.*** I now understand how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way - an honorable way - in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment." It seems, even under such absurd, extremely harsh and intolerable conditions one can realize, experience and appreciate the meaning, the importance, and the comforting, wonderful and transformative, extraordinary and profound power of love.

Love, the affectionate concern for the well-being of others is not only the most fundamental and significant emotion related to our happiness, it represents the noblest attributes of humanity. Love is the renunciation of self; it knows no boundaries, and it avails for all things. In other words, it is helpful, useful, and beneficial for all things.

No motivation is more profound to humans than love and faith. They are two of the most important and the most powerful life forces that exist. They create this wondrous and magical feeling as if all things are possible. You can accomplish anything with your love and your faith in your belief and ability to do it. Hence, this modified proverb declares: *Love and faith conquers all. True love is truly invincible.*

There is a theological and spiritual belief that the power and sense of virtue regarding one's faith, hope, charity, and love is permanent. It is said that these theological virtues are the character qualities associated with salvation, and represent the essence of the human spirit that man should desire to develop in order to become closer to God, and share in his nature. And through this human spirit they naturally become their own reward. Like all virtues, they support individual moral excellence and collective well-being. The characteristics associated with these virtues seem to be innate or some say infused qualities that are naturally progressive, go forward and improve in utility when practiced regularly, and they also relate to or affect one another. In other words, when one is deprived of the other they are all affected. It is said that the greatest of all these individual characteristics and special virtues is love, because it is the fundamental root of the other three, and it binds all virtues.

Many religions believe the love that human beings possess enables one's heart, soul, and one's mind to sustain an inner peace and faith that surpasses all human understanding, and it represents one of God's highest virtuous presence in man. Love and faith can transcend and mitigate one's disbelief, despair and doubt, and one's animosity, hatred, and ill will; and are the two most extraordinary qualities that can complete one's life.

In addition to feelings of fulfillment and inner peace, deep and enduring tenderness, warmth and understanding, enchantment and invincibility, our love for one another creates a sense of underlying oneness, and is the foundation of any true and happy relationship. True, genuine relationships, which include close personal friendships, intimate and loving marriages, or a strong commitment and devotion to a spiritual or social group, or organization, are based on a feeling of closeness, in which there is a sense of sharing, affection, connectedness, trust, and love.

Through love we learn how to treat one another, and the world around us. It brings tenderness and caring into our heart, and applauds and gives rise to all things good and true. Love is the one thing that can make the essence of our happiness, our heart, and our soul complete, and it is said that it is the only thing that can vanquish time. Our love is infinitely abiding and fuels the expansion of tolerance, patience, acceptance, faith, endurance, understanding, kindness, hope and happiness. It enhances the essence of our character, provides for greater fulfillment, peace and joy, and it makes our life worth living.

Love seems to have many of the qualities of a Supreme Being: It is the essential nature, the oneness, and a source that underlies everything good. Love is the connection that changes and transforms everyone's life for the better, creating a higher consciousness and a sense of rightness unlike any other. It becomes the light of life and the way to find your true self. Love is the oneness that makes us part of everything.

"Love intensifies our experience of meaning, consoles us in our pain, and deepens our sense of happiness and delight in the world. There are few stronger predictions of happiness than a close, nurturing, equitable, intimate, and lifelong companionship with one's best friends and loved ones."

Tal Ben-Shahar.

"If you have love in your life, it can make up for a great many things you lack. If you don't have it, no matter what else there is, it's not enough." - Ann Landers

"One word free's us of all the weight and pain in life; that word is love." - Sophocles

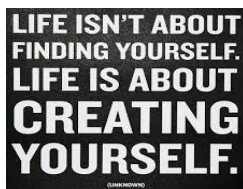


WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF LOVE?

Love, like happiness enhances us, it makes us more by helping us grow. From love we achieve our noblest attributes, and it helps build some of our greatest strengths, such as: happiness, hope, faith and understanding; empathy, trust, respect, and patience; truth, tolerance, compromise and commitment; humility, kindness, compassion and forgiveness. These diverse and highly regarded qualities enhance our personal relationships, and intensify our love.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love never delights in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. That is from the book of *Corinthians*.

That is the essence of love. When you express the emotion of love you create happiness and joy within yourself, and within all the others you share it with. Aine Belton says, "Love feels just as good going out as it does going in and will always keep you rising." Love is what makes life worth living. Happiness is the expression of love.



THERE'S MORE...

The following are additional principles, and what I call fortune cookie strategies, which represent some points to ponder, life lessons and bits of wisdom that might help improve one's perspective, that could engage the heart, bring an idea to life or just might make you think. Can you make it through the list? Can you add to the list?

Regularly express your appreciation, gratitude and affection for, and routinely be helpful and supportive of, the people you love and care about • It's the people we care about most that effects us most deeply • The best thing you can do to help yourself is to put your arms around someone that needs it more than you • Every day may not be good, but there is something good in every day • Be the change you want to see and create the life you can't wait to live. You have the ability to create such a life. Understand and never forget that you, and only you are responsible for the quality of life that you want to live • Try to become a habitual optimist • We are not defined by our tragedies, misfortunes or our circumstances; but we are defined by how we react to them • What people have the capacity to choose, they have the ability to change - Madeleine Albright • Work toward developing greatness within yourself. And, one of the important ways you should measure both your greatness and your happiness is by the positive impact you have on other people's lives. Remember, you make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give • Strive for personal growth, excellence, and to engage the world with curiosity • Learn something new every day of your life. Never stop learning. What determines whether you succeed or fail, often lies in what you know, and how you make use of that knowledge • Any fool can despise, rationalize and make excuses for what he cannot get • It has been said that Man is fundamentally intuitive and is not a rational animal, he is a rationalizing animal • If you are not willing to learn, no one can help you. If you are determined to learn, no one can stop you • One thing about life lessons is, they will be repeated until we have learned them • You can't control everything, but you can control how you react to everything • We need to ground our expectations in, and acknowledge and accept the constraints of reality. There's nothing wrong with setting ambitious goals and high expectations, and striving for superior standards and excellence, those are commendable and worthy objectives for sure. But, demanding and/or depending on perfection, or setting unrealistic and idealistic expectations for yourself and others, especially the ones you care about, will invariably result in disappointment, frustration or anger. It is also one of the common causes of unhappiness • Unhappiness is best defined as the difference between reality, our talents, abilities or efforts, and our expectations • Unless it's crucial, aim for moderation and flexibility in your expectations and endeavors, rather than perfection, extremes and idealism. Idealism also increases in direct proportion to one's distance from the problem • Stop trying to make the world conform to your will • Avoid the temptation to rigidify your way of thinking, and guard against narrow mindedness • Agreement is not important, but understanding is • Never get discouraged by disparaging remarks from myopic, inconsiderate, ignorant and thoughtless individuals • Savor the present. Enjoy what life has to offer each and every day. Don't dwell in the past or become obsessively anxious about the future. Live life to its fullest while it's happening • Our lives are a series of moments. You never know how many moments you or your loved ones have left. Be grateful for every moment. These moments are the indefinite interval of time that combined with the right choices that can make your day, change the world, or transform your life • Accept the inevitable or what cannot be avoided and make the best of it. Remember, the happiest people don't have the best of everything, they just make the best of everything • Your level of desire and commitment are fundamental keys to positive change, success and happiness • Being decisive is essential for a successful and happy life. If you deny yourself commitment, what will you do with your life? Every accomplishment, great or small, starts with a decision. • Nurture meaningful relationships throughout your life. These meaningful interactions with people can help contribute to more successful, fulfilling and rewarding relationships, and help foster a deeper connection with others, they can also help maintain your emotional balance, and may help you to rebound from the disappointment, discouragement, and misfortune that we all experience sometime in our life • Marry the right person, and be the right person. Important as it is to choose the right partner, it's probably more important to *be* the right "partner" in marriage, friendships, and in our work. Be a voice of support and encouragement for your partner, friends and loved ones. We all need a cheerleader in our lives • If your intention and emphasis is about love and support, not about being right or self-centered, you can overcome almost any difficulty • Find a mate whose core values and background are compatible with yours. Opposites may attract, but they are generally not good for long term relationships. When people's values, background and approaches to life echo one another, they increase the odds for achieving a more respectful, caring, satisfied, harmonious, happier and successful long-term relationship • Look inward to fixing relationship problems rather than trying to change others, unless there are dire circumstances. It's not always easy to refrain from giving advice, especially with those we believe-in, care

about, and feel we can help. Our friends and loved ones, like most of us, are frequently looking for encouragement or validation. They will usually appreciate and benefit from your understanding, your love and your support. They may not welcome your judgmental, critical comments or unasked for advice. So, it's often better to focus on improving yourself. And, be there to comfort these people and celebrate their accomplishments, and support them in times of need • Be kinder than necessary. Everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle • Live with good intentions and purpose • Every person is talented in some way. Our worth should not be measured by whether we win or lose, but how we use our talents, and by the efforts we make for ourselves and others. • Wanting to win, and making a concerted effort in life is good. But, no one can win everything. Don't forget to enjoy and appreciate both your efforts and your accomplishments, and more importantly, those that help you along the way. • *"Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing."* is a well-known quotation in sports. But, in life and in our interpersonal relationships, I'll use another more suitable sports reference in this regard, *It's not really whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game, that's most important.* Remember, we don't win at relationships, we win by having relationships • Try to be more interested than interesting. We could learn something from every person we meet. Each event and person we encounter has something of value to teach us • Thoreau said, It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see. Look for the good in every person and in every situation • Be conscientious. Those who are more thoughtful, organized, and more mindful and attentive, can better control their impulses and emotions, and are often healthier, happier, and more satisfied and successful people • Be open to new experiences. Going outside your comfort zone, being receptive to the unfamiliar and having a wealth of experiences can help you develop the skills needed to cope with and solve new problems, expand your consciousness, and develop a broader based view of life • Get enough sleep. Fatigue raises your stress levels, is a detriment to your health, and inhibits good decision-making • Get on with your life. Do what needs to be done • Don't be inflexible. Learn to balance routine with spontaneity • Don't be afraid to fail and stop blaming others. John Burroughs said, a man can fail many times, but he isn't a failure until he begins to blame somebody else • When searching for someone to blame, you will always be successful • Failure is not bad, nor is it pleasant or necessarily easy to deal with. If you choose to accomplish anything worthwhile in your life, failure becomes inevitable and necessary somewhere down the line. It teaches you things you could never learn otherwise. • Your most important insights are often the ones that are most hard-earned • Failure is not an option if you want to be successful. Tal Ben Shahar says, we either learn to fail or we fail to learn. Mistakes and failures provide some of life's greatest lessons • You may fail many times throughout your life, but you never really lose until you surrender and give up. This self-imposed limit is man's only unconquerable enemy • Our greatest failure is to have never tried at all. It's true, by not trying, we can preclude the possibility of failure, but we certainly preclude the possibility of success • Kierkegaard said, To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. To not dare is to lose oneself • It is said that failure makes us stronger and more resilient; and offers self-discovery and insight to every loser willing to listen • Our growth begins when we begin to accept, learn from and become grateful for our own failings and weaknesses. The reasoning is, we can use them as guides for our future growth • It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat - Theodore Roosevelt • Our mistakes should not define us. But, they should be used as a reference, aid, and direction to help us move forward, improve, and mature • The ultimate mistake is the one from which you learn nothing • Paul "Bear" Bryant advises: When you make a mistake, there are only three things you should ever do about it: admit it, learn from it, and don't repeat it • It's often better to be nice than right • Turn the other cheek and don't burn bridges. Don't let a dispute destroy a relationship with friends and loved ones. *"We can work it out"*, solve it amicably. Life is way too short to harbor ill feelings and waste precious friendships • Apologize when you are wrong • Take responsibility for your own happiness - and all the other aspects of your life as well • Reach out and share your happiness • When in doubt

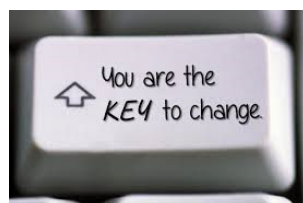
ask yourself, will this make me happy over the long-term, is it the right thing to do? Question and find your way to the truth • Put an end to needless worrying and over-thinking. Those traits are toxic and counterproductive to your well-being • Stop complaining and put things in their proper perspective. Remember, it could be a whole lot worse. Be accountable and make things better • Solve your problems and conflicts in a positive and constructive fashion • Curb your bad traits, your ego, and negative feelings • Emphasize the common ground you share with others, rather than the differences - Dale Carnegie • Be optimistic, develop a positive attitude, self-confidence, and a can-do spirit • Learn to deal with stress and adversity and help the one's you care about deal with it too. Hard times are unavoidable in every life • Overcome your fears and doubt. Fear is at the root of all avoidance. It inhibits us from taking risks necessary for growth and progress. It compromises your physical and mental abilities and performance. It can disturb your spiritual and emotional balance, jeopardize your psychological well-being, and it can turn its' dark vision into a self-fulfilling prophecy • To appreciate life, you must contemplate death • "It is only in the face of death" wrote Saint Augustine, "that man's self is born." • Be productive at meaningful work. Work at something you enjoy; and get involved in something you have a passion for that is larger than you • Volunteer and help others • Don't hesitate to question anything. But, don't dismiss faith, intuition and what your gut is telling you entirely. If you want proof of everything, you may inhibit your love and your enlightenment. The gut also functions as a second brain - the enteric nervous system. It can act independently of conscious thought and it gathers vital information. Listen to what it's telling you, but don't over-rely on it. • Following your heart may not always mean there'll be a happy ending, but again, listen to what it is telling you. Unlike the gut, it's a distinct, profound, and deep-rooted connection to the life and love within all things. Recognize and make use of that special connection because it is the nexus to your loving wisdom, your higher self, and to all that's important and that which really matters in life. • The heart is the center of your spiritual activity and character. It is the fundamental and vital connection to your body and soul, your search for meaning and truth, your unshakeable knowledge, and the core of your true and invariable nature. It is the essence of who you are. It is the lifeblood and crossroads of all operations of human life. • Our connection with the heart goes beyond our dominant intellect, and transcends one's conventional reasoning. It is said that the heart has reason that reason doesn't know. It is also said that your heart knows when you're truly happy because it smiles. When it comes to matters of the heart, trust it, and you will always know the right thing to do. • The most beautiful things in life are not seen but felt by the heart • Antoine de St. Exupery, a French author and poet insightfully noted, it is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye • Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all - Aristotle • Our days are happier when we give people a bit of our heart rather than a piece of our mind • Stop and smell the roses now, remember life is about the journey. Enjoy it when it's happening, and don't let it pass you by. Our life long journey is our quest for meaning, and self discovery. But, don't forget to enjoy arriving at your goals, and take pleasure in experiencing life's' infinite and amazing destinations too • Some of our most precious gifts such as our gratitude, growth, spirit, curiosity, faith, and love have no limits • Have a sense of humor, dance, hug, laugh, and smile more. Their positive energy can lighten us up, reduce tension, and help us cope with adversity • Carpe Diem - seize the day to live life more mindfully, meaningfully, passionately, fully and fearlessly • Stop and reminisce with friends and loved ones. Sharing fond memories can create an abundance of positive emotions. Reflect, relish and share with others • On a regular basis remind yourself to recognize, understand, enjoy and appreciate what truly matters and what doesn't • A person's most useful asset is not their head full of knowledge, but a heart full of love, an ear ready to listen, and a hand willing to help • Realize the things that will destroy us are: politics without principle; pleasure without conscience; wealth without work; knowledge without character; business without morality; science without humanity; and worship without sacrifice - Gandhi • Don't sweat the small stuff, resolve it and move on. You can waste a lot of precious time and effort, and create unnecessary stress and anxiety focusing on the inconsequential and trivial mishaps, mistakes and disappointments in life • Stay in touch with nature. Our proximity to nature has a calming effect on the mind, can be therapeutic, and it makes us happier • Get a dog or cat or both - they're lifelong companions that bring fun, humor, and joy into your life. Caring for a pet, especially by children, teaches them about responsibility, discipline, compassion, love, devotion, sacrifice and respect for other living beings, especially ones who are totally dependent on them. For children, it seems there is almost nothing to compare with the companionship and

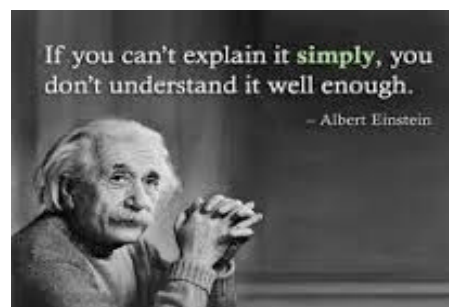
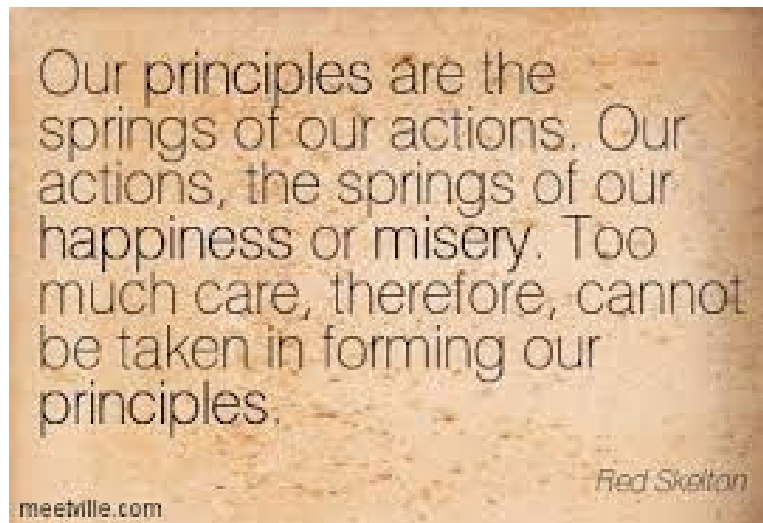
love of a pet • Finding a way is easier and it will result in more happiness if we can benefit from others' experiences • George Washington Carver said: How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong, because sometime in your life you will have been all of these • Finally, I've come to realize that all that truly matters in the end is that you have loved. Thomas Merton said: Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone. We find it with another • Through the human experience we learn often, very early on, that life isn't always pretty, or tied with a bow. But, it's still a gift, and a blessing. Remember every day is a gift, and the quality of your life is your gift to yourself • When you look hard and diligently in life, only the truth remains; and one of the infinites, absolute, and most powerful truths that exists is love. It is the highest goal to which man can aspire. Love is, always was, and ever shall be the answer. It is the most wonderful feeling and extraordinary quality that can both transform the world and complete your life.

Finally, one principle, one moral idea, one code of personal conduct, and one rule that to me stands above all else as a practical guide in life, and that is the 'Golden Rule'. This is an ethic of reciprocity that most of us are quite familiar with. If you remember nothing else, this one guiding principle of human behavior regarding the treatment of others, if followed, will likely provide the greatest "dividends" to you and all who you meet and influence in this world..."Treat every human being the way you would want to be treated."

The above list may seem rather extensive in length, and somewhat broad in scope, by the quantity and magnitude of the number of items alone; but there is no question, that it's far from all-inclusive or unique. As you may have noticed, I'm partial to lists. Nonetheless, this is only a sample of suggestions or possible insights that I believe could help improve your relationships, your outlook, well-being and overall quality of life.

Would you apply all of the above principles, ideas or suggestions to your life? Probably not. Do you agree with or believe in all of them? Probably not. Nonetheless, if only one or two of these suggestions or thoughts brings you closer to achieving a happier, better, or more connected life, it will have served part of its purpose. Additionally, the intent of this list is to reinforce the realization that much of your happiness, and the way you live your life, can be enriched in many, many ways; and more importantly, your life is not just contingent on your nature or your circumstances, but your life is manageable and within your power to control and change. Therefore, it's important to recognize, and it's logical and beneficial to use, whatever you can control, for your own self-development, and to help you achieve the life you want, deserve, and can't wait to live. Rumi insightfully noted: Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.





Principle: a moral rule or belief that helps you know what is right and wrong and that influences your actions.



DESIDERATA - A SIMPLE PHILOSOPHY FOR LIFE AND HAPPINESS

I find the timeless words of Max Ehrmann's poem *Desiderata*, to be both eloquent and inspirational. It offers a simple, positive credo for life and happiness. And, it seems to encapsulate many of the principles and life lessons noted above.

DESIDERATA

*Go placidly amid the noise and haste,
and remember what peace there may be in silence.*

*As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.
Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others,
even the dull and ignorant; they too have their story.*

*Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are often offensive and vexatious to the spirit.
If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter;
for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.*

*Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.
Keep interested in your own career, however humble;
it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.*

*Exercise caution in your business affairs;
for the world is full of trickery.
But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals;
and everywhere life is full of heroism.*

*Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection.
Neither be cynical about love;
for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass.*

*Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.
Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in times of sudden misfortune.
But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings.
Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.*

*Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.
You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars;
you have a right to be here.
And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.*

*Therefore, be at peace with God; whatever you may conceive him to be.
And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life,
keep peace in your soul.*

*With all its shame, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.
Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.*

CONCLUSION

Although there are certain inconsistencies and contradictions in the limited amount of research, self-help books, articles, and surveys that I've looked at over the years, regarding human happiness, much of this material which includes scientific, empirical and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that it is possible to be happier. And, more importantly, it demonstrates that you can choose to improve your outlook, and overall well-being, regardless of your nature, and your circumstances. It shows that much of your happiness is manageable, and within your power to control and change. It also shows that there is more than one path that can lead you there.

Inconsistencies and contradictions are expected and inevitable. After all, we're discussing the examination of happiness, or what psychologists appropriately refer to as *subjective* well-being. And, there is no question, happiness is inherently subjective. Therefore, one's happiness is both personal and distinct, and subjectivity by definition emanates from one's experiences, perceptions, understandings, emotions, and other specific conditions of the mind. Hence, there seems to be as many paths to happiness as there are personal or individual impressions, opinions, biases and feelings. Sonja Lyubomirsky notes, "There are probably as many ways to achieve happiness as there are ways to lose it." So, when it comes to happiness, one might say, "the more the merrier" and "to each his own".

Contradictions and subjectivity aside, I think we can all agree that attaining genuine, sustainable, long-term happiness may not always be easy. For most of us, life is a constant challenge, and often a struggle, marked by disappointment and frustration. It's the nature and existence of our own human frailties that ensures there will always be, to some extent, unrealistic expectations, frustrations, anger, disappointment, and some sadness in our lives. Nevertheless, it can be achieved. And, I've come to recognize that *enduring happiness...*

- is not so elusive
- is there for the taking
- is not dependent exclusively on your environment, circumstances, or your nature
- begins with self-awareness
- is a choice, an attitude, a perspective, a state of mind that can be managed
- is knowing that one's life has meaning and purpose
- involves the development of a sound core self, and an attitude of embracing life rather than rejecting it
- is not something you pursue directly, it's more of a by-product of how you choose and manage to work, play, love and live; and how you continue to see yourself and the world around you
- is about the journey, not the destination, and living life to its fullest while its happening
- encourages your awareness, understanding, and common sense to surface
- expands your range of thoughts and can make you more resourceful and creative
- allows you to take your focus off your problems, and helps you enjoy the world around you
- provides scientifically proven medical benefits that can improve your health, vitality, confidence, and mental stability
- will enhance your perspective, personality and people's opinion of you
- improves the quality of one's life in other significant ways
- helps defeat depression, day-to-day anxiety, insecurity, anger, and discouragement
- is an unlimited and sustainable resource in which you can attain an infinite amount of nourishment for the soul, emotional well-being and inner peace; makes for a better world, and:

- is the ultimate currency
- is priceless
- is free
- is a mindset
- comes from within, and your endeavor to become happier, is a life changing, ongoing, dynamic and transformative process that will help you make your life more enjoyable, meaningful, and worth living.

Also, Aristotle was accurate, proper and correct when he said, “It is so important that it transcends all other worldly considerations”. After all, most people say, rightfully so; that it is the one thing they want most from life.

Get involved in something you have a passion for that is larger than you; be generous and share your blessings; and help others whenever you can. These are just a few of the principles and strategies noted here that can contribute to your long-term happiness. But none of the principles of enduring happiness will work unless you do.

Everything worthwhile in life necessitates effort and serious work. Achieving a meaningful, engaged, and happy life is no different. There are no short-cuts. Enduring happiness involves the development of a sound core self, and requires effort, discipline, compassion, commitment, and dedicated work. The good news is, this work can become the most rewarding and meaningful work that you’ll ever do.

If we validate the endeavor to become happier, as a worthy and compelling goal, and we pursue our happiness with a conscious effort in a useful, helpful, and pragmatic manner, it can: make human beings flourish, profoundly change and improve our lives, and it can make our world a happier, better, and safer place.

A Buddhist teaching says if you can’t feel a sincere desire for your own happiness, there’s no way you can truly wish for the happiness of others. Your happiness and more happiness comes from all that is right with you and our world.

Learning to appreciate and enrich your happiness is one of the most powerful and uplifting skills that you can acquire. Everyone deserves to live a life filled with joy and happiness.

We are gifted and blessed with this wonderful human intelligence and immense human potential. When we combine these remarkable innate human qualities with sufficient information, determination, effort, and time, we can all achieve sustainable, long-term happiness, and life satisfaction. Enduring happiness involves the choice to change and manage your state of mind.

I wish you well in your pursuit of enduring happiness. Because, when you finally realize it, and embrace it, you’ll always have it, you’ll never regret it, and regardless of your circumstances, nothing or nobody can take it away.

▲ Caution! Happiness is contagious. Yes, that is a scientific fact. Behavioral neuroscience shows that your happiness can infect those around you, via mirror neurons. This class of brain cells apparently operates as neural Wi-Fi. Collectively, these neurons can create an instant sense of shared experience. So, whoever is happy can make others happy too. Here’s to your happiness, and to an enduring pandemic of happiness withal.

ADDENDUM

AN ANSWER TO THE ULTIMATE QUESTION: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE ? and IMPORTANT PRECEPTS FOR ACHIEVING WORLD PEACE



Is the answer to the question: What is the Meaning of Life? synonymous with the precepts for peace, happiness and good will towards "men"? Is the answer to this question also closely associated with the answer to another fundamental question for humanity which comes from Harvard professor T. M. Scanlon who posed this question several decades ago: What do we owe to each other?

My simple answer to both of these philosophical and complex questions is: The answer can be synonymous or closely associated with both of these questions based on the following declarations.

In his book *The Happiness Hypothesis*, author and psychologist Jonathan Haidt poses, what has been called "The Ultimate Question" or what he also refers to in his book as the "Holy Question", which is this: What is the Meaning of Life? Haidt also notes that because the definition of the word *meaning* is: *the purpose or significance of something*; this question could also be reframed as: What is the Purpose of Life?

This is an age-old, philosophical and quintessential question that involves the very purpose or essence of our existence. Since human societies first appeared, humankind has sought to understand and explain the "meaning of life." Many philosophers believe this contemplation and the desire to understand our place in the universe are what differentiates humankind from other species; according to Ron McGivern, Associate Dean of Arts at Thompson Rivers University.

The meaning of life touches on so many complex and interrelated issues which include cultural, religious, and spiritual influences. Some might consider it a paradox. Is there a reason for our existence? Do we exist at all? Can the answer be found only outside of life, after death?

The meaning of life, according to Wikipedia, is deeply mixed with the philosophical and religious conceptions of existence, consciousness, and happiness; and touches on many other issues, such as symbolic meaning, ontology, value, purpose, ethics, good and evil, free will, conceptions of God, the existence of God, the soul, and the afterlife.

"Many people think of their vocations as their "purpose". Do I marry, if so too whom, what do I study in school, what job do I seek, and so on. While these things are important to us, I don't believe they're our reasons for being; they are not the meaning or purpose of life."

In many religions the answer to the Holy Question would be something like this reference, and the previous quote above from the American Life Helping Institute: "The meaning of life is for us to discover that we are true children of an infinitely loving and merciful God, to find out what our responsibilities are to our Creator, and to fulfill those responsibilities."

Theological teachings obviously differ to some degree with the wide variety of religious beliefs and the multitude of people - over 80% of the world's population (approx. 6.08 billion people) - according to Pew research identify to some extent with the plurality of religions that exist throughout our world, such as: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, etc.

However, regardless of man's diverse, subjective or institutional interpretation of what he believes is God's word based on the world's major religions, there are several universal, fundamental principles, responsibilities or obligations that I believe most religions, cultures and reasonable people, believers and nonbelievers alike can agree on.

Therefore, these universally accepted principles might help provide an appropriate and fitting answer to the questions at hand, and are listed below.

Before I identify these principles, one might ask:

Why do we need a sense of meaning?

Sonja Lyubomirsky, in her book *The How of Happiness* cites a well-crafted answer by psychologist R. F. Baumeister: "Because we need to feel that we matter, that our suffering and our hard work are not futile, and that our life has a purpose. Because we need to feel a sense of control over our fates. Because we need to be able to justify our actions: why we should forgive, what we have to be grateful for, why we should turn the other cheek, and so on. Because we need a reason to focus beyond just ourselves. Finally, because a sense of meaning fuels our sense of self-worth. It makes us feel good about our belief system, our identity, and the communities of like-minded individuals to which we belong."

Sonja points out that researchers believe that a genuine sense of meaning in life must be rooted in a person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. She says, blindly embracing someone else's sense of meaning won't bring about happiness and growth.

How others have defined the meaning or purpose of life and varied moral traditions

Tolstoy believed every religion is an answer to the question of the meaning of life. And, the religious answer according to Tolstoy includes certain moral precepts.

Based on his studies, Tolstoy noted that there are two principles of human behavior that are taught by almost all faiths; common threads that can be found in every common-sense moral tradition about how people should behave towards one another.

These two tenets or moral rules of conduct and behavior according to Tolstoy are, first and foremost Love - the affectionate concern for the well-being of others; and then Do unto others as would be done unto thyself - an ethic or moral norm of reciprocity which governs relationships within all stable social systems.

The principle of Not harming others is another moral tradition that resonates with most faiths and conventional ethical beliefs. Islam is the only major religion that does not believe in the principle of the Golden Rule or Not harming others. Islam believes in a duality of ethics, one for Muslims and one for non-Muslims.

Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard concluded that life - you may add the word meaning - is not a question or problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced. In other words, the quest for meaning can be found individually, in the act or condition of living. Each individual's experiences and perceptions differ from others. They are not the same as yours. They are far from uniform or monolithic; and no two people view or experience the world exactly the same.

Immanuel Kant's belief in, or perception of man's purpose intrinsic to the species and the natural purpose of humanity is the development of reason. He supposes in this theory of cognitive development that nature fosters this goal from infancy to adulthood through human physiology and human psychology, as outlined in a synopsis noted in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The encyclopedia's overview goes on to explain that "Kant argues that human society is characterized by an 'un-social sociability': on the one hand, humans need to live with other humans, and we feel incomplete in isolation. But, on the other, we frequently disagree with each other, and are frustrated when others don't agree with us on important matters. The frustration brought on by disagreement serves as an incentive to develop our capacity to reason so that we can argue persuasively and convince others to agree with us."

Further, the encyclopedia's précis explains, Kant argues we are naturally autonomous rational and moral beings who possess free will; and that our purpose in life, our ultimate aim as autonomous beings that possess free will, and as rational moral agents should be to become perfectly moral, and work towards the highest good. In other words, that our purpose in life is to be obligated to strive to become ever more moral, to work towards moral perfection, demanding this moral cognitive development and an endless progress toward moral perfection as a species, even realizing that humans will likely never be perfect in one's limited temporal lifetime.

When asked, what is life? Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, much like Kierkegaard said, "Life itself is but what you deem it." So, both of their answers to the question, if asked, *What is the meaning of life?* might be, "whatever you choose it to be".

Who's to say, why we are here. Why does the universe exist? What is the meaning of it all?

Most religions answer these questions, as noted above. And, your belief in their answers requires faith, not necessarily common sense, logic, empirical evidence or scientific fact. And, if you have the faith, you will believe.

As noted earlier, we all have our own belief system. So, on a worldly level, it seems Marcus Aurelius, and Kierkegaard got it right; it is a matter for the individual.

So, my answer to the above noted question - *What is the Meaning of Life?* is quite simple, by design, and it is based on reason and common sense. This answer consists of a set of principles I believe most of us value without argument, but not without qualification. This set of principles embodies four clear, practical precepts, universally valid, fundamental principles that virtually all cultures, religions, reasonable and well-intentioned people would agree with; a set of principles, natural laws, and moral attitudes that fosters love, learning, reason, compassion, decency and goodness. A set of principles that other reasonable people would be motivated to seek agreement on, and could not reasonably reject.

These principles could be considered practical duties and/or moral obligations that we owe to each other as reasonable and rational beings; principles that have positive values of a way of living with others; principles of justice that value and respect life, virtue, moral behavior and the humanity in oneself and in others; and principles that are easily understood, that are impartial and rational, bind and obligate everyone equally; principles that exert an influence on moral responsibility, exercising good choices, and achieving your greatest self; and principles that can be used to justify conduct to each other, as individuals grounded in reason and common sense, and that have good, undeniable, and positive enduring influence on people; and principles that can make a difference for good in this world.

If all of us would abide by these four simple, easily understood, fundamental principles, there is no doubt they could operate as moral imperatives, and a positive unifying force for good within our respective societies; and adhering to these principles could help bring peace to humanity, and would make our world a better place. And, some would argue that the purpose of life, and the answer to the question: *What do we owe to each other?* is: to contribute in some way to making things better.

Here are the principles:

1st principle..... Do what's right (*prudent, morally correct, good and virtuous*)

2nd principle.... Avoid what's wrong (*do no harm in word or deed, respect all life*)

3rd principle.... Help others (*transcend oneself by loving others as you should love yourself*)

4th principle.... Help yourself (*enlightenment; express love, peace, harmony and achieve your greatest self*)

By adhering to these principles and a logical extension of same, you create what could be considered another or fifth principle regarding *The Purpose of Life* - you help build or create a better world; you propagate a greater good by following a universal and natural moral obligation to yourself and others and to a higher power or purpose beyond just oneself.

To further enhance our lives and to make our world a better place, in addition to adhering to the above principles, we need to continue to survive, to thrive, to evolve and grow through enlightenment and self actualization; to understand, learn from, and resolve our individual and collective problems and the dichotomies inherent in human nature; to personify our spiritual ideals that are consistent with our virtuous and humanitarian values; to reach out to others, and collectively work together diligently to change laws and abusive powers of governments, corporations or other powerful or controlling authorities that are unjust or unnecessarily harmful to our fundamental human rights, our individual liberties, our environment and our world.

Since the genesis of our very existence as human beings, we seem to have developed a deep-rooted and essential need for knowledge. We have sought to understand the truths about our place and purpose in the universe, and how it was created. We have realized the value that comes from knowledge, truth, and freedom of choice, from acting without the constraint of necessity or fate, to weigh matters, and make choices that genuinely affect one's destiny, to take responsibility for one's actions and appreciate our gift of free will, to make intelligent decisions, to choose between right and wrong, good and evil.

NASA contends humanity's interest in knowledge and the heavens has been universal and enduring. It argues that human beings are driven to explore the unknown, discover new worlds, push the boundaries of our scientific and technical limits and of human knowledge, and ultimately understand all that exists, and then push further. The intangible desire to explore and challenge the boundaries of what we know and where we have been has provided benefits to our society for a long time. It also seems man's purpose intrinsic to the species is to understand each other for the betterment of humanity and the larger whole; to understand what's true and what's false and not real, that truth and morality is not abstract or irrelevant, is real and essential, is attainable and it matters to promote unity, peace, love, and good will.

According to the world's best-selling book of all time, the Bible, this innate desire and need for knowledge seems to have started in the very beginning with Adam and Eve. The story of the creation of the first chosen man and woman on earth is a perfect example of our thirst for knowledge. So, the bible explains Adam and Eve risked eating from the Tree of Knowledge, even after their Creator, God, forbid them to do so. God explained that He created them as autonomous beings that possess free will. God further explained, He gave them this autonomy, so they, and all of humanity, not He, had the ability to make choices that shape and affect one's destiny in life. He gave them the power and capacity to choose among alternatives and to act independently of natural, social, or even God's divine wishes.

Accordingly, God gave Adam and Eve the choice between receiving the eternal blessings from a gracious God or realizing the consequences that God would bring to bear, if they willfully disobeyed His request relative to this one absolute condition. It was the one and only imperative God put forth to Adam and Eve. God knew if they ate the pronounced forbidden fruit, a willful act of disobedience against His wishes, He may be displeased, but undoubtedly would understand, because He created them with the gift of free will – the gift of choice. But, if they chose to disobey this one particular wish, He warned them it would destroy their innocence and purity, introduce shame, guilt and regret, and bring wrongdoing, damnation and death into their lives. Because God created humanity with free will, He explained to Adam and Eve that with the ability to act at their own discretion, if they succumbed to this temptation, and disobeyed His only mandated prohibition they would be held morally responsible for their choices and actions, and they would then be undeserving of the blessed, eternal life He had created for them. And, more importantly, if they ate this forbidden fruit, they would then be deprived of the humanity, humility and morality necessary to achieve the real purposes of God. Consequently, if they ate the fruit of the tree, their selfish, willful act of defiance to their Creator would bring immoral behavior, wickedness, corruption, suffering, sickness and death into their lives and into the world. Yet, it seems, the alluring power of infinite knowledge and the temptation of accepting evil in order to facilitate such power is so seductive, they chose to reject their blessed eternal life in paradise, the idyllic Garden of Eden to trust and worship an evil power in the form of a serpent who enticed them to eat the fruit. This serpent proclaimed they would become enlightened and possess the same infinite knowledge as their Creator. Knowingly, by despising the authority of God, they were willing to risk it all to discover said knowledge, and by extension, the power equal to God, that they were falsely led to believe came with it.

Planetary scientist Dr. Alan Stern says, humans have been explorers since the earliest days, from our birth in the cradle of Africa, then spreading across the seven continents, exploring the depths of the deepest oceans, looking across the vast expanse of the universe, and going into outer space. He says exploration will never end. He believes there is something very deep within us as human beings that stretches back to our genesis, the dawn of our species.

Unless we are restrained, repressed or conditioned otherwise, history shows we have a natural tendency to: be curious, explore and to examine life, to capture and process more information to satisfy this human curiosity and immanent thirst for knowledge, exploration, and the truth, and to ultimately understand it all; to become our highest selves in our spiritual journey to find both meaning and purpose; shape our own lives, and to respect and experience a connection with all life.

We also want to recognize, understand, and learn from the true nature of human consciousness and the vital connection we have: to the larger reality, with other individuals, with nature, with the cosmos, with all of creation, and with the divine realm or some benign higher power or purpose beyond just ourselves.

Coincidentally or not, this answer to both questions: *What is the Meaning of Life?* and, *What do we Owe to Each Other?* consisting of the above noted principles, has similar ingredients to the recipe for happiness as noted herein: *What Are The Precepts That Can Help You Understand and/or Achieve Enduring Happiness and Life Satisfaction?* (See pages 121-141).

However, I want to make it abundantly clear that the issue here, the purpose of life, in my opinion, starts with seeking to improve both our individual character and our collective mind-set through virtue, love, compassion and enlightenment, rather than just the sole pursuit to gain self-fulfillment, subjective significance and one's individual sense of happiness in life.

On a collective level, we should first set our sights on values and principles that outweigh just one's personal happiness and self absorption.

In this regard, ideally, we should focus on a prosocial hierarchy that proclaims that one's character and one's positive engagement with the larger reality and our common humanity is more important than only one's subjective significance, self-absorption or one's tendency for preoccupation merely with the narrow pursuit of one's exclusive self-centered and self-serving interests and one's selfish pleasures or desires.

Although individual interests, pleasures and desires are important, if not critical to one's well-being, I think that any reasonable, wise, loving and compassionate person can agree that *The Meaning of Life* should NOT be just about me, me and me.

Living a more virtuous life will help strengthen our morality and prosocial behavior. Doing what is right, our integrity and morality, and our desire to help others are all important qualities and behavioral attributes that have greatly contributed to our human population's ability to progressively evolve from savagery to civilization.

This evolutionary progression has enabled humans to produce large, cooperative and productive societies, even in societies like ours, with great cultural diversity, and without the exclusive affinity and the tribal nature of clan or kinship and descent, and without ethnic, religious or political homogeneity.

Through the practice of virtue, Ben Franklin believed he would become happier, more successful and create a better world for himself and others. He said by living a virtuous life you learn the best thing to give your enemy is forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance; to a friend, your heart; to your child, a good example; to a father, deference; to your mother, conduct that will make her proud of you; to yourself, respect; and to all humanity (compassion) and charity.

Further, choosing to act in a good, prudent and praise worthy way will naturally contribute to one's joy, inner peace and happiness to make a better self, a better world, and respectively it can enhance both our individual and collective well being.

Altogether, this manner of living can help restore our fractured relationships and help moderate, minimize or ideally eliminate our seemingly intrinsic moralistic, critical, judgmental, defensive, divisive and combative tendencies or nature. It can also strengthen our mutual fellowship to ideally live without fear in the interest of a shared human unity for virtue, love, respect, and peace on earth.

Who could argue against the validity of these fundamental principles noted above, in this context? The presumption that if we respect, support, and practice these four simple, fundamental principles regularly, we could not become happier, more desirable human beings, and feel more fulfilled. Who could argue the point that our world would not be a better place than it has been, throughout the history of humanity, if everyone would have abided by these four clear and practical precepts, universally valid, fundamental principles, and by living a virtuous life?

Researcher Jim Collins says, for like all basic truths about what is best in human beings, when we catch a glimpse of that truth, we know that our own lives and all that we touch will be better for making the effort to get there.

As to what we collectively consider to be right or wrong, and exactly how we should help others and ourselves is certainly open to debate; it requires detailed qualifications. In the course of human history, we've seen torture, slavery, genocide, terrorism, and other atrocities done in the name of both religious and political beliefs, and what some have proclaimed as righteousness or divine judgment or mandate in order to rationalize or justify such brutal and inhumane actions.

I believe each of us is born with free will, to choose what is right or wrong, and to choose to help, or not help others and ourselves. So, The Meaning of Life is: to live a life of meaning, to make the right choices, do right, avoid wrong, help others, help ourselves, and therefore help the world collectively, to create a better world for all of us. If you believe in God or some other deity, do you think this Divine Being or Holy Spirit would endorse and approve of these principles? If you are, or are not a believer, do you endorse and approve of these principles?

Nonetheless, this is a starting premise that answers both of these philosophical and age-old questions, albeit simply, but arguably, appropriately. The qualifications as to what we collectively consider to be right or wrong, and what we ought to do, at the bare minimum, can be worked out.

Shared values

The more opportunity reasonable people are afforded to get to know one another's varying opinions, beliefs and cultures, the more you wind up appreciating their justified, worthy and noble values. With a more understanding, tolerant and reasonable societal approach we can help sustain communal kindness and mutually acceptable societal norms, to help us put our differences aside, and largely get along with each other. We can also learn to live with, and harness our differences for good, based on equality and mutual respect for our common humanity and the moral obligations we have to one another.

However, the absence of shared values, and the lack of mutually acceptable societal norms and public trust can poison societal relationships and create significant conflict, hostility, divisiveness, and neo-tribalism that can threaten our system of government and democratic way of life. When you lack common bonds of language, culture, habit, history, tradition and values, residents not only have little in common, but lack the mechanisms or even the desire to assimilate and integrate their migrant populations; especially when some migrant populations because of religious and political ideology prohibit assimilation to any other culture than their own.

The qualities we collectively care about, value and share are some of the prime motivating factors in human behavior that can engender more compassion, self-sacrifice, acceptance and understanding for one another over time, and it can create stronger ties between people, and bring us closer together.

According to psychologist Paul Eastwick, as we spend more time with others, and acquire more information about others, it seems plausible that we would come closer to discovering the 'truth' and thus achieve more consensus and harmony in our life.

When we surrender our feelings of selfishness, exceptionalism, intolerance, insecurity, resentment, fear, jealousy and hatred, and when we realize that trying to make the world conform to one's political, cultural and/or religious views, beliefs and values to the exclusion of all others, is not the solution to our problems, it is the problem.

And, even if most of us come to that conclusion, I suspect there will always be one or more narrow minded, intolerant, self-centered, insecure or irrational, violent, extreme and unreasonable fanatics or radicals, which can include certain unprincipled political, factional or religious leaders, tyrants, despots, zealots or cultures, that we will have to deal with or work around. After all, what would life be without challenges?

I think we can all agree that the world has many problems. I think we can also agree that it is unrealistic to expect that we can solve all of them at once. However, I think we have a responsibility to try and solve our own problems, and do the best we can in life.

I believe that it is part of man's purpose, to learn and understand, and to help put an end to our ignorance, which is one of the root causes of the miseries in this world.

Accordingly, the 4th principle noted above is relevant here, and it states: *Help (enlighten) yourself*. And, I believe the philosophy of the Enlightenment provides an appropriate definition, "Man is responsible to himself, to his own rational interest, to his self-development, and by an inescapable extension, to the welfare of his fellow man." But I will add, not to the exclusion of other virtuous beliefs, principles, or spiritual values.

Based on that hypothesis, and the principles noted above, I have a proposal for your consideration. Einstein said, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." With that thought in mind, I'm trying to consider a person that is most qualified to organize and lead the efforts needed to develop this proposal, and successfully complete the relevant objectives and goals. A person who demonstrates an exceptional level of consciousness, awareness, and enlightenment. A person who appears to be admired and respected by people from virtually all cultures and religions. One whose character is beyond reproach, and who is considered to be a paragon of virtue. A person who transcends oneself by connecting with others for the greater good.

The first person that comes to mind is the Dalai Lama. A person whose life is guided by: the advancement and promotion of basic human values, tolerance, and compassion; and the fostering of inter-religious understanding, universal responsibility, and the regard for the welfare of all mankind, and all living things. A person who believes that rational and well-intentioned people from all walks of life could and should coexist respectfully and peacefully, and they will trust in the collective will of humanity and the planet to survive. Further, the Dalai Lama is commonly considered the world's foremost ambassador of good will.

Therefore, I propose that the Dalai Lama organize, and take the lead in this proposed worldwide effort. Who would be a better person to do this? It already seems to coincide with his philosophical outlook and current mission in life. In fact, many of the principles noted here are taken from or inspired by the Dalai Lama's regard for universal responsibility, understanding, tolerance, compassion and respectful coexistence.

I also propose a significantly abbreviated, updated version and modification of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the principles noted here, and The Golden Rule be used as rough guidelines and starting points to help establish the basic principles that the peoples of the world can, and will agree with, accept, support, and conceivably abide by. Are there better examples or guides that we could start with, or utilize?

For the purpose of universal acceptance, my objective is to keep this proposed document both politically and religiously neutral, succinct, and as simple as possible, so that virtually all people can understand it, and ideally endorse and support its principles. It is not intended to take the place of the Bible, the Koran, the Constitution or any other sacred writings, testaments, or detailed principles and laws of nations, states, religions or social groups. It is also not intended to be a detailed philosophical dissertation; or a complete list of what one might consider to be all righteous, prudent and good. This proposed document is intended to become a symbol of wholeness, to help unite all nations, humanity, and our world. I will call this document, the **Fundamental Principles of Humanity**.

However, if you choose to restrain yourself from considering such principles, and stop questioning your limitations, sensibilities and beliefs, you can limit your view of the world and how you relate and react to it.

When you feel others don't share your deeply held values and beliefs, its human nature to feel less connected to them. Such a "collective" or more restrictive outlook, and circumscribed view of life may intensify and escalate these perceptions of disconnect. These sentiments of disconnect or feelings of disparity and detachment are further exacerbated under certain circumstances, such as misunderstanding, mistrust, perceived unfairness, paranoia, or other strained, distressful, troublesome, unfriendly, or hostile communications and conditions. "These people don't like me or my values, and may want to harm or control me. These people threaten both my identity and what I identify with, believe in, and who I want to be".

These types of negative perceptions, divisive communications or circumstances can initiate or exacerbate these feelings of disrespect, disunity, mistrust, and even the desire for mistreatment against others. Others, whom you may feel fundamentally opposed to, fearful of, alienated or threatened by.

Societal differences

There are individuals, groups of people, certain tribal cultures, or citizens belonging to a nation that grow up in closed-minded, isolated, authoritarian type societies that favor imposed order and blind obedience over freedom. They learn to obey and accept what they are told, with little or no questioning, and with little or no given choices; or else. As an example, extremists, fanatics or others who have radically different world views, beliefs and value systems compared to more balanced, conciliatory, self-conscious, more liberated people who actualize in independent free thinking, and live in more tolerant democratic societies that offer and encourage such independence, freedom, liberty and choice.

The extreme, uncompromising, and more authoritarian controlled and repressed individuals, groups or societies are largely uninformed, conditioned to believe, and are strongly influenced altogether by their authoritative culture, religion, political ideologies and/or government that everyone should view the world exactly as they do, and they are the only ones that have it right. Current examples would include the Chinese Communist Party, or any other Communist controlled country; all Islamic controlled countries; and any of the other totalitarian, authoritarian or fascist type governments or societies.

For the purpose of this discussion, I have categorized authoritative, totalitarianism as a form of a fascist type government, much like repressive, anti-democratic Communism, and the oppressive legal and political system of Islam. In both instances, the state's power for all practical purposes is unlimited; and their people are allowed little if any freedoms. Communism and Islam ruled governments control virtually all aspects of public and private life. This control associated with both of these fascist type governments extends to all political and financial matters as well as the attitudes, morals, and beliefs of the people. These governments use forcible suppression to stifle dissent and terrorize opposition, often at the hands of the military or the political and religious legal system of Islam respectively. As an example, sharia law governs every aspect of life: politics, economics, hygiene, marriage and family relationships, diet, warfare, crime, and so on. Everything is covered.

This type of authoritarian, intractable, "frozen" mind-set can happen around any deeply held ideologies or beliefs, which includes secular and theocratic totalitarianism, such as Communism and political Islam respectively. Similarly, even if not radicalized or coerced, most of us have also formed, and tend to stay faithful to our own strongly held convictions. But unlike Communism and political Islam, we are not compelled or required to live under this dictatorial type power and authority.

Further, the broad minded, liberated, independent critical thinkers, unlike the myopic or repressed, isolated, manipulated and controlled ones, are more willing and able to recognize, consider and even accept or choose other fitting or more suitable viewpoints or alternatives. The authoritarian and radical extremists usually are not willing or allowed to do the same. These oppressive type governments favor or enforce strict obedience to authority at the expense of personal freedom. They discourage or prohibit, and are opposed to, or become fearful of independent, critical free thinking and debate, and other democratic principles for reasons that seem obvious.

This blind, absolute obedience to authority or creed creates environments and conditions that lead to what psychologist Irving Janis explains is: a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment. He explains these repressed people remain bound and silence the cognitive dissonance, moral consciousness, and their own free will because of the controlled conditioning which includes the unquestioning obedience, and the dictatorial imposed fear, limitations and ignorance that exists under such isolation, restraint and authority.

When individuals in any ordered community, which includes those people in the free press, blindly trust, and don't question, scrutinize, and watch over the powerful ruling party in society, and they don't critically observe, become aware of and question related principles, beliefs and values and the particular way they look at things compared to others; and they ignore or dismiss the consideration of further pertinent, reasonable and possibly more suitable alternatives; these manipulated, controlled, and complicit ones in society usually end up becoming more exclusionary, biased, unreasonable and inflexible, nurturing closed-mindedness, fostering intolerance, and empowering tyranny.

Closed minded people are often short sighted, insular in nature, and dogmatic in their views. They are prone to judge hastily, condemn and divide. They are usually not receptive or willing to examine, consider or challenge differences of opinion, even reasonable doubts, new or different ideas, beliefs and values, or cultural diversity of any nature. They limit their potential to live life more mutually independently, respectfully, freely, fully, and compassionately.

Further, closed minded, unreceptive people are chiefly disapproving, frequently judgmental, often unapologetic, imperious or arrogant in manner, confrontational, and abnormally obsessed with their own self-proclaimed righteousness; and often suffer from illusory superiority. They generally see things in black and white, "stick to their guns" (like many of us do) regarding our deeply held, sacred beliefs, and they resist any arguments regarding same, no matter how rational, logical, real or true.

In general, totalitarian and authoritarian societies, radicals, zealots and closed-minded people are most always intolerant, inflexible, impervious to change, non-inclusive, often insecure, isolate themselves from outside influences with different perspectives, actively suppress dissenting or even alternative viewpoints, and pressure or coerce "their people" to participate in unreasonable and often times irrational acts of devotion to their cause. The oppressed ones usually lack sufficient knowledge and understanding, especially about the lure and danger of exclusionary, restrictive, close-minded thinking, and limiting beliefs. They are poorly attuned to and conditioned to care less about "others'" views, sensibilities and needs.

Closed minded people will often react to others who are different or unusual with prejudice, difficulty, resentment, contempt and fear. The radical, persistently stubborn, unregenerate, small-minded people are usually beyond intractability. Studies show these types of intolerants, by and large petty and obstinate people have a great potential to respond harshly or even violently if they feel the need to defend the honor and exclusionary values and self-interests of their "group". This may include their country, political affiliation, religion, family and their respective leaders, or other more restrictive, extreme, or radical communities, cultures, social groups or ideologies.

Bill Warner notes that authoritarian societies forbid critical thought for the simple reason that it cannot coexist with authoritarian thinking. Authoritarian societies forbid critical thinking by threatening, and inducing fear and paranoia amongst themselves. These oppressors subjugate others by brute force, power and cruelty, and they inflict savage and senseless punishment and other oppressive measures on not only those who they perceive or deem to be offenders of the authoritarian state, but to those that don't report known "resisters" or even suspects of same.

These brutal and oppressive measures are designed to weaken the bonds of personal relationships, while sewing a culture of distrust where even friends and families are reluctant to share their innermost thoughts and beliefs with others.

Warner goes on to say that "truth " has no meaning in authoritative knowledge. There are only thoughts that are allowed and thoughts that are forbidden. "Truth" is determined by appeal to authority, but only to the "correct" authority. Authoritative regimes are strongly hierarchal. He goes on to say that authoritative knowledge also forbids debate. Those who want to debate are demeaned, humiliated, insulted and they are frequently considered heretics, morally corrupt uninformed ingrates, or they are simply locked out of the venue. Those who disagree or "get in the way" - the "undesirables", the "deplorables", the kafirs and infidels, and other "resisters" are often forcibly sent to reeducation (imprisonment) camps to "learn" to become compliant and submissive, or they, their family and other loved one's may be enslaved, tortured or killed.

When we can't discuss or consider more rational, appropriate and reasonable alternatives, negotiate, solve, or even compromise on our disputes or critical differences, and when we experience animosity, ill will, and feel fearful of or threatened by others - conflicts, and ensuing hostility or violence are likely to arise.

Furthermore, extremists and radical "groups", and closed-minded people often create divisive states of mind such as resentment, hatred, and other strong negative emotions such as fear or contempt, and seem to need "enemies" to be able to justify or promote their cause, and their sense of victimhood and righteousness, and the need for retribution, especially from within.

What advances us as a civilization is the entirety of our understanding; realizing that those things which unite people through our mutual understanding are greater than those which divide us; and that intolerance, hostility, hate and war is not the inevitable fate of mankind, in spite of our history. Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history, according to an article in the New York Times.

Sociologist R. Brian Ferguson made the point that throughout human history, people have struggled with different views of what is fair, equitable, moral, and right. Staying true to your values and having strongly held beliefs doesn't mean you have to be inflexible, and have a closed mind. We should not have to wait to exhaust our tolerance, moral conduct, "tribal" emotion, and good will, or render useless, ravage or destroy other human beings who disagree with us, before settlement is possible.

The long human history of warfare

Like sociologist R. Brian Ferguson, I don't believe that our long human history of warfare is: traditional, or the result of human nature, or an evolved impulse to bond with our own kind and destroy or kill members of other groups.

Bonding with like minded people seems to be a common, comfortable and reasonable human behavior, and it maybe instinctual. However, harming and killing others, unless there is a real threat and need for self-defense, is not instinctual in my experiences, even when training as a Marine.

Studies show there is a profound psychological cost of learning to kill in war and Society.

Although self-preservation is a natural instinct, combat and war is not always about insuring our survival. I'm not saying that warfare is not justified or not necessary under any circumstances. The protection of innocent people requires the willingness and ability to use force and engage in vigorous conflict, often with the intent to paralyze the forces of an enemy. The history of mankind is fraught with the "moral" justifications of war.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that three conditions, and I add, quite subjective and arguable, were necessary to make a war just: *First*, it must be ordered by a competent authority; *Second*, the cause must be just; and *Third*, the combatants must have a right intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, and/or the avoidance of evil. Personally, I can't argue with the criteria, but who's to decide the competent authority, the just cause, and the right intention?

So, what have we learned from the phenomenon or general character of the state or condition of war, and from confronting the human misery associated with war?

Regardless of authority, intent or moral justification, it seems we've learned the nature of war itself in general, is a culturally influenced situation that is most often determined by the political power in control, and because of its violent nature, war can frequently bring out the worst of humanity. Yet, in many circumstances, to some degree, war has also brought out the best of humanity. And, unequivocally war brings to light the dichotomy of humanity, both the humane (compassionate and kind) and the inhumane (lack of compassion, cruel and savage) qualities that inevitably make us human.

In other words, war brings out, and may tend to, or can exacerbate both the moral and immoral character traits of people. These distinctive, but not necessarily invariable qualities exhibited by any number of individuals include: our seemingly inherent need for goodness and love, as well as the negative qualities and characteristic weaknesses, imperfections, and a host of behaviors we humans engage in that can be destructive not only to our enemies, but to our allies and to one's self, especially during times of war.

The humane side is, wars can encourage and advance research and development of new products, and technologies which can be adapted for civilian use when no longer needed specifically and exclusively for military applications. Wars have also driven revolutionary medical advances which includes: triage, ambulances, antiseptic, anesthesia, pain management, prosthetics, vaccine development and numerous other elements of medical development taken entirely for granted today. All of these medical developments emerged from the depths of the pain and suffering that occurred as a result of war. Therefore, these war related betterments saved countless lives, pain and suffering for both military personal and civilians alike.

To further the humanitarian side, surely history has shown that just wars have protected people from their destruction at the hands of an oppressive force. So, just wars can free innocent people from so much sorrow and suffering, and subsequently they can save an immeasurable number of innocent lives.

To a great extent, it is also reasonable to expect that morally justifiable wars: empower good people; that they are intended to eliminate the oppressor's ability to harm innocent people, by neutralizing or defeating the wicked and profoundly immoral; and eventually, that just wars can also create lasting peace, and stability.

Ian Morris, a professor at Stanford University, is the author of *"War! What is it Good For?"* wrote an article entitled, *In the long run, wars make us safer and richer*, and in spite of all the misery and destruction that wars inevitably bring to bear, he states that, "So yes, war is hell — but have you considered the alternatives? When looking upon the long run of human history, it becomes clear that through 10,000 years of conflict, humanity has evolved, and created larger, more organized, and better developed societies that have greatly reduced the risk that their members will die violently". These more organized, morally improved, and better developed societies exist today, especially in governments that promote freedom and democracy, and a framework of law to which the government is subordinate to the people.

Generally, on a grand scale throughout human history, Morris makes the case that as a consequence of war, no matter how unsettling such consequences become, he found these battle tested, better developed societies after the war has settled, have in certain situations, such as our civil war, and both the 1st and 2nd world wars, ultimately created conditions that achieved: reduced conflict, more predictability and stability, better productivity and development, enhanced infrastructure, improved per capita income levels, higher living standards, and most importantly they created conditions that advanced human rights, freedom, brought down the wicked, empowered people to become better, saved lives, and ultimately created peace.

Morris maintains that a 'just' war, especially under the right circumstances, has not only made us safer, but has made us better people. As an example, how would our country be with continued slavery, if the Confederates won the Civil War. How would our world be today if the Nazi's, and Imperial Japan continued, and governed all of Europe, the USA, and maybe the world? Would it be a better place for everyone than what we have today? Would it be a place you would want to live in?

I think in the face of slavery, in the face of Nazis, in the face of oppression and totalitarianism, any reasonable person who values life, liberty, human rights, and individual freedom would join those armies in a just war against such evil and oppression.

Although we understand and appreciate that a just and morally acceptable victorious war can stop oppressive forces; save countless innocent lives, serve as a catalyst for constructive change and innovation; provide for social justice and the many incremental benefits specified above. As stated earlier, a justified and moral war can also empower good and destroy evil.

On the other hand, we also recognize that war always generates some degree of hatred, injustice, the repudiation of truth, acts of violent conflict, oftentimes without compromise; the taking of human life and other morally risky activity. So, ultimately war is capable of taking a tremendous human toll on everything around it; whether it's valued, justified, morally defensible or not.

Moreover, war also involves devastation, horrific brutality, and untold individual suffering of every magnitude. Throughout history, wars have killed hundreds of millions of combatants and civilians, and traumatized whole civilizations. It fills our world with pain and misery. And in civil, more highly developed societies, it introduces fundamental demands for morality and lawful treatment of combatants that can be repeatedly abused under extremely stressful and uncivilized, war-torn circumstances; and frequently with feelings of hostility, guilt, shame, resentment and animosity.

As I recall a relevant quote from a Vietnam veteran who said something to the effect that: War crawls down your throat. It eats you alive inside and out. No matter how much you try, it's hard to be objective. War is a mind-numbing visceral, overwhelming and intense emotional experience that obscures one's reasoning, judgment and moral clarity. Further, the point was made that war is so horrible, dehumanizing and traumatic it is difficult to find words to truly describe it to those that haven't experienced it. According to General George S. Patton, Jr., "Compared to war all other forms of human endeavor shrink to insignificance."

Thus, adhering to the right conditions, a war might be justified; and it should be considered admirable or good for the morally acceptable reasons noted above. So, under evolved principles, and fundamental rules for the conduct of warfare, it seems war can be legitimized, warranted, and even virtuous; but it can never be humanized. One might ask: How can death, slaughter and carnage ever be humanized?

Further, it has been said that, success in war can cover a multitude of sins.

Michael Marshall in his book, *Blood of Angels*, states: "There has been no war without atrocity. War is atrocious, pure and simple: only greed, nationalism and faith help us pretend otherwise." "Truth, it has been said, according to Phillip Snowden, is the first casualty of war." Bertrand Russell said: "War does not determine who is right - only who is left." Alexander Cockburn said, "A 'just war' [may in fact be righteous or just, and morally defensible, yet] is hospitable to every self-deception on the part of those waging it, none more than the certainty of virtue, under whose shelter every abomination can be committed [under said delusion] with a clear conscience."

In addition to the moral challenges, ambiguities, and often widespread dehumanization of the enemy, and the moral complexities of people's actions in war, war creates economic hardships, collateral damage, and imposes *prima facie* wrongs. Also, according to many war-zone Veterans, and most psychologists, war can cause severe emotional and sometimes unbearable trauma for far too many people as a result of the overwhelming amount of physical, mental and psychological stress related to war. And it starts with: the extreme confusion and insecurity; an overwhelming traumatic experience, or series of events that is hard to accept, make sense of, or understand. Then comes the painful memories or nightmares, flashbacks, loss of sleep, and periods of crippling grief and worry involving the fighting, killing, mutilation and other violent acts; and the anxiety, destruction, carnage, chaos, cruelty, suffering, heartbreak, hostility, terror and death that is directly related to the horrific viciousness, intense animosity and the often uncompromising and extreme violent nature of war itself.

What sane human being wants that?

It seems no one can experience war or extreme violence and live through such mortal and horrific fear without scars. Therefore, according to senator Tom Cotton, a former Army Captain, and veteran of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq said, "No one who's seen the face of war desires to see it again."

Lethal Politics and Death by Government

Additionally, R. J. Rummel's work *Lethal Politics and Death by Government* shows that compounding the death and destruction related to war is the horrifying, and inexcusable fact that during the twentieth century alone, in addition to war related battle deaths, almost 170,000,000 men, women and children have been shot, beaten, raped, tortured, knifed, burned, starved, and driven from their homes; frozen, crushed or worked to death; buried alive, drowned, hung, bombed, beheaded or killed in any other of a myriad of ways governments have inflicted carnage and bloodshed on unarmed, helpless citizens and human beings throughout our world. These people were deliberately and systematically persecuted and killed for: class, ethnic, racial, tribal, religious, political and economic reasons, which were motivated by: retribution, revenge, class distinctions, political, religious and ideological differences, and profits

realized by slave labor/work camps, human trafficking, the pilfering of scarce and valuable resources and personal property, territorial gain, and other wealth confiscation, and so on.

Rummel estimates that throughout human history governments have killed more than 300,000,000 people. He mentions it is as though our species has been devastated by a modern Black Plague. And he goes on to say indeed it has, but a plague of Power, not germs.

Democracies are less warlike and the least likely to kill its citizens

Rummel concludes: concentrated political power is the most dangerous thing on earth. Absolute power not only corrupts, it kills. He maintains where power is diffuse, checked, and balanced, political violence and war is a rarity. His studies show that the more power a regime has, the more likely people will be killed.

He believes this is a major reason for promoting democracy and liberty. His research unequivocally shows where there is freedom of speech, religion, and organization; and where there is a constitutional framework of law to which the government is subordinate to the people; and where government guarantees equal rights for all; it will create a place of opportunity, freedom, equality and self-governance.

So, democracies are not only less warlike and the least likely to kill its citizens, to paraphrase Mike Pence, democracy will allow a country to become the most giving and generous country in the history of the world. It will allow a country to end slavery, win two world wars, and stand today as a beacon of hope and liberty for all the world. It will allow a country to evolve, and move beyond the prejudices and mistakes of the past, to create a more perfect union, and to extend the blessings of liberty to all that seek, value, and want to work for it. It will allow a country to achieve the highest quality of life, the cleanest environment on Earth, and improve the health and well-being of millions around the world.

Additionally, Rummel's research is commensurate with, and comparatively related to professor Morris's war related assertions, and V.P. Pence's affirmations noted above; and Rummel's corroborating evidence demonstrates that: Democratic freedom is an engine of national and individual wealth and prosperity. He determined that freedom also saves millions of lives from famine, disease, war, collective violence, and democide (which he defines as: genocide and mass-murder). That is, the more freedom, the greater the human security and the less the violence. Conversely, the more power that governments have, the more human insecurity and violence.

So, Rummel's research confirms that democracies not only bring greater wealth and economic prosperity, more personal liberty, and human freedom, but democracies are also less warlike. He further concludes, that democracy is also the form of government least likely to create conflict around the world, or to kill its citizens. Besides, history has shown that democracies have not waged war against each other; and are less likely to wage war even against non-democracies.

Richard Ebeling's review of Rummel's *Death by Government* sums it up well. He argues that all of Rummel's historical evidence shows that "as the arbitrary power of a regime increases, that is, as we move from democratic through authoritarian to totalitarian regimes, the amount of killing jumps by huge multiples. The empirical and theoretical conclusion is this: The way to end war and virtually eliminate democide appears to be through restricting and checking Power, i.e., through fostering democratic freedom, by which Professor Rummel means individual liberty; limited, constitutional government; and social tolerance of difference and diversity among the peoples in a society."

Nonetheless, Thomas Jefferson warns us that, "Even [with good initial intentions, and] under the best forms of government, those entrusted with power have, at times, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny." Jefferson maintains, if you want to know who you are, don't ask, act! He believes your actions will delineate and define you. He also agrees with Rummel, that a free society is the best defense for peace and prosperity. And, remember what Henry David Thoreau said, "That government is best which governs least."

In conclusion, when it comes to war, unfortunately it seems to form its own culture, even when it's undertaken by a democratic republic; where morality, humanity and virtuous principles of behavior is often sacrificed along with the physical, emotional, economic and psychological casualties of war. Professor Stanley Hauerwas said something to the effect that tragically war is a sacrificial system that can create and perpetuate its own justification and meaning whether it's morally justifiable or not.

War should be morally justifiable and undertaken only as a last resort

All Just War Theory doctrines of morality agree that ethically war should be morally justifiable and undertaken only as a last resort; and when there is no promising alternative to using force, when diplomacy alone is not enough to protect a people from their destruction at the hands of an oppressive force. It seems that no decision is more fateful than the decision to go to war, especially with the use of weapons of mass destruction.

I don't believe that violence, cruelty and warfare have to be inevitable in the future of humanity

There may always be divisions between "us" and "them", particularly if one goes about scapegoating, marginalizing, and demonizing others unfairly. When one has a sense of being wronged, or has hidden, deceitful, and harmful agendas, and is motivated by greed, power, or focuses on just their own narrow-minded self-interest, and disregards the truth, the sensibilities and the justifiable interests of others, conciliation, peace and harmony becomes far more difficult to achieve.

Still, I don't believe that violence, cruelty and warfare have to be inevitable in the future of humanity. However, the survival of our species and our world hangs in the balance of our choices. Steven A. LeBlanc said something to the effect that, only by examining all we know about warfare can we decipher its underlying causes and, just maybe, do a better job of limiting or ideally eliminating its frequency and destructiveness. If we do not strive to understand what we have done in the past and why, he says, it will only make it harder to get it right in the future.

Significant improvements in both: the scientific study of human behavior, and scientifically observing the various biological and chemical processes that make the brain and nervous system function, should help us in our efforts to improve, understand, and help us to minimize or eliminate war in the future. And, although we have a long way to go, we now have this enhanced scientific ability, and improved knowledge to actually understand ourselves and others, to some degree, and to a far greater extent than we had in the past. Through this better understanding we can learn from our mistakes, we can gain some wisdom, more self-awareness and insight, and enhance our capacity for growth and human development. Further, with these improvements we can better identify our respective strengths and weaknesses to help us transcend our limitations, create a better future, and to make ourselves and our world a better place.

In conclusion, LeBlanc maintains, continuous learning forms a necessary part in acquiring critical thinking skills which can help us figure out how our minds work. Further, through this continuous learning process, and using the knowledge, wisdom, self-awareness, and insight we've gained, and implementing the right choices, we can learn from our mistakes, broaden our minds and improve attitudes, change outcomes, discover new ways of relating to people, better prepare for the unexpected, and continue to accomplish great things besides wars. Additionally, through this understanding and the wisdom we gain from it, we can better understand war, along with its various underlying causes, therefore, we can help control it, if not stop it altogether. One day, as Isaiah prophesied, we "will study war no more." But war in all its contexts, according to LeBlanc, is precisely what we need to study now if that day is ever to arrive.

In summary, our collective success, evolution, growth, and our very future is at stake.

Technology extends our abilities to change the world

Our advanced technology today does not just provide tools for science, it has become one of the most powerful forces in the development of our civilization; and using it wisely has become essential to our very existence.

Our present civilization with all its improvements in science, and its breathtaking technologies, which includes the technologies of killing, and the ever-growing weapons of mass destruction provides us with the capability to wipeout humanity and all life at the push of a button if we don't cooperate and work together to manage our conflicting ideologies and political wills, and utilize our technologies and resources wisely.

The more clearly we can focus our attention on what's really important for humanity and our world, the less taste we shall have for war, terrorism and the intense animosity and human suffering associated with such hatred, demoralization, and violent conflict.

So, today we have more information, knowledge, instant world-wide connectivity and communication; artificial intelligence; more and better technologies and educated human resources; more humanity and social intelligence on both a quantitative and qualitative level. All of these factors can help bring us closer to one another; and provide us with a better understanding of the world we live in.

Working together with this better understanding, we individually and collectively grow beyond ourselves. The more we are able to grow individually, the more capable we are of being of service not only to ourselves, but to others as well. I agree with what Helen Keller said, “Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much more.”

We are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent

Further, as the world becomes increasingly interconnected and interdependent, with a positive attitude and the right intention, it can bring with it a sense of sharing, cooperation, generosity and gratefulness to help us develop and sustain more desirable, acceptable and mutually beneficial relationships and create a better world that we can all benefit from.

Because of this increased communication, connectivity and a more universal consciousness we will also become more cognizant of others distinct views and collective worries. Such worries include, but are not necessarily limited to our feelings of uneasiness, to say the least, regarding our diverse and sometimes our diametrically opposed economic, social and political ideologies, other dichotomies and cultural differences; our dwindling natural resources; and our global climate change concerns; all of which affects us, and will continue to make our world even more interconnected and interdependent than ever before.

It seems humanity, the human race collectively, has little or no meaning as isolated individuals, but can be understood only from our interconnection to humankind as a whole. Physicist Fritjof Capra explains, the more we study the major problems of our time, the more we come to realize that they cannot be understood in isolation. They are a systemic problem, which means by definition that our collective problems are interconnected and interdependent; problems due to factors that seem to be inherent in human nature, rather than due to a specific individual and/or an isolated factor. These systemic human problems affect not only humanity, but also our environment, and all life on earth.

We can't pretend that our unique and diverse cultures, ideologies, the way we impact our environment, plus our conflicting interests and other differences don't matter; and keep wishing that we could solve our systemic problems apart from one another, without cooperation, good intent, and joint action.

However, what helps make any culture or society successful is their shared commitment to an ideal. In essence, the ideal in all countries with a democratic system of government is that all of us are created equal. The vast majority of Americans subscribe to these general ideals, including equality, democracy, individual liberties, and a shared commitment of basic values; in addition to a limited government that has constitutional restrictions in order to protect the individual rights and civil liberties of citizens. Because of the many freedoms and opportunities, we are afforded in America, all of us have the chance to make of our lives what we will; and to help others make our world a better place.

Equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome, not socialism, is what helped make this country the great melting pot, the guardians, and the land of liberty that attracted people throughout the world, made-up of various cultures that were willing to assimilate, and form an alliance around these ideals, these values and principles of equality and liberty. According to Edwin Feulner, America has always sought to help immigrants incorporate their unique values and culture into the melting pot that is America. Becoming American has nothing to do with birth, ancestry, race or ethnic identity; it is a state of mind, heart and beliefs.

The strength of any society, any country can be found only in unity. As a result of this unity, and the great opportunity, and the many freedoms afforded these immigrants, we became the greatest country in the history of humanity. Woodrow Wilson said flatly, “You cannot become thorough Americans if you think of yourselves in groups. America does not consist of groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group has not yet become an American.” Identity politics is counterproductive to unity, and a strong society.

But obviously, not all countries or cultures or people share the same ideals, values or opinions.

Nonetheless, when we decide to work together with a spirit of tolerance, understanding and cooperation, we can be more effective in resolving systemic problems, achieving common goals, yet recognizing and respecting individual sovereignty and cultural differences, discovering the truth together, and thereby furthering our individual and collective growth, and creating conditions more conducive to achieving world peace.

Do all people have the right to self-determination?

Human beings choose, instigate, or otherwise cause their own actions, and because of this, you can and should be held morally accountable for your choices and your actions, and you alone are answerable for the consequences of your behavior.

I am of the opinion that all people have the right to self-determination, and they are innately equal in terms of their rights. And, an individual's life belongs to him or her. And, there needs to be clear limitations on the government's power, which in a Democratic Republic is derived from the consent of the governed, ‘We the people’.

Therefore, it is important to realize that our life does not belong exclusively to any collective, such as the group, the community, society or the State; even though one may have extensive interaction with, strong emotional, ideological or many other mutually acceptable ties, and abide by the customs and laws of the land. However, I am also a firm believer that there is a moral dimension of humanity and human existence. I also believe one's honesty and trustworthiness are critical elements of our moral character.

Without such honesty, no interpersonal or societal relationship can be trusted or sustained over the long-haul.

Moral character, moral principles and our individual rights

How we adapt to a shared world beyond one's self-interest to interpersonal and societal interest is part of one's moral character. Our moral character helps us balance our own interest with those of others. But ultimately, each person must make their own individual decision as to what to do, regardless of what the collective, the religion, the political party, the State, one's family or community, etc. may believe is good for individuals and society. Your personal voice, liberties, freedoms, and one's sense of good moral character are never, and should never be irrelevant.

I want to make it abundantly clear that our democracy and our Constitution allows, and should continue to allow one to be as selfish as they want to be, within certain restrictions, some of which are noted herein.

The Fourth Amendment forms the basis of a "right to privacy," the right to be left alone. The enjoyment of financial and personal privacy is fundamental to a free and civil society. Rightfully so, the individual, not the majority, not the minority, and not the collective is the primary focus of our inalienable rights.

Volitional type freedoms of will and self-determination as well as other natural laws, ethical beliefs, and fundamental freedoms inherent in human nature allow us as individuals to consciously choose, think, decide and act voluntarily, deliberately, and willingly. In other words, individuals are a separate entity, make their own decisions, think their own thoughts, and most importantly, are responsible for their own choices, and for how they behave and lead their lives. And, abiding by basic moral principles common to man, he or she can choose their own way, without creating victims, or unreasonably harming others.

According to an article in *The Hindu.com* web site, there are three moral principles, or important lessons to be learnt for living in a society: 1st, It is not wise to interfere and try to solve problems of others without being invited; 2nd, One should not have exaggerated notions of their own capabilities; and 3rd, Reward for noble deeds will be ten times better than expectations. There is a 4th principle I'm adding herewith, recommended by *Common Sense Ethics*, which is: Always ask, "Is it right?" before taking any action. This axiom is aptly reinforced by a quote by MLK "Never be afraid to do what's right. Society's punishments are small compared to the wounds we inflict on our soul when we look the other way."

These four rational and basic moral principles, and/or societal lessons are messages that seem significant, morally relevant, reasonable, ring true, and they can provide real and practical guidance to live by, for both individual and societal living.

It seems nearly every problem in human society is essentially a problem with the moral state of humanity, according to Leah Goldrick of *Common Sense Ethics*. So, if morality is critical in society, it is the individual that morality is concerned with.

Individually, each person is a distinct entity that makes their own choices. Even though societies expectations and norms are independent of our individual thinking about them, each person is responsible for their actions. And, one's actions have consequences regardless of what norms are prescribed or proscribed, collectively approved or taken exception to; you and you alone are answerable to consequences of your behavior, even for your destiny, and certainly for the choices you make.

However, there is no question that our collective experiences, insight and wisdom as a whole can be more knowledgeable, but not necessarily more right or real than any individual. So, we must not lose sight of our critical individual freedoms and moral responsibility.

Human beings are individuals; metaphysically real, and they are the basic unit of humanity and human life. Groups, the collective insofar as they exist, are nothing more than individuals who have come together to interact for some purpose; and if the purpose is for both our individual and mutual benefit, it can help facilitate more powerful positive change, and together, help us create a world we all deserve and want to live on.

Leah Goldrick of *Common Sense Ethics* goes on to say that the moral principles governing the exercise of individual rights are the same for everyone based on the concept of natural law. Goldrick emphasizes that ethics do not recognize point of view. She argues that if we all have equal rights as human beings, then proper standards of conduct are the same for everyone, like it or not. If we all have equal rights as humans, then it is not possible for some people to have rights that others do not have. Groups of individuals also do not possess any rights that individuals do not possess.

Individual rights are important and they serve the individual, but that should not preclude individuals from serving the greater good as well, i.e. doing something that most likely will not benefit you but many people, a community, or even the human race. Individualism and serving the greater good don't necessarily have to be mutually exclusive philosophies. In other words, if we value independence, self-reliance, security, safety, morality and some semblance of order, we will have to give up some of our freedoms, for the common good.

Throughout our world, restrictions of freedom to some extent are warranted, necessary and reasonable in exchange for a more stable, predictable, secure and functional society. In society we need moral norms, and related mutual expectations which includes trust as a foundational feature important for the effective governance of democratic societies. We need these norms, conventions, expectations, and trust to help create a social environment where people reciprocate both valuable and beneficial behaviors and actions. These norms can help us improve, develop and sustain social cooperation and order; and can be used as part of a moral foundation to form more trustworthy, productive, reliable, stable, and healthy relationships within society.

Our ability to successfully build relationships affects every area of our lives

Without positive and enduring relationships our life will be incomplete, and the well-being of individuals and society will suffer as a result. Our ability to successfully build relationships and navigate social environments have a significant impact on our society, and they affect every area of our lives.

We are social animals. We seek social companionship and understanding. Learning from people with different perspectives, values or beliefs, apart and independent from our own, through discussion, debate and free speech, and discovering the truth together ***can contribute to improving:***

- our relationships, which includes our interactions with each other and with the world around us;
- our trust, understanding and respect for one another;

- our appreciation and gratefulness for what we have, and for the miracle of life itself;
- our critical evaluation process regarding one's individual perspective, and to realize it may not be as valid as we thought;
- our courage and transparency, while telling others what we truly think, and not censoring others free speech or opinions, no matter the differences or dichotomy of opinion;
- our development of more constructive responses and more appropriate and effective solutions to contentious issues; and better appreciate others rational and equitable points of view and concerns; help prevent misunderstandings; and learn to become more reasonable, accepting, tolerant and grow.

So, other people can help: generate the right questions; broaden our perspective; transcend individual limitations; inspire and encourage; provide support; create more opportunities; help us make better choices; discover the facts, the truth, and reach our full potential together.

Each of us matter, and we all exert an influence on the whole

According to Paddy Ashdown, we are now interlocked as nations, as individuals, in a way which has never been the case before. In this age of Globalization, and because of the unprecedented global information that exists in our world; and because of this exceptional interconnection of people and nations; and the unprecedented expansion in population of people living on this planet; and the ever increasing rate of social change taking place; and the number of countries with extraordinary numbers of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the survival of our species, and all life on this planet hinges on our capacity for social living. This includes how we individually and collectively confront ourselves with the most radical and destructive problems about humankind's relationship to each other and to our world.

Ashdown points out that this global interconnection is a fact of life these days, but one which can be either a terrifying prospect or a cause for celebration and peace. It means that we all can intentionally share a mutually beneficial destiny with each other if we choose to do so.

Together we can help achieve the following desirable objectives:

- become more aware of the needs of others, by carefully listening to others;
- become more open to criticism and challenges from others;
- learn to use persuasion and reason vs. threats, and help overcome our mutual distrust and fear;
- connect with each other, and gain insight for positive individual and collective growth and beneficial change;
- find more meaning and fulfillment in life; and make our world a more positive, cohesive, safer and better place.

We help accomplish the above noted objectives by developing and accepting universal values or principles, such as the ones noted herein, that we don't take for granted, that we all believe in, mutually support, defend and live by, and that bind us together in an environment of trust and faith in ourselves and in others, that becomes our destiny and reality in this world.

Our uniqueness and our individuality are important, even critical, because they define who we are as individuals. But like humanity itself, we as individuals are only one autonomous self-interacting entity, just a part, even the most intelligent part of a microcosm of the whole interconnection and interdependent nature of things that exist throughout our world.

I believe science proves that our human existence and the existence of everything - that which objectively persists independent of one's presence - is not an isolated, detached or unique phenomenon. No person, no thing spontaneously exists all on its own. It's a scientific fact that it's impossible to exist outside of everything, presently in this universe.

I believe each of us matter. Both individually and collectively we exert an influence on the whole. We seem to be connected not necessarily theoretically, philosophically or ideologically, but we are connected in reality and by definition in some form or fashion not only consciously through our words and deeds, and not only through the obvious, understood and objective existence of: family, friends, community, environment and culture, but we are also connected, joined or linked together economically, socially, genetically, biologically, physiologically, and incorporeally through our spirituality (in the intuitive and deeply ingrained sense of something greater than ourselves, that there is a unity of the mind and the world; that our environment and life, and virtually everything is interconnected and inseparable; that we exist in relation to other beings; that interconnectedness is the true nature of all beings).

We are also connected chemically, atomically and in a scientifically proven all pervasive sea of self-interacting energy. This energy underlies and is manifest in all phenomena, which in and of itself suggests a unity of everything. It suggests a singularity that all things - seen and unseen - are connected; some would say in God, our creator, a Deity, or a universal consciousness. Matthew Webb says, there are no real boundaries between human beings and Nature, other than those we impose. Humanity is an extension of nature and natural laws. All of our thoughts, and the other attributes of God and this universal consciousness (used here as completely synonymous terms) indicate we are one, and seems to connect us to:

- one another;
- our human desire to belong;
- the community of all living things and their environment in our world;
- a "universal" collective consciousness;
- the cosmos in its entirety as a living whole; and ultimately it seems;
- to a higher purpose beyond just ourselves.

All things, to some extent, regardless of free will, according to Brian Thomson, are interdependent, [physical actions, our mental formations and the emotional happenings within our mind] are dependent upon cause and effect. What one does individually not only affects one individually, it affects others, especially those around them, and it plays a distinct part in the future of humanity, our planet, and in the collective formation of mankind.

The imperative need to cultivate afresh the spirit and actualization of humility

One could argue that one of the great qualities and essential virtues needed for individual, cultural, spiritual, and societal growth is humility.

In this sense, humility allows us to take responsibility for, accept and admit to one's defects and imperfections. And, even more importantly, to ideally: learn from our deficiencies and mistakes, and not repeat them; be courteous, respectful of, listen to, learn from and follow the sensible and prudent advice of others. This includes those who have come before us. Those who have demonstrated great wisdom and understanding. Those that can help us conquer our lower nature, which includes our ego; chase away our pride; allow our self-imposed protective walls to come down; adapt better to a shared world; and go beyond just our own thoughts, ideas and beliefs; then evolve, develop and grow, and aspire to become even better human beings.

Ralph W. Sockman said, "Humility makes us modest by reminding us how far we have come short of what we can be."

By cultivating and showing our love, compassion, and humility we can positively influence and strengthen our relationships, individually and collectively.

With the apparent rise in narcissism and decline in empathy these days, especially among young Americans and others, I believe we could all use and benefit from a little more humility.

To paraphrase Galatians 6:2, a society where the individuals are torn by mental strife or domestic discourse or by class conflicts, prolonged violence, viciousness, and other types of divisiveness, combat or warfare, has an imperative need to cultivate afresh the spirit and actualization of prudence, virtue, and true humility. This is because all estrangement from the virtuous life, and all that is good, and strained relations with our fellowmen, result from our lack of humility, the absence of respect for the realization and appreciation of one's human limitations.

Working out our differences and understanding our similarities

Journalist Robert C. Maynard said, "It is in seeing ourselves whole [Which in a more comprehensive manner, I translate as follows: Seeing ourselves whole is more than the quality of forming a unified whole. As ever evolving creatures in an ever-changing world, it means seeing this inclusive, ever-evolving coherence of life. It means establishing a logical and harmonious interconnection of all the parts. It means expanding the breadth, clarity, comprehension, and awareness of our understanding. It means by not fragmenting ourselves, by not dividing and conquering, but by sticking together and not giving up on each other] that we can begin to see ways of working out our differences, of understanding our similarities."

Part of the inhibition that often restricts us from seeing ourselves whole, comes from both our fear of differences, and the lack of understanding of our similarities. Celebrating differences is not easy, natural, or routine for many of us. The obvious dichotomy that exists in our current political climate is but one example of this hesitation or outright resistance to celebrate, in this example, our political differences.

Celebrating differences means going beyond our comfort zone. It means expanding our horizons. It means increasing our knowledge. It means attaining new skills and character strengths. It means moving beyond our discomfort or fear of the unknown. It means overcoming the cognitive dissonance that can be created by challenging one's beliefs. It means to thrive in new ways, with new people, with new ideas, and in new environments. It means recognizing our common humanity. Appalachian State U maintains that this recognition of a common humanity is the first step in the celebration of our differences - differences that inform our cultures, our values, our minds, and all our ways of being in the world. In a utopian world we would all celebrate each other's similarities and differences. But, in the reality of our species and human society, there is no utopian/perfect world.

Recognizing our common humanity also means recognizing our many human limitations. It's recognizing our tendency to underestimate or lose sight of the fact that most every human being has some discomfort or fear of the unknown. It's recognizing that we all have a host of constraints, inadequacies, transgressions, and weaknesses. Because of our human imperfections, to some extent, we are all selfish, inconsiderate, presumptuous and divisive at times. As humans, we are also confused, fallible and flawed in more ways than most or all of us realize or care to acknowledge.

Even though our means of survival, human intelligence and cognitive performance has evolved steadily over the course of thousands of generations, it seems that mankind presently, in spite of our relatively remarkable technology, does not have the capability to categorically understand the world, never mind the mysteries of the universe, human consciousness or even human behavior with complete clarity. I suspect a far greater level of understanding to these current mysteries or far-reaching intellectual questions do exist, but they are too complex and hard to fully grasp with our current, relatively limited human knowledge and our promising, yet emerging intellectual capacity. This is because our intellectual capacity has not been fully developed. This is good news considering our species has likely not reached or even come close to its ultimate limits of comprehension, knowledge, reasoning, and wisdom, on both a cognitive, scientific and spiritual level.

Keith Awynn in his *Musings of an Unapologetic Dreamer* says, I firmly believe that the world would be a much more harmonious place if we were to spend a little more time recognizing our human commonalities and looking at our differences not with fear, but with wonderment and celebration.

Edgar Mitchell, one of the astronauts who walked on the moon had a transcendent personal experience. He like many others believe that the world can be changed by the right application of human awareness. He described his feelings while viewing the Earth from space. He said, "You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it. From out there on the moon while looking at the Earth, international politics looks so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter of a million miles out and say, "Look at that, you son of a bitch."

Other astronauts who viewed the Earth from space apparently had a similar, overall perspective of humanity that you are not just an American, Chinese or Russian citizen or a Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Jew, misanthrope or an agnostic, and suddenly all these self-imposed affected boundaries disappear when one looks at humanity as a whole.

We may not only be of different religions, and inhabitants of a sovereign state or nation, in a more encompassing and all-inclusive broad sense of humanity, we are also human beings, a community of people worldwide that recognizes our world is an increasingly complex web of interconnections and interdependencies. In other words, regardless of one's faith, or one's love of country, culture or way of living, we are all connected. We are all connected by virtue of our common humanity, regardless of nationality, religion, race, culture, or creed. We are all united by both pain and love. We are all inhabitants of the same planet. We are all imperfect beings. We are beings that innately recognize good and evil. We understand that one's beliefs, and one's actions not only shape one's life, but they help shape our community, society, and our world. We are dependent upon each other to sustain and enrich life, maintain our precious resources, manage our survival, evolve, flourish, and make ourselves, make our country, make our society, and our world a better place.

As noted above, we are also people that should realize that one's beliefs, choices and actions have consequences. One's consequences or repercussions will not only affect themselves individually, but intentionally or unintentionally, these actions can impact other lives around us locally, and nationally or internationally throughout our world.

Based on the history of humanity, and the inherent imperfect nature of humans, the establishment of a utopian, so called perfect human society is a socialist concept, some say an ideal. But despite noble goals of equality and fairness, socialism consistently fails.

According to an article in *Psychology Today*, authored by Gary Bernhard and Kalman Glantz, they ask the question: Why does socialism always fail to deliver on its promises? They go on to explain that Marx, Lenin, Mao, and many others have sought to establish societies based on equality. They were horrified by the inequities of capitalist regimes and repulsed by the types of behavior that the emphasis on self-interest and individualism tends to engender.

Bernhard and Glantz go on to explain that all these experiments in creating social equality ended in tyranny: a strong central government, ruled by the few, who control the means of production, the political process, the military/police state, and the media, and profit from the labor of the many.

Socialism inevitably and always fails because it defies human nature's need for freedom, self-interest and individualism; and it relies on a perfect human collective that simply doesn't exist in our temporal world.

There is no perfect society in our world because humans are far from perfect. Humans are flawed. There's no doubt about it, mankind is extremely flawed. It seems their narcissism knows no bounds; their moral sense is hazy and relative at best; and many, most or all are paradoxically incapable to fully handle the cognitive skills and ability of their potentially vast intelligence. And to top it off, many humans naturally have an insatiable ego; are motivated by self-interest, exceptionalism, excellence; are often greedy/selfish, and tend to be very indifferent to any and all people.

So, the alternative I put forth is this: If all of us would abide by four simple, easily understood principles that would ultimately benefit individuals and humanity as a whole (see pg. #166), there is no doubt these principles could operate as a non-exclusive moral imperative, and a positive unifying force for good within our respective and diversified societies. Adhering to these principles could be instrumental in moving human development and all of civilization forward; and would make our world a better place.

Even though lofty socialist ideals consistently fail, and have inevitably produced such regrettable and horrifying results, we should not forget the interdependent and interconnection nature of life. When we recognize that all of us are an integral part of one human race, all living things, and a greater purpose beyond just oneself, and when we become intentionally connected by abiding to the above noted moral principles, and not separated exclusively by geographical, cultural, political, racial or religious boundaries, it can lead us to a new and improved broader perspective, awareness and understanding and help us provide value for both our individual and mutual benefit, and to do good for each other.

Our wish to know the truth about the world we live in, and our role in it, and developing a broader perspective of the world and its many cultures is indeed a good thing. However, we should not forget that it is also a good thing to respect the sovereignty of one's nationality; respect the self-rule by its own people; respect the autonomy of one's country and its respective culture, even when we continue to be an imperfect world; as long as we are respecting one's individual freedoms, beliefs, values, and human rights.

Being perfect means having no flaws; being without defect or blemish.

Being perfectly human means accepting our mistakes and imperfections. It means realizing that no human being is flawless or completely free of faults and defects. It means we should learn not to be afraid of making mistakes. Remember, to err is human. It provides the opportunity for growth.

So, even though humans can't be inherently perfect, people have intrinsic value beyond perfection.

Being perfectly human also means we should continue throughout our lives to learn from our own and other's mistakes, experiences, and insights. This development can help us to overcome our flaws and imperfections. It can help us to facilitate growth, discovery, understanding, and learning. It can help us become better human beings. It can help us to do what's right; avoid what's wrong; to help others; and to help improve ourselves; and by extension to help us make the world a better place. I proclaim that this is essentially man's fundamental purpose in life; and I believe we have a moral obligation to pursue and establish this essential purpose, as I've noted earlier, in answering the question: What is the Meaning of life?

Like perfection itself, being a good and morally perfect character is not an inherent characteristic in humans. Further, this ultimate perfect goodness I'm referring to cannot be created instantly, if at all, in any mortal person. Rather, for us human beings this striving for perfect goodness is the end product of a process of development. A process aiming for a state in which we can become perfectly moral, and work toward the highest good, for both our individual and collective well-being.

In other words, as noted above, Kant argues that our purpose in life is to be obligated to strive to become ever more moral, to work towards moral perfection, demanding this moral cognitive development and an endless progress toward moral perfection as a species, even realizing that humans will likely never be absolutely perfect in one's limited temporal lifetime.

Utilizing this process of moral development, and approaching life with thinking that is sensible, coherent and logical, we can begin to overcome, negotiate or respectfully abide by our differences for our mutual interests and the common good.

Furthermore, we can ideally reach a point where our differences and diversity are not seen as sources of hatred, intolerance, division and distrust, and learn to: respect the rights and justified interest of others, not create victims and not commit or be responsible for unnecessary destructive violent acts, and not unreasonably harm others.

Then, we can create a bond based on our common humanity, and our realization that no matter where we come from - economically, politically, culturally, geographically or spiritually - we are basically the same human beings; and we need to create a better world, not just for our own narrow interests, and not just for those closest to us, but also for the benefit of all mankind to coexist respectfully and peacefully, before it's too late.

It is with this realization, commonality, and bonding of humanity, that our greatest worldly joy is to be found, and fulfilled. One could argue that it is our temporal purpose in life, and it transcends all other worldly considerations. Remember, there are no problems which we cannot solve with a spirit of understanding, responsibility, cooperation, and goodwill.

We are gifted and blessed with this wonderful human intelligence and immense human potential. When we combine these remarkable innate human qualities with the determination and effort to work together to: rise above artificial barriers, and our primitive and self-imposed limitations for achieving world peace; recognize that violence, bigotry, greed, ignorance, and hatred are the root causes of most of the miseries in this world; realize as humans that we have the unique ability to learn and respond more practically and broad minded and compassionately to different cultures, circumstances, and people; and we don't have to buy-in to the many self-imposed limitations, authoritative dogma, ignorance, prejudices, baseless negative attitudes or adversely distorted stereotyped beliefs that we encounter throughout our lives.

Then, it seems we might be better off individually and collectively if we instead: demand, bring about, and solidify our real common binding purposes in life; stop focusing on our differences; recognize, appreciate, and embrace what's good in others; learn to share your wisdom, compassion, and the good things provided to you on this earth; and treat people with fairness, consideration and respect.

This more useful and prudent approach can help us develop our capacity to appreciate and befriend one another with an enhanced spirit of compassion, understanding and a more kindly disposition toward others. Further, it can help us overcome animosity, indifference and intolerance; and help provide the cornerstones of universal peace, virtue, and goodwill among men.

Even if we can't create a utopian world where there is true equality of goodness and love for all, we can create a future that harnesses the strengths and virtues that are inherent in the many diverse societies, cultures and ethnic groups that make up the world's population. "Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Just walk beside me, and be my friend." "I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things." These words by Nobel laureate Albert Camus, and Mother Teresa respectively, may seem somewhat simplistic and trite, but can you deny their relevance and beauty?

Surely, human beings are much more important than just their limited beliefs, ideological boundaries, emotional and self-centered ways of doing things, or their primal separative social tendencies to form exclusive groups, discriminate against others and divide up the world.

By simply recognizing these human predispositions and other human frailties, then developing the right attitude, trusting our hearts and drawing out our humanity and our humility, and mindfully focusing our intention and will, one by one we can develop the qualities, ability and inclination to overcome or even vanquish our destructive tendencies, selfish desires, and other moral weaknesses. We can help free ourselves from man's lower nature and adverse base emotions, thereby improving one's attitude, behavior, well-being and overall quality of life.

One by one we are capable of transforming ourselves for the better, embracing our many virtues and the sacredness in all of life, and with the right mind-set and moral character, changing the destiny of the entire human race.

Henceforth, we can help unite our nations, and ideally achieve universal accord based on our mutual respect for, and pursuit of human dignity, friendship, love, safety, community, and moral goodness. These are fundamental human needs that apply to all - individual or collective, secular or theocratic - societies.

We all aspire to many of the same things. We all need to feel safe and secure. We all need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. We all need activities that give us a sense of contribution and purpose. And, we all need to feel a sense of dignity, appreciation, self-value, and respect. And most importantly, we all need to love and be loved.

Then, let us rejoice in our efforts, and work together: to promote, pursue, and support our fundamental human needs, and universal responsibility, and for our mutual understanding, kindness, unity and love; and, ideally to strive for the constant betterment of humanity, and for the realization of our full potential, to become every wondrous thing that we are capable of becoming.

Accepting individual accountability is the key to everything in one's life

No doubt, it is easier to look outside oneself to place blame, play the victim, or to depend on others for answers to our problems. This approach requires less responsibility, accountability, discipline or effort on our part. Dependency, making excuses, and finger pointing can be easier and less burdensome, but without exercising your personal accountability and individual sacrifice, you can lose your integrity, your courage, your grip on who you are and what's important to you.

If we avoid the responsibility of acting individually and wait for the group, the community, society, the state or evolution to do it, we may be waiting indefinitely or never obtain the answers that are truly needed.

To become what we are capable of becoming requires personal accountability. Accepting personal accountability and responsibility gives life meaning, it builds one's integrity, courage, respect and trust, and it helps determine the kind of person we become.

Holding yourself accountable first and foremost means accepting responsibility for your life, for your choices, for your behavior, and it is the key to everything. Individual and collective positive growth is not possible without it.

So, the real solution to our problems and the real connection we have with one another seems to reside within each one of us. The true source of one's life and the answer to our individual and collective human problems also remains within us; whether it is of, or inspired by a Devine nature, or a higher power greater than one's self.

It is only with the heart that one can see rightly

Look within. Listen to your heart. Trust what it's telling you. Remember what Antoine de St. Exupery said, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

What I believe he's saying is, the commonality and human connection we have with one another, and we have with our higher self, with the fundamental nature of our spiritual essence, and with our unshakable knowledge is the connection with the heart. This transformative heartfelt inclination for connection, virtue, and the intrinsic part of man's personality, intellect and will, and the true and essential nature of human feelings, sentiments and emotions cannot be seen by the eye. With an open heart, no matter how hardened or hurt it has become, if we truly "look" within we will sense and discover that it has a distinct, profound, deep-rooted and sacred connection to the life and love within all things.

When we gather this sense of heartfelt connection and unity, along with it comes a natural feeling of compassion for one another, empowering our will to understand, and to bring together the courage, clarity, tolerance, moral responsibility, and wisdom to be able to put our differences aside, in order to lead a more agreeable, virtuous and kind-hearted life together.

Together we can work for both one's individual and mutually acceptable common goals; become problem-centered, not just self-centered; appreciate and respect what life has to offer; demonstrate concern and support for the welfare of humanity and all life; realize that human life has inherent worth, and all life is sacred and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.

The credo of Complete Wellbeing

In part, Wikipedia defines wellbeing as choices and activities aimed at achieving physical vitality, mental vigilance, social satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment, responsibility, and personal fulfillment.

Renowned psychologist Martin Seligman references wellbeing to "the good life", which he says is a reflection about what holds the greatest value in life – the factors that contribute the most to a well-lived, meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling life. He says it is using your signature character strengths (see pg. 135) every day to produce authentic happiness and abundant gratification; and I add, to further improve other controllable circumstances in one's life that relate to one's wellbeing.

According to Corey Keyes, emotional well-being, like one's happiness, concerns subjective aspects of well-being, in concreto, *feeling* well, whereas psychological and social well-being concerns skills, abilities, and psychological and social functioning.

As a common objective for humanity, I believe in the overall credo of *Complete Wellbeing*, which says: We believe it is possible to live on a more peaceful planet; where love is valued more than success; where relationships take precedence over possessions; where prevention is trusted more than cure; where peace is more important than victory. [In a world where moral goodness, honesty, integrity, and our inherent, fundamental inalienable rights are defended, cherished, and protected. In a world where all of these attributes are considered more valuable than money and power. In a world where political ideology and religious dogma does not precede truth or justice.] In a world where abundance flows to everyone; and fear, hatred, and violence is conspicuous by its very absence.

Yes, we believe it is possible to create heaven on Earth. In a world of harmonious living and great inclusiveness; in a place where we see the reflection of our own being in others in order to see ourselves more clearly; to help us better understand who we are; in a place where we carefully, thoughtfully, and with civility, respectfully debate different opinions and ideologies regardless of the dichotomy of differences; in a place where we choose to do what is right, prudent, and best for ourselves and our fellow human beings; in a place where our moral excellence of doing what is right, and avoiding what is wrong is achieved by means of developing and attaining virtue; and is valued as a foundation of principle and good moral being; in a place which in our hearts knows no division of humanity regardless of, and not being blind to, and demonstrating sensitivity and respect for: reasonable human differences; our vast and endless human challenges and imperfections; and our diverse, fair, and reasoned way of thinking, and varying abilities; in a place where the power of love overcomes the love of power.

But, when all is said and done, all of it is a choice we must make in order to achieve togetherness with others, and togetherness within ourselves. Because of our many human imperfections, a utopian world is by definition impossibly idealistic. In spite of the fact that humans can't achieve this impossibly ideal, yet historically and ideologically flawed utopian society, we can successfully bring about and realize a place of: contentment, peace, high moral values, and true harmonious living; a place one might say is heaven on Earth; a place that has reached the goal of *Complete Wellbeing*.

The profound power of truth, love and faith

With our extraordinary human intelligence, determination and effort, there is no doubt individuals can make a difference. When you add a common purpose, cooperation and the profound power of truth, love and faith, then insert great insight, knowledge, understanding, and the right leadership, anything is possible.

Sherwood Eddy said something to the effect that, faith is not trying to believe something regardless of the evidence; it is daring to do something [ideally worthy] regardless of the consequences. One definition of faith is: the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen or proven. In other words, faith is a feeling that has more emotional depth than simple belief. But, regardless of its emotional depth, faith is still a belief that does not rest necessarily or primarily on direct proof or material evidence.

Faith is both a spiritual and emotional sense, often based for the most part on feelings instead of facts. Faith like optimism can be considered by some to bring forth reassuring feelings of admirable qualities. But, unlike just being optimistic or accepting about the best possible outcome of something, faith is a genuine feeling of inner confidence, a strong belief and mental acceptance that seems to bring everything you hope for, believe in, or pretend to know that you don't know, within the realm of possibility. Studies show that faith, much like one's optimism, can also be used to successfully reduce one's stress, help people cope with unfortunate news and make more sense of bad events, improve mental health, the immune system, and the quality of one's life. Both faith and optimism can also help one develop a greater sense of belonging.

On a psychological level, faith can also be defined as an innate drive to search for meaning, purpose and significance. Therefore, one's faith and spirituality can also provide this noted sense of purpose, allowing people to connect to something greater than themselves.

Even though faith is often based primarily on feelings, as noted above, much of one's faith is also based on some type of evidence. The evidence, of course, maybe strong, circumstantial, weak, or even laughable, but evidence nonetheless. Without some type of evidence, there would likely be no faith.

Faith can be supported by a combination of evidence, theory, and an educated guess or gut feelings. Faith or belief is often a foundation on which reasonable choices are made and often accompanied by critical examination. Therefore, it doesn't mean that one's beliefs or faith can't stand up to serious scrutiny. So, one's faith and strongly held beliefs may have one's complete trust or confidence, yet, by definition faith is not provable.

Nonetheless, because of the way our minds work, faith, optimism and belief have extraordinary power.

However, the primary caveat with relying on one's faith, especially one's absolute faith in man's personal version of, or man's institutional interpretation of or conviction in what he believes is God or God's word is, the remarkable power that faith possesses over one's mind usually overwhelms a need for unequivocal justification, reason, analysis, rationality, evidence or burden of proof. This arguable rationale applies even more so to one's blind faith. In particular, to the non-virtuous doctrines and belief collections of hatred, intolerance and violence against other good, loving and reasonable people who think or believe differently.

Choosing to follow a religion, authoritative dogma, a political ideology, or any comprehensive "normative" vision, belief system or idea-collection is just that, one's choice. It is ultimately one's decision; it is not one's unalterable fate, regardless of societal pressure, culture or other expectations. On a rational basis, choosing a unified system of beliefs or values is not blindly accepting arguments from authority, of any nature, especially without thought, scrutinization, reason or evidence.

Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth

Einstein said, "Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth".

To further extend such reasoning, one might say, it's better to question everything through critical thinking and the friction of debate, regardless of authority.

But, why is this important, why question everything?

One reasonable answer seems to be that the prudence and virtue associated with one's critical thinking, and making this analytical and critical evaluation effort to seek out and eliminate contradiction and learn the truth, is essential to the development of knowledge. Therefore, this analytical process, and critical evaluation of ideas, arguments, and points of view put forth to establish the truth can: elevate the quality of our critical thinking; help us understand the situation more thoroughly; enhance our ability to see more clearly and make better decisions; distinguish among competing claims for truth and determine which arguments and points of views one should trust and those of which one should be skeptical of; and further our likelihood for determining the truth, leading to deeper connections, and ultimately creating the strong probability for individual and collective growth, trust, and respect.

To help discern and verify the truth for its own sake, we must be willing to give up cherished notions and beliefs, and reject customs, traditions and dogma, religious based or otherwise when skewed or proven wrong as a basis of fact. We must also have the integrity and courage to accept the facts and any suffering, dissonance, or other discomfort and consequences that come with acknowledging the truth through our critical thinking, using logic, reasoning and the friction of debate, regardless of authority. Byron Katie says, "An unquestioned mind is the world of suffering." She says, inquiry leaves us as more loving human beings. Inquiry can lead to truth, which in turn can become a transformational experience, an opening to a journey of meaningful discovery and purpose, that can affect our destinies and our world.

Another reasonable answer seems to be, without question, life is full of subjectivity, misrepresentations, authoritative dogma, contradictions and deceit.

There is contradictory chaos in religion, politics, science, moral values, and the plurality of ideologies, philosophies, and beliefs that exist throughout our world. Conflict and contradiction are everywhere. Why? Because one of the absolutes most people discover, often early on in life is, no two people view the world exactly the same, and human beings are far from perfect. Life is not perfect. And the longer we live in this world, the more we realize this to be true. Virtually all religions, human history and science reinforce this point.

"Imperfection" is not an individual problem, it is simply one of our many inherent weaknesses, a characteristic of human nature, who we are; and one of the numerous limitations of human existence. In Christianity it is essentially a result of *Original Sin* i.e., sinners and all humans are imperfect.

Further, the concept of perfection is subjective, and perfection exists only as an abstraction of our minds.

Nothing in nature or humanity is ever permanent or perfect. In nature there is no such thing as perfection, it is simply a concept humans created for an ideal situation. The goal of being perfect throughout one's life is not attainable. A perfect temporal life may be a goal one strives for, but it is an ideal that cannot be reached. This is because its definition depends upon one's social, moral, and cultural standards, values, beliefs and world-view; and although there is common knowledge (conscious and unconscious) that norms exist about what some consider an ideal human, there is no universally-accepted standard of an ideal human; and there is no universal agreement on what constitutes perfection, according to researcher Erin Martz. Further, one of the absolutes in life is that all human beings are flawed, and we all make mistakes, regardless of one's intellect, expertise, education, knowledge, or other comparative man-made constructs.

We seem to have a potentially limitless number of flaws or weaknesses, and also contradicting opinions, beliefs and conjecture regarding: the philosophical and religious conceptions of man's purpose; the source and extent of human consciousness; God; the existence of God; life and the afterlife; and, virtually everything else. Hence, the reasons for the many chaotic and critical contradictions in life noted above. But, if we are smart, we will learn, gain sufficient experience, understanding, knowledge, insight, and wisdom. Utilizing this learning process one can evolve, improve and grow; and develop the ability to better discern and judge what is true, right, prudent and sensible, apart from one's faith.

This growth, maturity, and the process of acquiring knowledge and the truth can be more effectively achieved as a result of critically examining: said mysteries, contradictions, and the implicit trust we often rely on regarding the so called "knowledge or expertise" of intellectual authorities. These expert declarations or schools of thought, are not necessarily based on fact or verified knowledge, and are perhaps better categorized as their beliefs i.e. historically, these so called experts or authorities declared: the world was flat; it was the center of the universe; heavier-than-air machines could never fly, etc. - then faithfully endeavor to assess the evidence and collectively work with others to seek out and eliminate contradictions, false knowledge, conjecture, erroneous assumptions, invalid theories, and flawed reasoning, which includes irrational thoughts or logical fallacies which misrepresent the facts, and ideally discover verifiable truth and reality together.

This critical and more prudent evaluation process can help us to make more informed and effective decisions, and ideally reach consensus or at least a compromised mutual agreement to solve problems together, and make things better for all of us.

So, is faith a good thing or not?

It could be or it may not be, depending on where that faith is placed or misplaced.

When foresight and reason give way to only hope and desire, faith may not always be a good thing. If one's faith is placed in something noble, virtuous and trust worthy, it's definitely a good thing.

The wonderful aspect of faith is that it is an extremely powerful and transformative force, and placed properly, it can not only bring comfort, light, hope, imagination, vision and virtue, it can bring unlimited determination and the willingness to give to one another.

So, if we learn to give a little, and have faith in one another we can all get a lot in return.

Further, scientific studies have shown that people of faith usually, and to a great degree, care about other people and have an innate ability to establish trust.

Professor Arthur Dobrin notes: All that we hold precious rests upon a faith in people, their potential not yet fulfilled, whether there is Devine inspiration for that faith or not. However, he also notes the evidence of human history points us in a different direction. He affirms the world is full of ugliness, brutality and injustices. Yet he realizes there is also so much tenderness, kindness, concern and love; and he says that takes the bigger part of our hearts.

With this bigger part of our hearts, together we can make it happen.

Marilyn Monroe said, "Sometimes good things fall apart so better things can fall together."

Together, we can make the world a better place. Together, we can shape our destiny in the right way. But former U.S. Marine Lieutenant Bobby Muller is right; we should not forget that life is a flickering flame and at times unpredictable.

Science shows that life on this planet has a history of natural extinction

Of the millions of diverse species that have lived, and are now currently living on this planet, humans are one of the relatively newer, significantly intelligent and most technologically advanced ones. And, we may be at the top of our respective evolutionary scale but, as individuals, we have an extremely limited time here on earth. Moreover, we can be a heartbeat, a tiny, insignificant, blink of an eye away from death. And regardless of this fact, even an enduring, long-lasting life in this world, as mortal individual human beings will only exist for a fleeting instance relative to the seemingly infinite duration of cosmic time.

Further, science shows that life on this planet has a history of natural extinction. It has been estimated that the vast majority of all species that ever lived here are now extinct.

Regardless of the technological advances that humans have made to date, and despite the fact that we see ourselves as the most advanced and adaptive species on Earth, and we appear to be at "the top of the proverbial food chain", the ongoing risk of the continuing natural extinction of our world is not only probable based on our history, it appears to be inevitable.

The natural extinction of our world seems to be consistent with one of the fundamental forces of our universe. The second law of thermodynamics establishes the concept of entropy as a physical property of a thermodynamic system. This concept states that entropy is partially a universal law of decay; the cause of why everything ultimately falls apart and disintegrates over time. Material things are not eternal. Everything appears to change eventually, and chaos increases. If and when entropy will totally and irrevocably destroy our world and the universe is far from conclusive, unknown, and impossible to predict currently. But, in the long run, nothing escapes the Second Law of Thermodynamics, according to James Clear. Current science maintains that the pull of entropy is relentless. Everything decays. Disorder always increases.

The inevitability of extinction and the death of living organisms may be a natural process, but human actions beside natural phenomenon and entropy, may also accelerate, and certainly threatens our own premature extinction or destruction as a result of possible nuclear annihilation, biological warfare, overpopulation, ecological collapse, climate change, etc. But it is important to note that these factors do not make our individual and collective lives insignificant; and these factors do not guarantee that human activities will seriously and irrevocably destroy life on Earth; and regardless, even though extinction may be a natural process, just like death, we should not meekly surrender to it, especially prematurely. All of these particular concerns are not legitimate reasons to give up hope for mankind and for what we are capable of accomplishing together. Our individual and collective accomplishments can make a difference to shape our future in the right way, to bring about a far better world, despite our many imperfections, limitations and other constraints.

The Dalai Lama says, "To remain indifferent to the challenges we face is indefensible. If the goal is noble and/or virtuous, whether or not it is realized within our lifetime is largely irrelevant. What we must do therefore is to strive and persevere and never give up."

So, if we choose to "never give up" when will we have universal peace and harmony?

The solution is not necessarily easy, but it is quite simple

It starts when we choose to open our hearts and our minds, and choose to take responsibility.

Getting things done right takes more than talk, or a belief or just hope. It takes faith in one another. It takes faith that peace is not only desirable but possible. It takes sacrifice, a positive attitude, the proper action, good leadership, courage, intent, understanding and resolve. When we decide to stand up and willingly cooperate and demand it together, it will happen.

By making a good faith effort and coming together with the right leadership and intention, to sort-out, understand, and to find acceptable solutions to our mutual problems side by side, we can feel more comfortable and relaxed.

When people come together with good intentions, it can naturally bring about this sense of calmness, comfort and cooperation. It can also bring about more confidence, enthusiasm, and presence of mind where our desire to go beyond just our own narrow-minded self-interest, and our inclination to work out our conflicts collectively and successfully, becomes dramatically enhanced.

Then, with this improved attitude, enthusiasm and perspective, meaningful work can get done.

Together, willingly, we can also enrich our individual human experience and promote a respect for our diversity and sense of community, as well as strengthen the bonds of our common humanity, and collectively gain more clarity, agreement, truth and strength.

Getting to know one another, and using our beneficial attributes, with this more cooperative, insightful, synergistic state of mind, and employing a positive attitude, we can reinforce and promote unselfishness, more unity, better understanding, and enhance our capacity to act for our mutual benefit.

With learning, understanding, good reasoning and cogent arguments comes respect. By earning one's respect, progress, discernment, growth and greater insight, preventing violence, warfare and resolving major conflicts becomes more possible or likely.

Altogether, this can enable us to accomplish significant goals and achieve more consensus, creating a solid foundation to help facilitate mutually supported beneficial relationships and requisite change.

By embracing our mutual cooperation, understanding and respect for one another, we also relieve our primitive and seemingly innate cultural isolation tendencies which without this positive interaction, often make us suspicious, fearful and even disdainful of others.

Successively and successfully utilizing these strategies and all of our character strengths, with this improved mindset and the right leadership, we can ultimately provoke a sense of connection, compassion and empathy for one another, and facilitate an understanding beyond rhetoric and dogma to help build trust between global neighbors, and collectively become much more than the sum of our parts.

Tending to and befriending others can make us more thoughtful and benevolent, which in turn can help motivate us to sacrifice for one another when needed, even when we see the world differently, and even at great risk. It also can help us relieve our individual and collective anger, insularity, combative tendencies and defensiveness enabling us to come together more easily and humanely to make needed changes for the common good and our mutual benefit.

When we care for or identify with one another's' humanity, then reasonable, loving and compassionate people learn to become allies, not enemies.

Reasonable people are also cognizant of the premise that reasonable minds can differ, and compromise, although quite difficult at times is needed to mutually resolve conflicts peacefully, consensually, and without violence, destruction or warfare.

Because of the dynamic nature of human learning and the neuroplasticity that makes our brain extremely resilient and adaptable, we have the amazing ability to continue to acquire knowledge and to change at any age, even one's fundamental beliefs and one's perception of the way they see the world.

Our ability to continue to acquire knowledge can also help us develop mutually beneficial and productive alliances based on new experiences, information, knowledge and awareness that we achieve through this educational process of learning. And this learning process continues through our compassionate concern and connection with one another.

Then together we can move forward with more confidence and harmony, and move away from a divisive past to a shared and comparatively better future.

However, coming together is only the beginning

Keeping together is progress, and advances our movement forward. Working together we can do so much more. With a successful collaborative effort, we can face any challenge, and cultivate an atmosphere of understanding, acceptance, tolerance, compassion, civility and respect.

We become so much stronger by combining our efforts and working together with resilience and determination to meet the obstacles and inequities of life; and restore the dignity and respect we deserve. By fostering a sense of shared sacrifice and responsibility, and by engaging with and helping others, we can begin to resolve our differences, change lives, touch the hearts of others, and promote a healing process; to let go of our intolerance, hatred, fear and aggressive and combative tendencies; and instead, choose to embrace our compassionate side to make needed changes, and to make our world a better and safer place.

The solution to achieving universal peace

In conclusion, the solution to achieving universal peace and harmony involves: changing our state of consciousness; demonstrating good leadership, love, peace and understanding; and believing in what is good, noble and virtuous, and acting accordingly, with integrity, compassion, fairness, kindness, appreciation, justice and respect; and believing in something greater than ourselves.

And finally, realizing with our respectful individual and mutual cooperation and sincere effort, everyone is always better off, when others are also better off, when we make the collective effort to transcend our differences and divisiveness, and achieve a shared future and a lasting world peace together.

Individually as humans, we are amazing, and we can make a difference. Together embracing our many virtues and our fundamental human needs, character strengths, mutually respective humanitarian values and goals, with our collective wisdom and understanding, we not only become stronger and better off, we become unstoppable.

Together, it can be done. Momentum is powerful, and it starts with you and me. Let us find the way.

When we want to transform the world for the better, then we must first transform ourselves.

After walking on the Zen Way (a path of togetherness of body, mind, spirit and nature) an unknown Buddhist monk said, *The mountain is the mountain, and the "Way" is the same as of old. Verily what is changed is my own heart.*

In this context, the monk seems to be saying, although many things in one's life may stay the same, and you may travel the same "Way" or path as many others, verily what can change you and the world, even dramatically, is your connection with the heart, the human initiative. i.e. Our consciousness, our beliefs, our feelings, and our thinking can be changed.

Einstein said, the world, as we have created it, is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking. All of it can be changed, transformed through good intent, understanding, reasoning, compassion, connection and love.

The "Way" spoken in the philosophical message *"is the same as of old"* or as it always was and always will be. I believe the "Way" could be used as a metaphor for our way of, or path in life. The infinite number of paths that we can take have infinite possibilities that can be realized in an infinite number of ways; but no matter what path we travel in our own lives, they can ultimately lead to the same wonderful place when we act with, and show a heartfelt compassion and love for one another.

Ancient wisdom tells us that we can change our circumstances only by changing ourselves.

Acting with compassion and a loving heart is, always was, and ever shall be the solution to the salvation of man. The Dalai Lama said that love and compassion become the pillars or moral fabric of a lasting world peace. He maintains that without a human connection through these virtues we will not have universal peace and harmony, and humanity will not survive.

In summary, by coming together human to human, heart by heart, with the right leadership and mindset, employing reason, prudence and logical thinking, morality and virtuous conduct, and embracing the miracle that is our freedom, our spirit, and our love, together with our courage and commitment to do so, we can be part of the solution; we can get it done; we can live together in peace, joy, and harmony to create a better future.

Further, by recognizing that our actions or lack thereof have consequences, and fighting and defeating illogical, immoral and genocidal ideologies and beliefs, and the violence, intolerance and hatred preached by those that propagate them, and not fighting or killing each other, but treating each other with kindness, love, compassion and respect we will not only heal ourselves, together we will heal the world.

To paraphrase Robert Koepeky, when we intuitively act together for the benefit of everyone, and our good and kindness grows and spreads across humanity, people, and the planet, will be healed.

When we realize, believe in, and act upon these fundamental principles, humanity's most glorious achievements are just ahead.

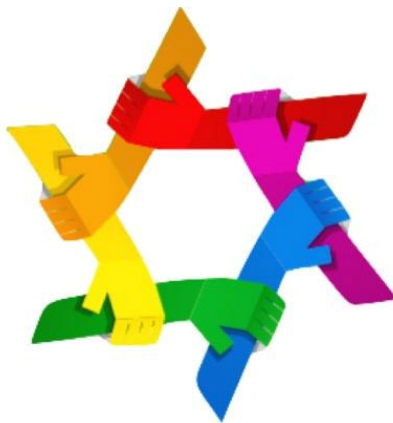
"When you are inspired by some greater purpose, or some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds: your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be."

- Inspirational and profound words of wisdom by Indian philosopher, Patanjali.

How wonderful that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world. - Ann Frank

Nothing that I can do will change the structure of the universe. But maybe, by raising my voice, I can help in the greatest of all causes - goodwill among men and peace on earth. - Albert Einstein

Humans are capable of something grander than war, prejudice, and hatred. - Abraham Maslow



FINALLY, SOME MIGHT SAY A PERFECT WORLD IS IMPERFECT
PEOPLE WHO REFUSE TO GIVE UP ON EACH OTHER.



DON'T GIVE UP ON EACH OTHER

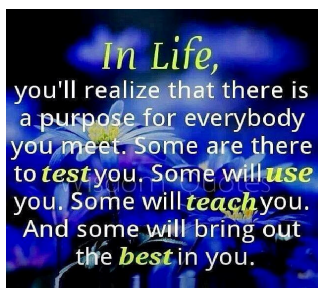
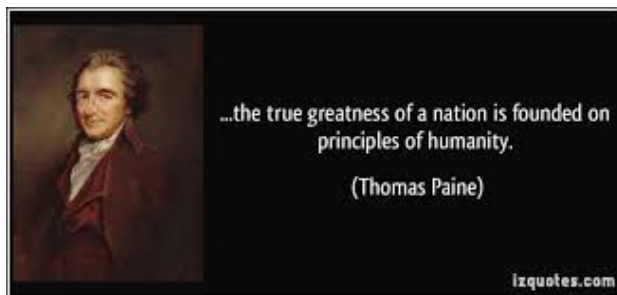


WHY? BECAUSE WE, AND FUTURE GENERATIONS MAY CONTINUE TO IMPROVE AND UNDERSTAND
MORE.

So, there you have it. One person's definition of The Meaning or Purpose of Life, and one's proposal. What do you think? Can you support it? Can you create a better one that would have more universal acceptance and ideally make the world a better place? Could you help develop the Fundamental Principles of Humanity?



THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT
DAYS IN YOUR LIFE ARE
THE DAY YOU ARE BORN,
AND THE DAY YOU FIND
OUT WHY.
MARK TWAIN



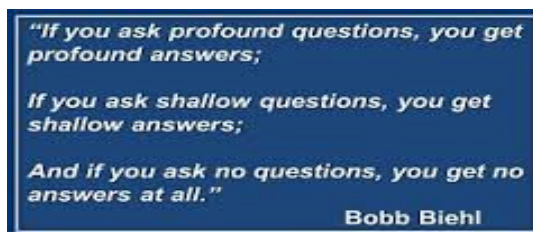


25 PROFOUND QUESTIONS TO START ASKING YOURSELF EVERYDAY

Most of us live in somewhat of a robotic state from day-to-day without facing some of the big questions that can lead us to more fulfilling lives and a sense of abundance. Here are 25 questions to start asking yourself everyday to stimulate a greater sense of awareness of who you are and why you are here.

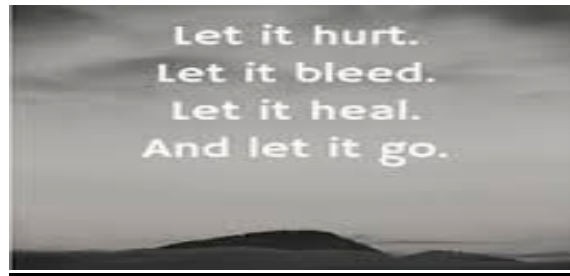
1. Why do we do so many things we don't like and like so many things we don't do?
2. What is the one thing you'd most like to change about yourself and the world?
3. If happiness was the national currency, what kind of work would make you rich?
4. Are you doing what you believe in, or are you settling for what you are doing?
5. If the average human life span was 40 years, how would you live your life differently?
6. Are you more worried about doing things right, or doing the right things?
7. What's the one thing you have not done that you really want to do, and what's stopping you?
8. Are you holding onto something you need to let go of?
9. Have you been the kind of friend you want as a friend?
10. Is it possible to know the truth without challenging it first?
11. Has your greatest fear ever come true, and was the outcome as bad as you thought it would be?

12. Do you remember that time years ago when you were extremely upset? Does it really matter now?
13. Is it possible to know, without a doubt, what is good and what is evil?
14. When was the last time you marched into the dark with only the soft glow of an idea you strongly believed in?
15. If you knew that everyone you know was going to die tomorrow, who would you visit today?
16. When is it time to stop calculating risk and rewards, and just go ahead and do what you know is right?
17. If we learn from our mistakes, why are we always so afraid to make a mistake?
18. What would you do differently if you knew nobody would judge you?
19. Do you allow people to be themselves or do you feel the constant need to fix or change them?
20. When you forgive somebody, do you feel empowered or disempowered?
21. Do you believe there is more to life, space and time than what you have been told?
22. When was the last time you noticed the sound of your own breathing?
23. What do you love? Have any of your recent actions openly expressed this love?
24. What are you most grateful for?
25. Decisions are being made right now. The question is: Are you making them for yourself, or are you letting others make them for you?



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LETTING GO OF THESE 18 THINGS COULD REDEFINE YOUR OUTLOOK ON LIFE

There are some things in life not worth keeping. Letting go of negative qualities which dominate your ego will only lead to a greater sense of self and happiness. We hold on to so many things that cause us a great deal of pain, stress and suffering -- and instead of letting them all go, we cling to them. When you hold on to things dearly, the things you believe you cannot or should not live without, they can take control of, impact, define and tend to perpetuate your existing identity, priorities, interests, values, beliefs, personality, relationships, and the habitual way you have lived your life. Attachments inhibit change, growth and development, and can weaken our spiritual, psychological and emotional well-being.

As noted above in the chapter entitled *Freedom from Attachments*, letting go is an action of the mind that can release you from the emotional dependence you put on things, to uncomplicate and simplify your life, to more clearly see the numerous possibilities and the many wonders that life has to offer. It can help you to feel the energy, freedom and excitement of a new beginning, and to empower you to make the necessary changes you need to make it all happen. Lao Tzu said, "When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be." Our surrender can become our salvation.

Assessing the following negative qualities may help you discover things that are holding you back and preventing you from moving forward to feel the energy, freedom and excitement of a new beginning:

1. Your Need to Always Be Right

There are so many of us who can't stand the idea of being wrong -- wanting to always be right -- even at the risk of ending great relationships or causing a great deal of stress and pain, for us and for others. We love to so call "right-fight". It's just not worth it.

Whenever you feel the 'urgent' need to jump into a fight over who is right and who is wrong, ask yourself this question: *"Would I rather be right, or would I rather be kind? It's better to be nice than right."* ~ Wayne Dyer.

What difference will that make? Is your ego really that big? Ultimately everybody has their own perspective. Yours is only one and it may be no more correct than another.

2. Your Need For Control

Be willing to let go of your need to always control everything that happens to you and the circumstances around you -- situations, events, people, etc. Whether they are loved ones, coworkers, or just strangers you meet on the street -- just allow them to be. Unless it involves harm to you or others, and you have the power or ability to facilitate crucial and life-threatening changes, allow everything and everyone to be just as they are and you will see how much better that will make you feel. Accept by coercion or other means of force, you can never control anybody but yourself, and even that most of us find quite difficult at times i.e. losing weight/dieting, stop smoking, and other addictions, etc.

"By letting it go it all gets done. The world is won by those who let it go. But when you try and try. The world is beyond winning." ~ Lao Tzu

3. Your Need to Blame

Give up on your need to blame others for what you have or don't have, for what you feel or don't feel. Stop giving your powers away and start taking responsibility for your life. Blame is only self-judgment for things you could not accept in your own life. Don't become a victim of the Blame Game.

4. Your Self-Defeating Self-Talk

How many people are hurting themselves because of their negative, polluted and repetitive self-defeating mindset? Don't believe everything that your mind is telling you, especially if it's negative and self-defeating. You are better than that. Start recognizing that.

"The mind is a superb instrument if used rightly. Used wrongly, however, it becomes very destructive." ~ Eckhart Tolle

5. Your Limiting Beliefs

About what you can or cannot do, what is possible or impossible. Don't allow your limiting beliefs to keep you stuck in the wrong place. Spread your wings and fly!

"A belief is not an idea held by the mind; it is an idea that holds the mind" ~ Elly Roselle

6. Your Complaining

Give up your constant need to complain about those many, many things -- the people, situations, events that make you unhappy, sad and depressed. Nobody can make you unhappy, no situation can make you sad or miserable unless you allow it to. It's not the situation that triggers those feelings in you, but how you choose to look at and react to it. It is a matter of perspective. Never underestimate the power of positive thinking.

7. Your Criticism

Give up your need to criticize all things, events or people that are different than you. We are all different, yet we are all the same. We all want to be happy, we all want to love and to be loved, and we all want to be understood. We all want something, and something is wished by us all. When you criticize, you are again passing self-judgment for something lacking in your life that you refuse to let go of.

8. Your Guilt

Guilt is a trick of the mind. It is a game your mind plays with you and it's not very much fun. It brings your attention to ways in which you may be out of balance and sacrificing your integrity, doing wrong and not honoring yourself or others.

Accept responsibility for yourself, your life and your actions. You are *response-able*. You are an adult. You are *account-able*, meaning, with every action you take, you account for it. You chose to do it; you must accept the consequences. You did it all for a reason, and hopefully you'll learn from it.

9. Your Need To Impress Others

Stop trying so hard to be something that you're not just to make others like you. The moment you stop trying so hard to be something that you're not, is the moment you take off all your masks, the moment you accept and embrace the real you, you will find people will be drawn to you, effortlessly.

Success may have nothing to do with how much money you have or how many cars you have, but how you choose to live a life of abundance which comes in many forms; all of which have nothing to do with material things.

10. Your Resistance to Change

Change is good. Change will help you move from A to B. Change will help you make improvements in your life and also the lives of those around you. Follow your bliss, embrace change -- don't resist it.

"Follow your bliss and the universe will open doors for you where there were only walls"~ Joseph Campbell

11. Your Perceived Pain

All pain is perceived and we all perceive it differently. It affects us all differently. You cannot interpret the pain of others unless you have experienced the same pain (i.e. losing a child). It allows us to grow and shatter barriers that would otherwise be impossible beyond the painful event. Without some semblance of pain in our lives, it is difficult to distinguish and learn.

When we let go of our pain, life changes and flows in ways we never dreamed possible. If you think you can't get rid of your pain, you are only confirming your self-limiting beliefs and why the pain is there in the first place.

12. Your Labels

Stop labeling those things, people or events that you don't understand as being weird or different and try opening your mind, little by little. Minds only work when open.

"The highest form of ignorance is when you reject something you don't know anything about. ~ Wayne Dyer

13. Your Fears

Fear is just an illusion, it doesn't exist -- you created it. It's all in your mind. Correct the inside and the outside will fall into place. Most of the limiting factors on this page stem from fear. Release your fear and everything will change in your life, almost simultaneously. Many successful people have achieved great heights only because they have let go of their fear of success.

"The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself." ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

14. Your Excuses

Send them packing and tell them they're fired. You no longer need them. A lot of times we limit ourselves because of the many excuses we use. Instead of growing and working on improving ourselves and our lives, we get stuck, lying to ourselves, using all kind of excuses -- justifications and rationalizations that most of the time are not even real. We sabotage ourselves beyond belief. If you find yourself making excuses, ask yourself why you are creating the excuse in the first place?

15. Your Past

We often assume the past looked so much better than the present and the future looks so frightening, but you have to take into consideration the fact that the present moment is all you have and all you will ever have. The past you are now longing for -- the past that you are now dreaming about -- was ignored by you when it was present. Stop deluding yourself. Be present in everything you do and enjoy life. After all life is a journey not a destination. Have a clear vision for the future, prepare yourself, but always be present in the now. Eventually, your life will revolve around your day today, not yesterday or even the future.

16. Your Attachments

This is a concept that, for most of us is so very difficult to grasp, but it's not something impossible. You get better and better at with time and practice. The moment you detach yourself from all things, (and that doesn't mean you give up your love for them -- because love and attachment have nothing to do with one another, attachment comes from a place of fear, while love...well, real love is pure, kind, and selfless, where there is love there can't be fear, and because of that, attachment and love cannot coexist) you become so peaceful, so tolerant, so kind, and so serene. You will get to a place where you will be able to understand all things without even trying. A state beyond words.

17. Your Resentment

Let go of your internal resentment towards people, situations and events. If you hold a grudge, you only take power away from yourself and your learning and growth stops. Your resentment towards anything is a result of all of the limiting qualities on this page. Learn how to forgive. This is true strength.

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." ~ Mahatma Gandhi

18. Your Expectations of Yourself and Others

Let go of any expectations of yourself that will limit your growth. If you hold high expectations for how others should behave, you will often be disappointed if they do not represent themselves in the manner you expected. It is only your expectations of people that cause you to judge them which ultimately is a judgment of yourself. Far too many people are living a life that is not theirs to live. They live their lives according to what others think is best for them, they live their lives according to what their parents think is best for them, to what their friends, their enemies and their teachers, their government and the media think is best for them. They ignore their inner voice, that inner calling. They are so busy with pleasing everybody, with living up to other people's expectations, that they lose control over their lives. They forget what makes them happy, what they want, what they need...and eventually they forget about themselves. You have one life -- this one right now -- you must live it, own it, and especially don't let other people's opinions distract you from your path.

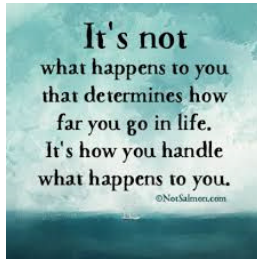
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Brené Brown has defined ten guideposts for Wholehearted living while working at "letting go" of what's holding you back in your life:

1. Cultivating Authenticity: Letting Go of What People Think
2. Cultivating Self-Compassion: Letting Go of Perfectionism
3. Cultivating Resilient Spirit: Letting Go of Numbing and Powerlessness
4. Cultivating Gratitude and Joy: Letting Go of Scarcity and Fear of the Dark
5. Cultivating Intuition and Trusting Faith: Letting Go of the Need for Certainty
6. Cultivating Creativity: Letting Go of Comparison
7. Cultivating Play and Rest: Letting Go of Exhaustion as a Status Symbol and Productivity as Self-Worth
8. Cultivating Calm and Stillness: Letting Go of Anxiety as a Lifestyle
9. Cultivating Meaningful Work: Letting Go of Self-Doubt and 'Supposed To'
10. Cultivating Laughter, Song, and Dance: Letting Go of Being Cool and 'Always in Control'

To learn more about these 10 guideposts, look at Dr. Brown's book, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*. Also, check out Dr. Brené Brown's TED talk, "[The Power of Vulnerability](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability)" on YouTube. Inspiring, informative and worth your while.



7 LESSONS YOU LEARN THROUGH LIFE'S CHALLENGES

By [Mo Seetubtim](#)

1. You need to change.

There are times when things go wrong in life. Most of us try to escape it, denying the truth life presents to us. When a problem occurs, most of the time it occurs because something is not right — you got sick because you haven't been eating right; you are in hefty debt because you didn't live within your means; you got backstabbed because you're too trusting; your partner wanted to break up with you because you're too controlling — the list goes on and on.

Instead of looking at external circumstances and blame them for unfortunate life events, look at yourself first and see if there's anything you can improve. Can you change the way you live so that your life situation can improve? Whether it be changing your habits, attitude, or outlook, you need to change in order to improve your life's situation. Failing to accept the truth life presents to you, you will forever fall into the traps you can never seem to escape.

If you're gonna make a change... operate from a new belief that says life happens not to me but for me. — Tony Robbins

Everything happens for a reason and that reason leads you to another destiny. Accept the fact that shit happened to teach you something, to push you to grow, and to encourage you to change. Use this as a drive to make successfully change yourself for the better.

Sometimes the uncomfortable things in life are there to teach us lessons because to go through a change of habit, we need to feel uncomfortable. — Mo Seetubtim

2. You can't control life but you can control yourself.

There are circumstances in life that you can't control, i.e., being born into a dysfunctional family, losing your family member at a young age, becoming a victim of an unforeseeable accident, or having a cancer.

When you go through life's challenges, you have the choice to either fall apart and become a victim of the circumstances, or you can rise up high and above others.— Mo Seetubtim

Surrendering to life, you become weak and vulnerable. You become easily influenced especially by bad influences such as drugs and alcohol which you're told could help you heal pain. You become friends with bad strangers. You become sad and emotionally unstable which leads to depression and beyond.

However, if you realize that you are in control of yourself no matter what happens, you will not ignore the unfortunate circumstances and use them as springboards for the better you. You bring yourself to a healthy environment. You build yourself a support system. You surround yourself with good influences. You build yourself skills and never stop improving yourself.

3. You can't change the way things are but you can change the way you look at things.

You cannot control what happens to you, but you can control your attitude toward what happens to you, and in that, you will be mastering change rather than allowing it to master you.— Brian Tracy

Going through life's challenges require strength — a lot of strength — both mental and physical because they go hand in hand. You need to stay strong. You need support from family and friends. Most importantly, you need to change your outlook on life. You need to understand that you can't change the way things are but you can change the way you look at things.

The secret of success is learning how to use pain and pleasure instead of having pain and pleasure use you. If you do that, you're in control of your life. If you don't, life controls you.— Tony Robbins

Use pain to motivate yourself — to become more determined, work harder, and succeed.

4. You are actually a very strong person.

A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions. — Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

As a result of 2 and 3, you become a stronger person who is not afraid of anything in life. You know that no matter what happens you will be just fine. The strength you have built up over the years has become one of the most valuable assets you have. You know you have the willpower to combat anything in life.

Knowing that you are a strong person is a blessing. Because the power of the mind is very powerful.

5. You are your own worst enemy and your own best friend.

Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own unguarded thoughts— Buddha

Sometimes when life hits you with a brick, you just really hate yourself. You hate yourself for letting people who've done you wrong into your life. You hate yourself for not being more disciplined and doing the right thing. You hate yourself for what you did in the past which caused your life to go sideways. You just can't forgive yourself. You feel sad, upset, and angry. You just keep thinking about this over and over.

However, having gone through a struggle, you realize that sometimes you can be your own worst enemy. You can choose to blame yourself for what's gone wrong, or you can forgive yourself and move on. Dwelling on such thoughts can only create self-harm and delay healing. To be able to heal, you need to accept the circumstances, forgive yourself and your mistakes, and move on.

Time does not heal everything but acceptance will heal everything. — Buddha

Ask yourself **“What would you say to your best friend if your best friend was in the situation?”** Will you put her/him down? Will you blame him or her even more for what went wrong? No, you would cheer your best friend up and try every way you can to make him/her feel better. So why aren't you doing this to yourself? **You can choose to be your own worst enemy or your own best friend. Choose wisely.**

6. You realize who your true friends are.

When you are up in life your friends get to know who you are. When you are down in life you get to know who your friends are. There will be many people who will be great to be around when times are easy. Instead take note of the people who remain in your life when times are hard. The friends that are willing to sacrifice their time and the resources they have in their life to help improve yours. Those are your real friends. A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.

These moments are crucial in life because it's when you realize who matters and who doesn't. Only true friends will stick by you through tough times, help you in every way they can, and are always there to listen to you.

Once you realize who your true friends are, cherish them. They are very hard to find.

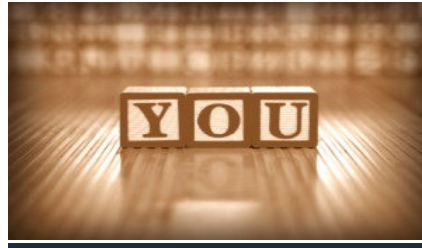
7. You realize what matters and what doesn't.

When you are in a good financial situation, you probably find joy through activities such as dining out, going to the pub, going to events, shopping, and traveling. However, when life gets tough, you cannot afford to do those things. If you spend time feeling sad about the situation and missing the things you used to get to do, then you'd be unhappy. But if you learn to enjoy the simple things in life, little by little, and appreciate what you have, then you would realize that life is not too bad after all.

Instead of dining out, you start cooking. Instead of going out clubbing, you invite your friends over or go to their house and enjoy the company that way. Instead of going shopping, you learn to be happy with what you already have. Over and over this becomes a habit — you start to adopt a minimal way of life and find joy and happiness from the simplest things.

Mo is the founder of [The Happiness Planner](#), a stationery line that focuses on happiness, positive thinking, mindfulness, and personal development. She also has a blog called [BrandMentalist](#) where she writes about modern life wisdoms, happiness, self-improvement, and entrepreneurship.





PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY—A REQUIREMENT FOR LIFE **ADVANCEMENT**

by Todd Smith

Accountability is normally viewed as being responsible—giving an explanation of your actions—to somebody for something. However, today's lesson is not about someone holding you accountable. It's about you holding yourself accountable.

When you take 100 percent responsibility for holding yourself accountable, your performance will improve, your relationships will flourish, your market value will soar, people's respect for you will skyrocket, you will be a great example for others to follow, and your self-esteem will grow.

How is it that in all these areas of your life you can see such dramatic improvement? Because when you hold yourself accountable to doing the things you know you should do, you will distinguish yourself from the crowd.

I am convinced if you want to advance your life personally or professionally, you must hold yourself accountable for your actions, responsibilities, and goals. Think about it. Why should it be someone else's job to make sure you are doing the things that you know you should to be doing?

The mindset I adopted more than 25 years ago is this: *it is up to me and no one else to make sure I am doing what I know I should be doing*. When someone has to hold me accountable, because I failed to do what I should have done, I have a serious conversation with myself. My belief is that *no one* should have to hold me accountable for my actions, responsibilities and goals. While I appreciate others helping me get better, I am the one that must hold myself to a high standard.

Three Types of Accountability

There are three areas in which you must hold yourself accountable:

1. **Your actions and choices**—This would include such things as:

- The way in which you communicate with others
- How you spend your time
- Your behavior and manners
- The consideration and respect you show others
- Your eating habits and exercising routine
- Your attitude and thoughts
- The way you respond to challenges

2. **Your responsibilities**—This would include these types of things:

- Returning calls, emails, and texts in a timely manner
- Being on time for business and personal appointments
- Keeping your home, car, and workplace clean
- Spending less than you earn
- Doing the things you agreed to do when you agreed to do them
- Executing your job description to the best of your ability
- Writing things down on a “To Do” list so you don’t forget

3. **Your goals**—This would include your:

- Fitness and health targets
- Financial goals
- Family objectives
- Career ambitions
- Personal goals
- Marital enhancement
- Any other goals you have set for yourself

Make no mistake about it. You cannot achieve any worthwhile personal or professional goal, if you don’t hold yourself accountable. The reason is simple. It’s your life! If you have to be held accountable at work, don’t expect to be promoted or to experience any type of significant career advancement. If you have to be held accountable at home by your parents, roommate or spouse, it will grow old fast and your relationships will deteriorate.

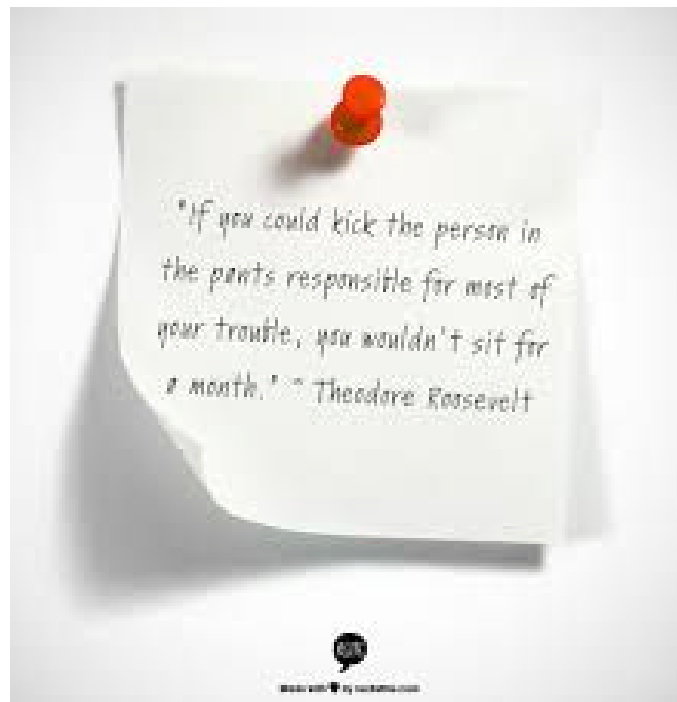
Holding yourself accountable is nothing more than following through with YOUR commitments and responsibilities. It’s doing what YOU know YOU should do, when YOU should do it.

Whether you are 15 years old or 60 years old, let today be the day that you make the commitment to yourself that you will NEVER again require anyone else to hold you

accountable. Let me also encourage you to start keeping a prioritized “To Do” list and focus on holding yourself accountable to working through your tasks in a prioritized sequence.

This is your life! Take control. Be responsible for it.

If you will hold yourself accountable for your actions, responsibilities, and goals, you can achieve anything that is important to you.



The Author's qualification:

Note: It is probably obvious or not, that I'm far from an expert on any of this. I have no degrees or formal education in philosophy, psychology or political science, journalism or English for that matter. My formal education and the start of my career had been in architecture. Since then, I had been running a professional home inspection business for over three decades. Nonetheless, it has not inhibited me from expressing a deep felt, albeit cursory and limited layperson's novice opinion regarding happiness, and what I consider to be a needed and warranted world mission relative to the above proposal, regarding the precepts for achieving world peace.



Acknowledgments and additional Author's remarks:

The quotes above attributed to the Dalai Lama pertain to His Holiness, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, **Tenzin Gyatso**, the spiritual and former temporal leader of the Tibetan people. His Holiness is also a recipient of over 84 awards, including the Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of his message of peace, inter-religious understanding, universal responsibility and compassion. He has also authored more than 72 books.

The Dalai Lama's quotes noted above are taken from the book, *The Art of Happiness*, authored by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Dr. **Howard Cutler**, M.D. In this book, the Dalai Lama's infinite wisdom and worldly views along with Dr. Howard Cutler's insightful questions and sound clinical advice, identifies important human values and living principles which provide beneficial and practical advice for living a more enlightened, joyful and happier life.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the following people who I've quoted, sometimes extensively in this book: Acclaimed professor of psychology, **Sonya Lyubomirsky** PhD for her most interesting, and well written science-based analysis and advice on how to become happier. She puts forth the most practical, detailed, enjoyable, and easy to understand approach to enhancing your happiness and overall well-being in her outstanding book, *The How of Happiness*; Professor of psychology **Jonathan Haidt** PhD for his interesting, engaging, and thought provoking writings and his superb book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*; World renown professor of psychology **Martin Seligman** PhD, the father of Positive Psychology and coauthor with distinguished professor of psychology Christopher Peterson of the 24 Character Strengths cited herein; **Tal Ben-Shahar** PhD for his captivating and excellent books, *Happier* and *Being Happy*; Dr. **Deepak Chopra** M.D, one of the most enlightened and inspirational minds of our time; **Arthur C. Brooks** PhD, president, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy, and former Professor of Business and Government policy for his outstanding book, *Gross National Happiness*; Professor of psychology **David G. Myers** PhD, who's writings I found not only practical and informative, but quite entertaining as well; Distinguished professors of psychology **Ken Sheldon**, **David Schkade**, **Ed Diener**, and **Laura King**, for their life's work in the field of human happiness research; Author, foreign correspondent, and journalist **Eric Weiner** for his interesting, entertaining, and informative book, *The Geography of Bliss*; Psychologist Dr. **Michael Fordyce**, a true modern pioneer in the field of human happiness research; Bestselling author and Psychiatrist **Mark Epstein** M.D.; Psychologist and internationally recognized author **Laurie A. Helgoe** PhD; New York Times bestselling author **Kathleen McGowan**; **William James** (deceased) acclaimed pioneering psychologist and philosopher; Therapist **Albert Ellis** PhD (deceased) for his work on REBT; **James E. Faust** JD (deceased) for his devotional address at Brigham Young University; **Victor Frankl** MD, (deceased), prominent Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist, author and holocaust survivor; **Rumi** (deceased) Muslim poet, jurist and theologian; **Carl Jung** (deceased) Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. His work has been influential not only in psychiatry but also in philosophy, anthropology, archaeology; **Immanuel Kant** (deceased), author, renown philosopher; **Hannah Arendt** (deceased) one of the most influential political philosophers of the 20th century; **Cecilia Capuzzi Simon**, freelance writer, journalist and editor; **Pamela Weintraub**, author, editor and investigative science journalist; **Kenneth Blanchard**, renown author, management expert, and Chief Spiritual Officer of The Blanchard Companies; Dr. **Norman Vincent Peale**, American minister, author, and progenitor of the theory of "positive thinking"; **Roy Baumeister** PhD, author and Director Social psychology, Florida State University; **Daisaku Ikeda**, educator, Buddhist philosopher, peace builder, author and poet; **Edgar Mitchell**, Apollo 14 astronaut, author, Medal of Freedom and Distinguished Service Medal recipient; **Dr. Lissa Rankin** MD, physician, bestselling author, teacher, speaker and artist; Dr. **Sheri Rosenthal** DPM, author and Master Toltec Teacher; **Dorothy Wade**, journalist and former Deputy Editor of the Sunday Times Magazine UK; **Daniel Goleman**, author and cochairman of the Consortium for research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations at Rutgers University's; **Richard Boyatzis**, author and Professor of organizational behavior, psychology, and cognitive science; **Richard E. Lucas**, professor of psychology at Michigan State University; Dr. **S. Ignacimuthu**, S.J. , Director, Entomology research Institute, Loyola College, Tamil Nadu, India, and author of *Being Happy and Successful*; **Gail Brenner** PhD, psychologist, author and blogger; **Fr. William Saunders** is dean of the Notre Dame Graduate School of Christendom College; **Michael Youssef** PhD, author, pastor and founder of Leading the Way ministry and founding pastor of The Church of The Apostles in Atlanta, Georgia; **T. M. Scanlon**, PhD, author, American philosopher, Harvard professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Civil Polity; **Alex Lickerman**, MD, author, speaker and general internist; **John Mason**, bestselling author, speaker and coach and the founder of Insight International; **Rick Hanson** PhD,

neuropsychologist, senior fellow at UC Berkeley, author and speaker; **Bill Warner** holds a PhD in physics and math, is an author, a former professor, businessman, and applied physicist; **Robert Ringer** is a New York Times #1 bestselling author, speaker, lecturer and host of the highly acclaimed Liberty Education Interview Series; **Michael Shermer** PhD, is a professor, founding publisher of *Skeptical Magazine*, columnist and author of numerous books; **Sharon Janice**, author, speaker, filmmaker, musician and philosopher; Professor of psychology **Barbara Fredrickson**; **Mikko Myrskla**, head of the Max Planck Group on Lifecourse Dynamics and Demographic Change; **Rachel Margolis** PhD, professor of sociology at the University of Western Ontario; **Johanna "Hanna" Arendt**, political theorist; **Judith Sills** PhD, psychologist, bestselling author, columnist and speaker; **Hale Dwoskin**, best-selling author, international speaker, and featured in the movie *Letting Go*; **Stanley Hauerwas**, author and professor of Theological Ethics; **Nicholas P. Kidd** and **Henk J. M. Schram** of Revolutioniz.com; **Aine Belton**, of Doseoflove.com is an author, and founder of the Global Love Project; **Ernie J. 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by the Wikimedia Foundation; **Henry Ford**, American industrialist, the founder of the Ford Motor Company; **Lissa Rankin MD**, New York Times bestselling author; **Mac Anderson**, founder of Simple Truths, author and speaker; **Brandon West**, founder and author of Project Global Awakening; **Jim Rohn**, American entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker; **Aristotle**, Greek philosopher and scientist, together with Socrates and Plato, laid much of the groundwork for western philosophy; **Ben Franklin**, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, was a renowned polymath and a leading author, printer, political theorist, politician, freemason, postmaster, scientist; **John Wesley**, Anglican cleric and theologian; **Woody Allen**, American actor, comedian, filmmaker, playwright, and musician; **Yogi Berra**, American professional baseball catcher, manager, and coach, a cultural icon whose fame transcended the baseball diamond; **Ulrich Orth**, associate Professor of Psychology, University of Bern; **Alexander M. Schoemann PhD**, psychologist and assistant professor Department of Psychology, East Carolina University; **Anke C. Plagnol PhD**, lecturer in psychology (behavioral economics); **Richard Ainley Easterlin PhD**, University Professor and Professor of Economics at the University of Southern California; **The Pew Research Center**, a nonpartisan American "fact tank" which is based in Washington, D.C. It provides information on social issues, public opinion, and demographic trends shaping the United States and the world; **Lauren f. Friedman**, author and editor; **Aldous Huxley**, English writer, novelist, philosopher; **John Calvin**, influential French theologian; **Ann Landers**, was a pen name created by Chicago Sun-Times advice columnist Ruth Crowley, and eventually a nationwide media celebrity; **Sophocles**, was one of the most famous and celebrated writers of tragedy plays in ancient Greece; **Red Skelton**, American entertainer; pantomimist and radio and television comedian, host, and star performer of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) variety program; **Albert Einstein**, German-born physicist who developed the general theory of relativity, among other feats; considered one of the most brilliant humans in the history of mankind by many; **Max Ehrmann**, American writer, poet, and attorney; widely known for his 1927 prose poem "Desiderata", and he often wrote on spiritual themes; **Tolstoy**, usually referred to in English as Leo Tolstoy, was a Russian writer who is regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time; **Soren Kierkegaard**, Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic and religious author; **Marcus Aurelius**, Roman Emperor from 161 to 180, was the last of the so-called Five Good Emperors; **Dr. Alan Stern**, American engineer and planetary scientist; **Jim Collins**, American business consultant, author, researcher, and lecturer; **St. Thomas Aquinas**, was an Italian Dominican friar, Catholic priest, and Doctor of the Church. He was an immensely influential philosopher, theologian, and jurist; **R. J. Rummel**, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Hawaii. He spent his career studying data on collective violence and war with a view toward helping their resolution or elimination; **Thomas Jefferson**, an American Founding Father and the principal author of the Declaration of Independence; Jefferson mastered many disciplines, which ranged from surveying and mathematics to horticulture and mechanics. He was a proven architect in the classical tradition. Jefferson's keen interest in religion and philosophy earned him the presidency of the American Philosophical Society; **Heart Math Institute (HMI)**, a nonprofit research and education organization offering prevention and intervention strategies for improved emotional health, decision-making, learning skills for living healthier, fulfilling lives and building a brighter future; **Nassim Haramein**, Director of Research at the Hawaii Institute for Unified Physics; **Jeff Bridges**, American actor, singer, producer and author; **Bernie Glassman**, world-renowned pioneer in the American Zen Movement. He is a spiritual leader, published author, accomplished academic; **Maggie Hamilton**, Australian author, teacher and publisher; **Robert C. Maynard**, American journalist, newspaper publisher and editor; **Edgar Mitchell**, United States Navy officer and aviator, test pilot, aeronautical engineer, and one of the few NASA astronauts who walked on the moon; **Albert Camus**, French philosopher, author, and journalist; **Complete Wellbeing**, magazine promotes the idea that individuals are not sum of parts but an integrated whole; **Sherwood Eddy**, leading American Protestant missionary, administrator and educator; **Bobby Muller**, former U.S. Marine Corp Lieutenant; an American peace advocate; founded Vietnam Veterans of America; and won a 1997 Nobel Peace Prize; Indian philosopher, **Patanjali**, the compiler of Yoga Sutras, was a great philosopher; He is also supposed to be the writer of a work on the ancient Indian medicine; **William Blake**, English poet, painter, and printmaker; considered a seminal figure in the history of the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic Age; **Rev. 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Schulz**, American cartoonist best known for the comic strip Peanuts; **George Washington**, the first, and only nonpartisan, President of the United States, the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War, and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States; **Eugene O'Kelly**, former Chairman and CEO of KPMG, one of the largest U. S. accounting firms and one of the Big Four auditors; **Carl Sagan**, American astronomer, cosmologist, astrophysicist, astrobiologist, author, science popularizer, and science communicator in astronomy and other natural sciences; **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, American Baptist minister and activist who was a leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement; **Cavett Robert**, considered by many to be the founder of the modern professional speaking industry; **Daisaku Ikada**, Buddhist philosopher, educator, author, and anti-nuclear activist; **Bruno S. Frey**, author, Swiss economist; former professor at the University of Zurich and the Business School of the University of Warwick; **Alois Stutzer**, author, professor at University of Basel Department of Business and Economics; **Richard M. Ebeling**, writer, author, and professor of Ethics and Free Enterprise Leadership at The Citadel; **Cecilia Capuzzi Simon**, writer and editor specializing in long-form journalism, with expertise in education, psychology and media topics; **Keith Bellizzi**, psychologist, associate Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Connecticut; **Dr. Albert Ellis**, American psychologist who in 1955 developed rational emotive behavior therapy; **Karl Wilhelm Von Humboldt**, Prussian philosopher, government functionary, diplomat, and founder of the Humboldt University of Berlin; **Alex Lickerman**, MD, physician, author, former assistant professor of medicine; founder and CEO of Imagine; **Bruce Lipton**, MD, American developmental biologist best known for promoting the idea that genes and DNA can be manipulated by a person's beliefs; **David Hawkins**, MD, nationally renowned psychiatrist, physician, researcher, spiritual teacher and lecture; **Alexander Weiss**, comparative psychologist at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland; **Marcia Lucas**, *assistant professor of Mental Health*

Counseling at Alliance Graduate School of Counseling; **Gregg Braden**, NY Times bestselling author, speaker and Templeton Award recipient; **Ian Morris**, British archaeologist, historian, academic, lecturer and author. He is currently Willard Professor of Classics at Stanford University; **Steven A LeBlanc**, author and American archaeologist; **Richard Hooper**, philosopher, former Lutheran pastor, and hospital chaplain in Washington State; **Matthew Huttson**, science and technology writer and author; **Venesa Janek**, science writer, childbirth educator, armchair astrophysicist, Registered Nurse, and lover of all things earthy, nerdy and inspiring; **Mike Pence**, VP of USA, attorney, former governor and congressman; **Janet Boyer**, author and teacher; PREVENTDISEASE.com; **Elite Daily** newsletter, elitedaily.com; **Robert Lanza** MD, medical doctor, author, scientist and philosopher. **Ralph W. Sockman**, senior pastor of Christ Church, associate professor, author and renown speaker; **J. Gary Bernhard**, Ed.D. has been involved in leadership and management in education for more than 40 years; **Kalman Glantz**, Ph.D. a professor of social science in Cambridge, a Visiting Scientist at MIT, and a psychotherapist in private practice in the Boston area; **Ajit Singh**, writer and retired Jt.Commissioner from Mumbai, designs and conducts courses on Behaviour Science; **Mo Seetubtim**, writer, founder of The Happiness Planner, and she has a blog called BrandMentalist; **Erin Martz** PhD, author and researcher; **Paddy Ashdown**, is writer, and a British politician and former diplomat who served as Leader of the Liberal Democrats; **Leah Goldrick**, writer, editor, content creator and social media manager; **Henry Karlson**, writer, author and theology historian; **Ben Thompson**, creator of *Zen Thinking*, author, speaker and teacher; **James Clear**, author, photographer, and weightlifter focused on habits and decision making; **Arjun Walia**, author and a writer for The Collective Evolution; **Ron McGivern** is the senior lecturer in Sociology and Associate Dean of Arts at Thompson Rivers University in British Columbia; **Corey Keyes**, Sociologist and psychologist, teaches at Emory University in Georgia; **Robert Kopecky**, author, speaker, artist, illustrator and animation designer; **Edwin J. Feulner**, PhD, founder and former president of The Heritage Foundation; **David Leonhart**, The [down to earth] HappyGuy.com.

I especially thank *Psychology Today* for their wonderful magazine and web site, and the numerous well written articles I've quoted from, with many of the above noted well respected authors, regarding positive psychology, the science of happiness, and other relevant subjects.

My personal opinions expressed in this book are portrayed strictly from a layman's point of view. Although positive psychologists often refer to happiness as subjective well-being, the references to well-being in this book are also referring to not only our subjective and emotional well-being, but to our spiritual well-being, good health, and how consonantly one is living with respect to one's principles, values, preferences, and expectations.

In addition to an enthusiastic interest in happiness and positive psychology, I also enjoy learning about human relations, leadership and ethics. Morals, ethics and virtuous behavior are important characteristics to our happiness. Therefore, they are recognized and briefly examined herein.

And last, but certainly not least, I thank my wife, **Jeanne**, who is the epitome of niceness and happiness. She is the one who truly enhances my happiness and my love for life. She is also one of the most thoughtful and helpful people you'd ever want to meet. Our son **Will** has contributed infinitely to our happiness, joy, and the gratefulness in our lives. **Will** and my friend **Marie Hyman** have also been instrumental in my research of happiness and positive psychology.

I also thank my entire family, in-laws, colleagues, and friends. These people are some of my greatest sources of happiness. They have inspired me by their wisdom, attitudes and actions to write about what it really takes to achieve a life fulfilled by happiness. They're the best. I love them all. My brother-in-law and sister-in-law, **Paul** and **Mary Ericson** have given me great feed-back through the years.

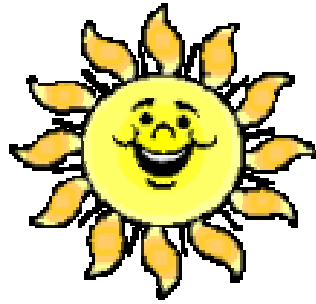
Janice McWeeny has not only been a dear friend to Jeanne, Will and me, she has been an unbelievable generous, giving, and grateful person and friend to the Sutton family. Janice's generous and gracious nature was the inspiration for the inclusion of the *Giving and Generosity, and Gratitude* sections of this book. My life long friend **Joe Connolly** has always been my inspiration for goodness and compassion.

Finally, several of my friends, family, colleagues, and others have mentioned that they are curious as to why I have spent the time and effort to write about happiness. Good question, since they realize I was a home inspector and somewhat of a businessman, not a psychologist. The simple answer is, I was looking for a better way to think about life, and to help develop and improve my own life and by extension, maybe others too.

I realize that no matter how good you are at your job or anything else, there is always room for self-improvement. I believe that personal and professional growth is a lifelong commitment. After reading several books, and other research on positive psychology and subjective well-being, it became one of my passions.

Not surprisingly, passionate people because of their enthusiasm, often feel compelled to share their knowledge and beliefs with others, I'm among them. I cared deeply about the job I did for my clients and my profession. I loved my job as a home inspector. I got to share my knowledge and experience to help my clients, and my colleagues. I volunteered a great deal of time both regionally and on a national level to help improve my profession and The American Society of Home Inspectors. As a former professional home inspector and a businessman, I welcomed and appreciated the opportunity to help my clients make one of the largest single investments, and one of the most important decisions they make in a lifetime... purchasing their home. So, consistent with my former profession and my true passions in life is... I love to share the knowledge I believe may help others. Since I started writing this book many years ago, I am presently retired, and no longer involved in home inspection, but I will never lose my passion for learning, and trying to help others.

So, I hope at least some of the information contained herein will enhance your life in some form or fashion, and can help you to better understand, appreciate, and enrich your happiness and the way you think about life. Here's to helping you achieve a more meaningful, more grateful, less stressful, and happier life.



HAPPINESS QUOTES

The following are a few of my favorite happiness quotes, which I came across on a commendable website: www.wisdomquotes.com

This wisdom quote website is designed to "challenge and inspire". It includes: "Quotations for a variety of occasions to help you shed light, help keep perspective, inspire, energize, or just make you think."

Their quotes are sorted by numerous topics and authors. These are a few of my favorites under their happiness section. Of all the websites I've visited regarding quotations, I've found this site especially, to be of excellent quality and quite impressive in its content and scope. So, here are a few of my favorites regarding happiness:

As I go through all kinds of feelings and experiences in my journey through life... delight, surprise, chagrin, dismay... I hold this question as a guiding light: "What do I really need right now to be happy?" What I come to over and over again is that only qualities as vast and deep as love, connection, and kindness will really make me happy in any sort of enduring way.

- Sharon Salzberg

Peace is the highest and most strenuous act of the soul, but an entirely harmonious act, in which all our powers and affections are blending in a beautiful proportion, and sustain and perfect one another. It is more than the silence after storms. It is as the concord of all melodious sounds... an alliance of love with all beings, a sympathy with all that is pure and happy, a surrender of every separate will and interest, a participation of the Spirit and life of the universe... this is peace, and the true happiness of humanity.

- William Ellery Channing

A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin; what else does a man need to be happy?

- Albert Einstein

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

- The Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso

Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others, cannot keep it from themselves.

- James M. Barrie

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.

- Marcel Proust

Happiness comes when your work and words are of benefit to yourself and others.

- Buddha

But what is happiness except the simple harmony between a man and the life he leads?

- Albert Camus

Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace, and gratitude.

- Denis Waitley

The truest greatness lies in being kind, the truest wisdom in a happy mind.

- Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The greatest degree of inner tranquility comes from the development of love and compassion. The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater is our own sense of well-being.

- The Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso

Each morning when I open my eyes I say to myself: I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it.

- Groucho Marx

No pleasure is comparable to standing upon the vantage-ground of truth.

- Francis Bacon

Hope is itself a species of happiness, and perhaps, the chief happiness which this world affords.

- Samuel Johnson

Knowledge of what is possible is the beginning of happiness.

- George Santayana

If you want to be happy, set a goal that commands your thoughts, liberates your energy, and inspires your hopes.

- Andrew Carnegie

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.

- Buddha

Everything is material for the seed of happiness, if you look into it with inquisitiveness and curiosity. The future is completely open, and we are writing it moment to moment. There always is the potential to create an environment of blame... or one that is conducive to loving-kindness.

- Pema Chardron

Those who won our independence... valued liberty as an end and as a means. They believed liberty to be the secret of happiness, and courage to be the secret of liberty.

- Lewis D. Brandeis

A Buddhist teaching says if you can't feel a sincere desire for your own happiness, there's no way you can truly wish for the happiness of others. Your happiness and more happiness comes from all that is right with you and our world.

- Bill Sutton

Note: The above quote is not taken from the Wisdom Quote web site.

Here's one that I believe most of us can relate to:

Everyone I meet makes me happy, either while I'm with them or when they leave.

And last but not least, one of my favorites; delighting the senses with beautiful thoughts expressed by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

This is my wish for you: Comfort on difficult days, smiles when sadness intrudes, rainbows to follow the clouds, laughter to kiss your lips, sunsets to warm your heart, hugs when spirits sag, beauty for your eyes to see, friendships to brighten your being, faith so that you can believe, confidence for when you doubt, courage to know yourself, patience to accept the truth, Love to complete your life.



NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]