

NOVEMBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

THEME: The Psychology of Happiness

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SELF TRANSFORMATION
THERAPY

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November 'Thought of the Month': The Psychology of Happiness



“Happiness is a state of being achieved by the removal of what makes us unhappy. Happiness is waiting for us under all the complexity and negativity we create in our mindset. True happiness is accompanied by peace and joy, from the capacity to accept what is offered and let go of what is lacking.”

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Article: **The Psychology of Happiness**

The vast majority of psychological theory has to do with unwellness, being unhappy or stressed. However, little discussion is often held on how to be happy, balanced and fulfilled.

Counselling focuses on determining why a person remains in a state of stress, unhappiness or imbalance. It is important to do this, as happiness is achieved by the removal of "unhappiness". I see happiness as the natural state of the human being, but we overlay with such a complexity of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that impede feelings of joy and peace.

Therefore, I believe it is an important part of therapy to help an individual develop new habits of being and relating to replace the old unhelpful ones. These new behaviours do more than replace the old ones. They serve a number of functions such as: self expression, empowerment, autonomy to take action, purposeful activity and a resilience to handle everyday stress. The capacity to freely express ourselves, while also being capable of enjoying our experiences moments-to-moment, describes the conditions for a happy, empowered and fulfilled individual.

It is important that the way we act in our everyday life is true to our own inner feelings and sense of self. For instance, it is important we have the capacity and integrity to say yes when we mean yes, and no when we mean no. To feel free to express ourselves in challenging situations without fear is very freeing.

This article focuses on positive ways we can embody a more peaceful and happy state of being. Let's explore this under the 3 areas of stress, relationships and life values/spirituality:

Stress

- You always have a choice – It is important to remember that we always have a choice, however these choices may be difficult. Yet remembering that we always have a choice can insulate us from the demoralising and draining feeling of being stuck and powerless. If you find these types of situations recurring, it suggests you may be reproducing an unresolved dynamic of your past, where you did not find your own voice or a resolution out of the situation.
- Don't give fear power - Fear will lose its power when it is expressed from inside you, into the outer world, such as taking action or speaking-up. When you have an experience of a positive or good outcome, rather than the expected fear-based outcome, this fear loses its control over you.
- Learn patience in having your desires fulfilled - Succumbing to the desire for comfort and quick fixes draws us away from developing the capacity to comfort and calm ourselves. Instead our focus will be on quick relief from outside of ourselves, rather than from an inner capacity.
- Take what each moment offers you - If we load too much happiness on an expected future purchase or event, then we are both potentially setting ourselves up for a let down. It can be enjoyable to feel excited about something, provided that is not to the degree that when the event arrives, you are not let down from building it up too much. Doing this will also render us unable to be receptive to what the moment has to offer us.

Relationships

- Focus on how you can create conditions for positive change - focusing on how your partner can change is such an entrenched problem that we all tend to do. However, your partner will feel pressure and we will feel frustration. If you want something in your relationship from your partner, offer something first, which creates positive conditions for change, then be patient for the response.
- Focus on developing your own sense of self - be aware of what personality traits or qualities that are underdeveloped within yourself, which you may rely on your partner to provide in the relationship. Then go about overcoming the challenges to develop these aspects of self. These traits may include your capacity for socialising, lightheartedness, decisiveness, strength or assertiveness etc.

- Value the positives in your partner rather than focusing on their imperfections - when we focus on the imperfections of our partner, we will only feel frustrated and stuck. By expressing gratitude and appreciation for who they are, warts and all, they are more likely to be responsive to change and improvements in the relationship.
- Understand that love is giving without attachment to the outcome - obviously it is not healthy to give to others while feeling we do not deserve it back. However, true love gives without the expectation of an exact outcome at an exact time. True love requires this patience and understanding. When this type of giving is a two-way street, a lovely sense of freedom and appreciation develops in a relationship – it is selfless.

Life values/spirituality

- Developing a life philosophy or spiritual beliefs can be very comforting – without a belief system of your own explaining life's purpose and challenges, life can appear pointless and demoralising. It can be useful to develop your own life philosophy or spiritual beliefs as to what is the point of all this challenge and our inner drive for fulfilment.
- Life just is - this statement reflects an important requirement to be able to let go of the challenges and disappointments in life and move on to the next moment, which may offer more fulfilling or enjoyable experiences. If we get stuck on the past, there will always be plenty of memories of disappointments, failures and injustices to focus on. Letting go is an extremely important facet of happiness, as it allows you to live present-centred in each moment rather than being drawn back to what was lacking.
- You can create your future - if we lack self-awareness of our past, our view of our future will be coloured by disappointments and unresolved situations of our past. Therefore, it is important to detach from fears or disappointments from our past and the desire for a quick-fix from unpleasant feelings. Having the capacity to minimise the influence of our past, allows us to be more receptive to our deeper inner feelings which reflect our true inner desires that know how to achieve fulfilment.
- Learn to tune into your own inner feelings - it is important to tune into our own deep-seated inner feelings as a guide to how we live our life, such as our values, goals and beliefs. Our busy lives and emotional baggage create a noisy inner world, which drowns out this quiet deeper voice of wisdom, self-knowledge and guidance. This deeper aspect of our self knows who we are and what we want, in order to obtain freedom of self expression and fulfilment within ourselves.

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