

Finding Your Way to Contentment

Life circumstances and happiness seem to go hand in hand, don't they? A new relationship, warm fuzzy feelings and smiling for no reason. An unexpected raise at work; feelings of appreciation, approval, and more dedication to do a great job. Vacation in a dreamy destination; delight in even the small things.

But what happens when life takes a turn and you're facing challenges—with family, finances, or health? Sometimes the drudgery of our lives, particularly when things seem even harder than typical, can pull us into a bit of a slump.

The road to happiness may sometimes feel elusive. We may mentally tie it to a goal—"I'd be happier if only I could ____." But studies have shown again and again that happiness is not found to be higher among those who we perceive have "everything". Instead, it is often a momentary feeling but one we seek and hope to have more often.

I read an interesting article that pulled information from neuroscientists on how to regain the happy in your life. The suggestions were reminders I often give but believe they are now being tied to actual changes in the brain! So it's time to review them again - and see what we all can add to our life to increase our time that feels happy, or at least happier. The first one is to ask yourself what you are grateful for, and here's the surprising part—you don't even need an answer. The mere act of mentally searching for something you're grateful for will raise

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Live, Grow, Journal?



Remember when you were in high school or grade school and one of your teachers had the wonderful idea to have all of you write every day in class, and then collected your free writing to grade it? Some people look back to this as the beginning of their journaling. Others recall it with dread, remembering how difficult it was to write that 5-15 minutes each day, knowing the teacher would read it. Others may have seen it as a great opportunity to develop their fictional storytelling skills. By high school, however, many a student has survived alcoholic parents, domestic violence, and gotten help for self-injury or suicide through the actions their English teacher took to help them. Whatever your experience, I believe this has left us with varying degrees of comfort in journaling.

Journaling is often something I ask clients to consider doing. Initially in my career, albeit prior to a lot of electronics being available, I encouraged only handwritten journals. Over the years I've learned that this is not something everyone is comfortable with, and all too often it's due to a parent, spouse, or friend reading their journal without permission. Journaling is a very private form of writing. It's not something most of us want read by anyone very often, and never without permission to do so. So it's important when journaling to find a way to journal in a way that feels safe and confidential.

Still, even if that fear is overcome, or if one doesn't fear exposure, why journal? Henri Nouwen described it so well, "Writing can help us to concentrate, to get in touch with the deeper stirrings of our hearts, to clarify our minds, to process confusing emotions, to reflect on our experiences, to give artistic expression to what we are living, and to store significant events in our memories" (from Henri Nouwen Society Daily Meditations, 4/27/16). What a powerful exercise! And he's not the only one to suggest these outcomes. The current Psychology Today issue has a feature series entitled 'The Story of Your Life' that goes into a suggested form of prompted writing to work through past traumas as well as a story editing method to prevent a current trauma from lodging into one's psyche. Through the first method one begins with targeted questions such as "I will always remember the day when..." From here one continues to write, letting the flow take over as you describe both the experience and your feelings. In his blog, Benjamin Hardy, a PhD candidate in industrial and organizational psychology, discusses some studies as do the Psychology Today pieces, that indicate the wiring in our brain actually shifts as we journal. A psychologist from the University of the South reports that our immune system is improved. And a psychologist at Northwestern University has found that through journaling our resilience to difficult situations in life is strengthened. No wonder psychotherapists have been finding it a very effective adjunct to therapeutic progress for clients for years.



But journaling needn't be limited to "working through issues". As Nouwen said, it can be a powerful way to process our day, develop a spiritual practice, or more successfully and joyfully live our lives. Benjamin Hardy believes that daily journaling, whether brief or longer writings done on a daily basis, transforms us in several ways:

- *Optimizes our creativity;
- *Speeds up the manifestation of our goals, dreams, or hopes;
- *Provides a method with which to move on from our day without painful unprocessed feelings of failure, dread for the next day, or uncertainty of what one has really accomplished;
- *Allows for mental (and others would add emotional and spiritual) clarity;
- *Strengthens any learning of a lesson and allows for unconscious processing of material through the writing and as one sleeps;
- *Improves our sense of gratefulness and awareness of things for which to be grateful, thus improving our mood;
- *Develops the writer within; and,
- *Concretizes our life story.

All of that from simply developing a daily practice of writing. Still, what do I write about? There are many ways to journal. I liked the one suggested by Hardy in which one free-writes upon waking for 20 minutes. Years ago, in the book *The Artist's Way*, the same early morning writing was suggested. Hardy, however, also suggests we end our day by developing a to-do list for the day. It's a different blend, but may be well-suited to you. Nouwen says to simply sit down with pen and paper and express what is on your mind. Another source said if nothing else simply begin describing the events of your day and see what unfolds. So there really is no single, correct way to journal. Begin with one of these methods if you're unsure and develop your own method overtime.

But, must it be written? Can I type it? Or can I express it in other ways? We are finding in brain studies that writing by hand improves learning in children as well as helping develop reading skills, strengthening activation in parts of the brain not otherwise tapped, increasing creativity as well as generating new ideas, and improving our processing of new concepts according to an article in the *New York Times*. Still, if with all of that writing is still too difficult to face, I've found that for some of my clients drawing, coloring, or painting journals are quite effective. A client recently shared that she writes first, then paints and that in doing so the work seems to be synthesized and integrated. Thankfully there are now a lot of different programs, apps, and methods. A young woman just last week shared with me a new idea she'd found called the *Bullet Journal*. It's a book that combines day planner and goals management, and can easily be designed to incorporate journal entries. Others have shared with me apps to journal on your electronic pad, on your computer, or create a special art or photography journal.

The sky truly is the limit so that you can find and design a method that meets your specific needs, likes, and dislikes. One caveat I ask you to consider is how private the app or program is. I saw one app that indicated it encrypts your entries; and then read a review in which someone said that their entry had been emailed to them, unencrypted, as a sales ploy. And I'll never forget the evening my BFF called in tears having just received an email from someone who had purchased her old computer, with scrubbed hard drive, and shared with her information from her journal that had been kept on that drive. So whether written, handwritten, art, or otherwise maintained, be sure you feel good about the safety and confidentiality agreement you have on the device and with those with whom you live.

Still, I encourage you to consider journaling daily. As Nouwen said, it can "open in us deep wells of hidden treasures". Do you really want to miss out on that?

June is: PTSD Awareness Month

What is PTSD?

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can occur after you have been through a traumatic event. A traumatic event is something terrible and scary that you see, hear about, or that happens to you, like: combat exposure, child sexual or physical abuse, terrorist attack, sexual or physical assault, serious accidents, like a car wreck, natural disasters, like a fire, tornado, hurricane, flood, or earthquake. There are four types of PTSD symptoms:

1. Reliving the event (also called re-experiencing symptoms),
2. Avoiding situations that remind you of the event,
3. Negative changes in beliefs and feelings,
4. Feeling keyed up (also called hyperarousal).

If you think you, or someone you know, is suffering from PTSD, there is help. Talk to Dr. Beth for more information. For more details and downloadable documents about PTSD, visit <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

For any service member or family member - if you need help in a multitude of ways, not just PTSD, go to <http://heroescare.org/> for assistance.

Finding Your Way to Contentment (cont.)



your serotonin levels, in turn improving your mood. The second suggestion is that you label the mood you're feeling with a word or two (angry, sad, disappointed) and in doing so, the mindfulness of labeling that emotion decreases the feelings associated with it. Finally, making decisions about issues that are stressors for you will also bring you peace. When your brain is struggling with a situation, finding a solution (which doesn't have to be perfect, just good enough) and allowing yourself to move on is calming to your system.

If you follow blogs or routinely peek at Pinterest, you likely have seen people post about gratitude particularly around the holidays but what if you implement some of those strategies year round? I've seen some people keep a dish of blank paper with ribbon tied to it to jot down grateful thoughts and hang each paper from a the limbs of a small tree branch in a vase. Others have written the gratitude quotes down on wooden craft sticks and kept them in a bowl. If you'd like to be more private with your thoughts, what about a gratitude journal in either pictures or words? No matter how you choose to capture those thoughts, the exercise will start you

looking for more ideas to write down and in turn have you feeling more optimistic.

Labeling your feelings can be equally simple. As you go about your day, if you find yourself in a bad mood, interrupt your grumbling thoughts to ask yourself exactly what emotion it is you're feeling. If you are a visual person, consider printing out a chart of faces depicting different emotions similar to the one on the left. Keep it in your journal, on your refrigerator, on your bathroom mirror. Give the feeling a name, and take away some of the power and angst behind it. You'll find that little by little you can move away from grumpy and toward a more satisfied place.

Finally, urge yourself to make decisions if some of what has you down is because you're facing circumstances and you don't know quite what to do. My process is to list out pros and cons and consider the paths carefully. Your process may be to do that and include a gut check—what are you feeling moved to do? Be wise in solving the dilemma but the decision doesn't need to be perfect. Good enough is all you're reaching for. Do your best with the circumstances you've been given and you'll feel some relief at being able to move on.

Don't wait for a bigger paycheck, a better relationship, a nicer house to be happy. Look for ways to find happiness today. Creating new routines as those outlined above have been proven by science to be effective tools. Try something new today!

For more info, see 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy, According to Neuroscience, here: <http://time.com/4042834/neuroscience-happy-rituals/?xid=fbshare>

National Cancer Survivors Day was June 5, 2016

Whether you're still in treatment or long since finished, there are many ways to continue to take care of yourself. Eating right – limiting processed and red meat, and eating more fruits and vegetables – is an important part of that equation. Exercise can boost your stamina, lessen fatigue, and keep you on the road to better health.

For more information, visit: <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/news/specialcoverage/national-cancer-survivors-day>

July is UV Protection Month

Avoid skin cancer and apply your sunscreen! Limiting sun exposure, understanding your risk levels, and when outside, applying sunscreen properly can dramatically reduce your skin cancer risks. Also, speak with your doctor or pharmacist--some medications make your skin more sensitive to the sun so shade and sunscreen become even more important. Lastly, be sure to get your annual skin checks by a qualified doctor. When caught early, skin damage, including skin cancer, is highly treatable.

For more information, visit: <http://www.cancer.org/healthy/besafeinthesun/index?sitearea=MH>



Pineapple-Berry Ice Pops

Recipe & picture from
www.myrecipes.com

- 2 c. fresh or frozen pineapple cubes
- ¼ c. unsweetened pineapple or apple juice
- 1 Tbsp. honey
- 1 c. fresh or frozen blueberries

Combine first three ingredients in a blender and process until smoother. Pour mixture evenly into 6 3-ounce ice pop molds, leaving about 1-2 TBLS in blender. Add blueberries to blender with remaining puree. Process until well blended. Pour over pineapple mixture in ice pop molders. Insert sticks and cover if necessary to hold sticks upright. Freeze 4 hours or until firm.

Resources:

Check out the following for some different methods of journaling:

For the Bullet Journal see www.bulletjournal.com and also check some of the YouTube videos shown to see ideas on how you might design one to your needs and preferences.

For information on journaling with art, see <http://artjournalingtumblr.com/>

Want to set up a photo journal? Try the iTunes Store for an app entitled Collect.

40 Soul Stretching Conversations: *Writing a Spiritual Journal* by Joan Chittester <http://store.benetvision.org/40soco.html>

An inspiring journal with mandalas and doodles to inspire you can be found at: https://www.amazon.com/Coloring-Journal-red-Therapeutic-stress-relief/dp/1533121192/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1466314577&sr=1-1&keywords=Mandala+journal

Music to Write To at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=jzj1UX73kU>



Cilantro Lime Honey Garlic Salmon

from Julia's Album at www.juliasalbum.com

- 1 lb salmon
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- Salt & pepper
- 2 Tbsp honey
- 1 Tbsp freshly squeezed lime juice
- 2 Tbsp chopped cilantro
- 3 garlic cloves minced

Preheat oven or grill to 450F. Pat salmon dry. Brush with olive oil on all sides. Season with salt & pepper. Place the salmon on a large piece of foil. Fold foil sides and ends up (1-2 inches high) tightly around the salmon. Place on a baking sheet or grill pan. In a small bowl combine honey, lime juice, chopped cilantro, and garlic. Spread over the salmon. Leave foil open (with sides up) and bake or grill for 15-20 minutes. Carefully remove the salmon from the foil, separating from the skin which will remain stuck to foil. Plate salmon and carefully scoop the sauce from foil and pour over top.



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