

Why Aren't We Happier?

"You attract what you believe you deserve. Thus, not only do you enjoy as much happiness as you believe you are worthy of, but you suffer as much pain as you believe you are worthy of."

Dr. Robert Holden

The Simple Answer

Why aren't we happier? It's a simple question. And believe it or not, there's a simple answer. *We are only able to enjoy about as much happiness as we deep down believe we are entitled to have.* What?! That's it?! Yes, that is it. But it will likely take further insight and a serious grasp on how to change our internal belief system before most of us will be ready to accept the responsibility that goes along with this understanding.

When we are feeling really good about ourselves, happy feelings are a natural response to the internal belief that we're fundamentally decent, that we're headed in the right direction, and that there is purpose in our lives. However, most of us secretly fear that perhaps we're *not* really worthy of lasting happiness. And that's because our lifelong mental conditioning has instilled within us a deep-seated guilt, and a belief that we're never quite good enough.

Oh sure, we enjoy portions of life's little pleasures, but will we allow ourselves to love, relish, and delight, in sustained happiness? How much joy can you handle? How much love and attention will you accept before you get antsy? How long will you permit yourself to bask in unlimited freedom of thought before your practical nature requires you to focus on what's wrong around you?

Paradigms

Our paradigms constitute the mental programs that sift, shade, and filter, all incoming information. Our individual paradigms are the models of reality that our brains have constructed. It is through these "lenses" that we view and understand the world. We are rarely aware of the internal models through which we compare and judge everything, and we rarely question their accuracy.

It's important that we recognize that our mind views everything through the mirror of past experiences. The mind filters all new incoming data through our political, social, scientific, economic, and religious predispositions. This is very important, because many of our subconscious views are seriously flawed.

Historians will grudgingly admit that about 90 percent of everything we think we know of history just isn't so. As a would-be historian, I personally struggle with this declaration. What I think I know of history I really do want to be true. I mean after all, I've spent much of the last seventy years learning, relearning, and struggling to remember historically accurate information. Yet the real truth is, human history is pretty much opinion and propaganda. And the larger issue is that it's not just the history we think we know that is inaccurate, our subconscious mind is literally plagued with defective paradigms. The larger truth is that if we're willing to be blatantly honest with ourselves, we'd have to say that the vast majority of what we believe is not particularly accurate. This is not to say that we are unable to function with false paradigms; people apparently lived for thousands of years believing the world was flat. Or so we're told.

Holding on to defective concepts and imperfect beliefs interferes with our ability to fully experience happiness. So, if finding and experiencing happiness is the ultimate underlying motivation of all the actions of man, as some scientists claim, what about the pursuit of truth? How does this play into the picture? Let's suspend this question for the present and ask a slightly different one. Why don't we simply stop right where we are, and just *decide* to be happy? Well, duh, why don't we? It is a good idea, and for some it might just work. But surely for most of us, we're going to have to undo some flawed habits of thinking and replace them with improved ways of being. In other words, we need to get a better grasp on what is best for us and release all the internal programs that are holding us back. From this perspective, finding happiness has more to do with "undoing" than doing. Letting go of our automatic ways of responding to new information. This is a lesson we will likely relearn a number of times before we really get it.

New information integrated into our personal paradigm becomes knowledge we can use. Increased knowledge expands the mind and stimulates our creativity. When we are in a creative state of mind we are generally at our best. Positive thoughts are flowing, new ideas arise, things seem easier to accomplish. Creativity is a beautiful thing. Considerable research now points to the conclusion that we are designed to create. And that's certainly true of our personal lives, because whether we are ready to admit it or not, we are the creators of our reality. Further, there is compelling evidence to support the contention that we literally exist to create new experiences through which we may grow and evolve.

Our imagination is stimulated when we integrate new experiences and new insights. We begin to consider what the new information might mean, how it might be used, what actions or new opportunities we might pursue as a

consequence. With fresh discernment we are able to stimulate new dreams and dare to consider moving outside the current boundaries of what we believe we are capable of. This, in turn, expands our paradigm, and frees us from a form of mental bondage. If we could face it, we'd realize that many of us are chained down and in prison. A prison every bit as daunting as the one I experienced for several years. The truth is that the most limiting prison of all is the one we've constructed in our mind. All the negative thoughts that have piled up in our subconscious must be largely released. Everything that no longer serves us must go. Not necessarily everything that is negativity, as exposure to negativity can and does foster wisdom within certain situations. But all the negative subconscious programs accumulated within us throughout a lifetime must be released. We first must recognize the need to lighten up our thinking. Then we can set about instructing our subconscious to release every mental routine that no longer serves us to be deleted. There are literally thousands of experiences we no longer remember at a conscious level, that color and darken the lenses through which we experience our current reality.

Living with Lies

Most of us fail to integrate new incoming information. We discount it without much thought, or we filter it out completely. The sad truth is that most people would rather live comfortably with a lie than go to the effort of integrating new information. Is that too in your face? Is that too scary? Do you want to deny the truth of it? One may be able to admit it's true for someone else, but when it comes to us personally, we almost always think it's the other person who isn't getting it.

To improve the way we see things, to adjust our paradigm if you will, we must decide to allow ourselves to think outside our self-imposed limitations. We must determine to get the blinders off, to see outside our day-to-day experience. Only then can we embark upon a new life of discovery. It is central to our improvement that we recognize that each of us is already living the life we have chosen, or at the least, we are living the life we have allowed someone else to choose for us.

It's easy to blame others for our current situations. There is a certain comfort in being the "innocent" victim. In this way we are never at fault, and people will pay attention to us and our dilemma. The ego views this as a double win. But the blame game is for those who are destined to be fundamentally unhappy. To experience true joy and happiness, we must accept responsibility. There is no need to shout it from the rooftops, or confess our past stupidity to anyone, other than perhaps to those we have harmed. But in order to become the happy,

balanced, evolved, person we deep down really wish to be, we must take responsibility for all the circumstances of our lives. To get there, it must be anchored in our brain that what stands between us and our greater good, is the way we think. That's the real truth.

It is not the outside world we need to change, although we may do just that, instead it is our own mental reactions to the world we live in. Most of us refuse to admit it, but the unhappiness we experience we have subliminally sought out. You see, there is a certain social comfort in being treated unfairly. Being the "righteous" victim has benefits. Deep down, we are "in effect" paid off for bathing in the sympathetic understanding of others. We like to talk about our troubles and indulge a little (or a lot) in self-pity. Hey! We're only human, right?

Money

The insidious belief that things can make us happy, and that the absence of things can leave us unfulfilled, is a lie; pure and simple. Enjoy the things you have, but do not buy into the common belief that things can make you happy. Happy people don't need to buy status symbols. Status seeking is a weakness. The insecure have always attempted to surround themselves with validations of their self-worth. They distract themselves from looking within. They are afraid. They mentally take the position that they must be okay, because look at all their stuff. Those who can't afford the stuff are driven on by the false belief, that money will fix their problems. It is not true. Hundreds of studies have proven that money does not elicit happiness. And yet, throughout society, we are convinced that more money will make the difference.

Money is a facilitator. It is neither good nor bad. We all need it, we all want it to some degree or another, and we all use it. It impacts much of what we do throughout the majority of our lives, it shapes a considerable amount of our thinking, and it sparks much of our action. Oddly enough, very few people really know how money is created, and what that actually means to them. For the most part, people look to money as security, both physically and emotionally. Money as emotional security tends to emanate from our tendency towards class distinction. It is a sign of status when we have money. We tend to feel better about ourselves when we have more than sufficient for our needs. Money, however, is false security. We ignore this understanding to our detriment. So, where's the balance? Suffice it to say, that money is in our way when it interferes with our personal growth. Many with economic surplus tend to have problems with humility. It's not always so, but it is a challenge for many of those who are financially successful.

Happy people gain their status from within. They are comfortable in their own skin. They feel greater confidence by having a solid grasp on knowing who they are. Why they are here. What their primary purpose is in life. They are internally validated through pursuit of worthwhile objectives and work well done.

Anyone can choose to be happy. It does not require money. And anyone can choose the course of their lives. While unhappy people may not believe that it's possible to achieve happiness without large sums of cash, happy people resist the fear and decide how they will live. Those who are happy with who they are will always decide what shall, and shall not, constitute the purpose for their existence. If money is one's purpose, they are way off track. Mahatma Gandhi left us with this insight: "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do is in harmony."

Addiction

There is a real chemical payoff in our body when our sub-conscious stimulates the release of short chain amino acids, peptides, or what most of us know as hormones. These are powerful drugs that begin to flow almost immediately when we wallow in negative thinking. One of the most vigorously potent of these hormones is connected with that state of mind best represented as "victimhood." It is oh-so-easy to become addicted to this internally generated juice. Without knowing it consciously, we create situations whereby we are victimized, and our body gets its fix of the hormone it is seeking.

All of us are addicted to one or more of our internally produced drugs. Marathon runners are a good example of this curious, but little discussed phenomenon. I've known long-distance runners that referred to their training hills as "Mount Orgasm," because of the huge endorphin release that came when gaining the summit. The addiction to endorphins keeps a lot of runners running. We may laugh, and call that a socially acceptable addiction, but do we really want to live in a place of addiction?

Dr. Joe Dispenza, recognized authority on the mind, brain function, and body chemistry, defines an addiction as anything you do that you don't really have control over. What parts of your life are so automatic and routine you don't really know how to change it? What are you addicted to? Some might call love an addiction. Even so, virtually all of us would believe that is a good thing. Well then, what about sex? All of us know people who are literally addicted to sex. The entire pornography industry is based on this powerful addiction.

By observing our own conversations carefully, we can discover the extent to which we push our internal buttons in order to get a hormone fix. There are a number of peptides produced in the hypothalamus, the little hormone factory in our brain. These hormones have a direct correlation with our most powerful emotions. The hypothalamus regulates food and fluid intake along with a number of other functions. There is a peptide release for love, and one for lust, one for happiness, and another for anger. There is one for depression, and one for victimhood, and so forth. Many times, the subconscious develops situations where we kick a whole cascade of these hormones into our system. The thing is, we are not just psychologically playing out developed habits of thinking; we are literally addicted chemically to certain forms of behavior.

Pay attention to how many people complain about their headaches, how tired they are, their heartaches, and the dilemmas of their friends. We complain about all kinds of problems with everyone, in addition business, government, and world affairs. Cable News Networks specialize in driving hormone addictions. If we are not careful, we can easily become news junkies. We all know them, and we may know them intimately, because as the comic strip *Pogo* once said: "They is us."

To sense the depth of the problem, simply consider how often you hear news media expressions of joy, happiness, and enthusiasm for life. How often can you count on hearing positive excitement from your friends, your family, or yourself? Observe your words - they deeply matter. Every word we speak is backed by thought, and all thoughts are vibrations that resonate with some form of emotions. Thoughts and their attendant emotions, drive the creation of our reality.

All of us have a host of past injuries, errors, and pain we can recall. Dwelling on them perpetuates and deepens the damage they do. As we revisit these experiences of hurt, embarrassment, or guilt, it strengthens the bonds that bind us. Unless we are specifically revisiting negative memories in order to give them a higher vibration, or to deal with them one last time before letting them go, we should be careful at dredging up past miseries. Doing so is much more dangerous than we realize. Typically, we excuse ourselves the perverse bathing in past upsetting memories by suggesting we'll learn from it. And perhaps there may be some truth here, but there is a huge difference between briefly looking backwards for greater insight and taking up residence in past hurts and emotional trauma. The majority of the time, when people are focused on past experiences they are dwelling on negative situations rather than those that are uplifting and inspirational.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness can wipe the past clean of misery and guilt. But only if we will allow it. Those who do not know how to forgive are destined to lead less happy lives. And those who hold too tightly to past hurts will endure more of the same, leading inexorably to greater distress, anguish, and unhappiness. So, unless we learn to forgive others their trespasses against us, we are philosophically and emotionally unable to forgive ourselves. It's the way your mind works. Argue with it, refuse to believe it, or insist that you're above this happening to you, but none of this will change the way our subconscious mind is designed to function. Forgiveness is vital to happiness. Without forgiveness sustained happiness is impossible.

Forgiving allows us to put the past behind us. It stops us from being a victim. It empowers us to rise above our petty grievances, and it gives us back our lives. In the words of Pollen and Levine in the book, *It's All in Your Head*: "It's another of those spiritual ironies: Once you stop trying to control your past and just let it go, you'll find the past no longer has control over you."

Consider the programs being constructed in your subconscious mind as the result of the negative flow of information in your brain just today and over the past week. Step outside yourself and observe your interactions neutrally. You're likely to discover that there is a heavy weighting of data flowing into you which powers up negative emotions. It is critically important for us to realize that no one can thrive, physically, mentally, or emotionally, by dwelling on the negative for any length of time. Yes we must face negativity at times, but we must be so very careful to not let it infect us, and down-regulate our entire emotional well-being. Guard your thoughts. Find ways to raise your vibrational set-point, laugh, smile broadly, and you'll be surprised at how fast things improve.

Okay, so this all sounds semi-rational, and it does make sense at some level, but most of us don't really believe that engaging in gossip, or complaining about our work, family, lack of money, lack of appreciation, and/or whining about what's wrong with our bodies, actually affects us. Instead, our addictions - and they are real addictions - rationalize for us. Just like the alcoholic who can "hold his or her liquor," we buttress ourselves with a battery of similar rationales. For the most part, we deny the possibility that we are responsible for our problems. Playing victim to anything or anyone is strong evidence of hormonal addiction. Look around. You will not need to look far to recognize a person that is always blaming someone for something, and that person may be you. Choose to change. Choose to change right now. Until we get this figured out and deal with ourselves

honestly, we'll continue to shift the blame on anything or anyone but ourselves. This is a trap of our own making. Its ultimate end is misery.

A rather typical response when someone finally grasps this negativity thing for the first time goes something like: "Even if I did admit there is some truth to this concept, how could anyone function in the real world by avoiding the news and not engaging in day-to-day conversation?" Grasping the depth of our dilemma is always unsettling. The real questions should be: How do I control my thoughts? How do I interact with others? How do I live in the real world and stay healthy of mind?

To deal with our addiction to negativity we must first admit, at least to ourselves, that we do get a perverse payoff when indulging in what amounts to a whining session. We need to recognize that our obsessive interest in most social media interaction, television, podcasts, celebrity magazines, and talk programming, comes from our desire to bathe in negative gossip, and be titillated by what's wrong with others. To fix it, we need to really know what the "it" is.

Let's use the garden analogy. No one ever intentionally plants weeds in a garden. But weeds show up anyway. They are pervasive. Before your garden will produce what you've planted, the weeds will do their best to take over. In the early stage, when shoots are just beginning to come up, that you need to identify the stuff you want, from the stuff you don't. Then, you've got to get busy weeding.

Guilt

Next to a lack of forgiveness, the most toxic weed in your mental garden is guilt. If you want to be happy, you'll need to eradicate this automatic response program right where it lives. It resides deep in our core; in the secret inner self.

Psychologists tell us that somewhere around 75 percent of our mental operating programs were developed by the time we were six years old. As adults we are often running around, busy living lives of frustration, disappointment, and defeat, because we view our world and circumstances through the emotional eyes of an underdeveloped child. Yes, it's incredible, but it's also quite true! You see, guilt unravels good. Guilt will neutralize happiness. Guilt destroys peace. And guilt encourages all kinds of disease. Feelings of guilt erode joy on contact. We seldom realize this insidious subconscious paradigm is the cankering worm that undermines us as we proceed through life.

Guilt is a sense of wrong. It represents our deep-seated belief that we're not good enough; that we don't really deserve more than a miserly share of

happiness. Guilt is all wrapped up in the “sin” word. We learned in childhood to store feelings of shame for childish misbehavior, misdeeds, and errors in judgment. Guilt has imposed an upward limit on our happiness thermostat. We pursue happiness, but early on we “learned” that we’re not really good enough. Besides, isn’t it awfully selfish of us to want all this happiness? Hint: That’s our guilt speaking.

Real happiness, that marvelous state of being where we see life as incredible, love as magical, and beauty all around, requires that we suspend our internal judgment. We must learn to quiet the monkey mind of our negative thoughts. We must learn to love and enjoy our own company. Why aren’t we happier? Because we don’t know a better way. The Buddha put it this way, “Everything is based on mind, is led by mind, is fashioned by mind. If you speak and act with a polluted mind, suffering will follow you as the oxcart follows the ox. If you speak and act with a pure mind, happiness will follow you as a shadow follows form.”