

Finding Your Power to Be Happy

A silhouette of a child standing on a beach at sunset, reaching out towards the sun. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and reflecting on the water. The child's arms are extended, and their hands are positioned as if they are about to touch the sun. The background is a soft, warm orange and yellow gradient.

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

D.E. Hardesty

FINDING YOUR POWER TO BE HAPPY
Seven Practices to Bring
Unconditional Happiness into Your Life

D. E. Hardesty

www.irrationalhappiness.com/dehardesty/

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

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

If happiness is the purpose, then how do you “get happy?” This is obviously a question for the ages and there are myriad opinions. Still, I set it as my goal to find out what others have said about this.

Preface

On the surface, nobody agrees on exactly how to bring happiness into one's life. However, beneath the surface there is a common denominator in all approaches to being happy. This book describes what lies at the heart of those approaches.

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

* * *

This book offers time-tested advice on how to find unconditional happiness. I do not mean to give advice to anyone seeking help with a psychological condition. I am just a writer and a seeker of truth. I am not a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

* * *

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

D. E. Hardesty
March 2015

Chapter 1

The Power to Be Happy

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why Do We Want to Be Happy?

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

*It is a fact – a natural fact of life – that each one of us has an innate desire to seek happiness and to overcome suffering.*¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unconditional happiness is not a feeling you get from taking a big bite of something sweet, and it is not the joy of sex or the thrill

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of victory. These are mere sensations. It is not the temporary rush of feeling when something good happens to you. Unconditional happiness is not a sensation, and it is not temporary. It does not relate to how you feel right now, or how you feel about something in particular. If you allow it to be, it is your emotional ground of being.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Your power to be happy lies in your ability to turn your attention away from what you assume will make you happy, and toward unconditional happiness. Turning your attention away from

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these desires is easier once you fully understand that what you do and what you receive in life are not the sources of unconditional happiness. Understanding that you have the innate power to be happy is the start of your journey to lasting happiness.

Trapped in the Belief that Happiness Comes from Stuff

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the other side of the coin, we grow up learning that negative things make us unhappy. Bad things happen, and we react emotionally. There is much grief in the world, and all of us at some

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point will experience painful physical and emotional sensations. However, negative events and circumstances do not affect unconditional happiness, and they are usually temporary.

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

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

Happiness for No Reason

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

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

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

Doing Nothing Calculated to Find Happiness

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

The teachings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu do not provide specific steps to arrive at your goal of happiness. Instead, their wisdom prepares the mind to accept the idea that you can have great happiness without doing anything to get it. Chuang Tzu

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summed up the Taoist philosophy of happiness nicely when he said that his “greatest happiness consists precisely in doing nothing whatever that is calculated to obtain happiness...”⁴

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

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

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

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

Irrational Happiness

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

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

The truth is that you can experience real happiness for no reason at all. Free yourself of your mind’s belief that happiness comes from what you do or have. Then you can shift your attention to a place of awareness where lasting happiness exists without cause.

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