

Happiness for the Practical Mind: 7 Steps to Discovering and Loving Your Authentic Self

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This book is dedicated to my Mother

Take your time & count to 5

Keep yourself always safe & Alive...

The greatest gift a child can give...

Is that their parents they outlive...

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Chapter 3: Feelings About Self Should Come From Self

Have you ever tried to purchase a gift for a friend or loved one you don't know very well? You want to gift them something that will bring them happiness yet you're not quite sure what that is. Or they haven't learned how to create a wish list yet on Amazon.com. So basically you're just taking a shot in the dark. Now take that concept and apply it to yourself; how well do you really know what you need to be happy?

It's hard to be happy when you have no idea what that truly means. Of course you think you know, but why then are you still seeking? At the basic level, all of us really need the same thing; love. However, in order to know what *you* need and how to get it, you must first discover who you are. Then you can plot a path from who you *think* you are now (A) to who you're meant to be (B).

The reason we continue to look for happiness outside ourselves is because the alternative is difficult and scary. Who wants to embark on the laborious journey of self-searching and examination? Especially if that means finding something we don't like about ourselves. God forbid we have to learn to accept it. Acceptance is crucial yet is one of the hardest parts of self-examination; once we accept something, we're responsible. And if we're responsible, we are the ones to blame for our unhappy life.

I don't know about you, but for the majority of my life I had no idea what I needed to be happy. There was always this nagging feeling that someday I would figure it out. In the meantime, I figured if I just kept my nose to the grindstone and charged ahead I'd eventually find it. I guess in a sense, that day finally came; but it was a painful lesson in finding inner-peace and happiness. Experience is that way; a painful teacher.

Through self-discovery, I learned something important about myself; I want to be liked—a real shocker. In an attempt to be liked, I sometimes feel responsible for other people's feelings. I guess my thinking was/is that if I protect the feelings of others, I'm a good person; thus they'll like me. If people like me, then I can like myself. The reality is **I cannot alter the lens of others in an attempt to manipulate the way they view me as a person.** This is still looking outside me for happiness.

How others view you is not as important as how you view yourself. Having a realistic view of self is vital to finding what you need to be happy. The main point here is that you are not responsible for how others view you; to some extent. Obviously if your actions are unacceptable you're somewhat responsible. Conversely, if you conduct yourself with respect and love for others, you're more likely to receive these same blessings in return. The benefit of the latter is the genuine aspect of it; you're not manipulating someone else's feeling towards you by lying or manipulating the truth about yourself.

In the summer of 2006 (while working through the process I outline in this book) I had a breakthrough. As the result of a simple conversation with a friend, I realized how much of my life I'd been inflating my own self-image by guarding and manipulating the feelings of others—or at least thinking I was. After meeting with a group of friends, one individual asked me specifically if I wanted to join her for a movie. As I'd done a million times before in my life, I made up some lie as to not hurt her feelings since all I really wanted to do was return home and relax by myself. Here's how it went:

Friend: Hey, do you want to go see a movie?

My Mind: *Crap, how do I get out of this...? I know! I just went to the grocery store and need to get some things I have in my car to the fridge.*

Me (responding almost immediately): Ah man, I just went to the store and have some ice cream in the car I need to get home.

Friend: What Kind?

My Mind: Crap, I need a quick second to come up with something... a flavor of ice-cream... stall, stall

Me: Huh?

Friend: What kind of ice cream?

Me: Rocky Road

I then left and headed home. On the way home I intended to stop by the grocery store to pick up some Rocky Road to settle my conscience. It was then I had an epiphany. Every conversation I had ever had with people where I lied because I didn't want to hurt their feelings flashed through my mind. *Man, I'm sick*, I thought. I called up my life coach and shared my new found introspection. He then officially gave me permission to use the word "no" without feeling guilt. Moreover, that I could say no without giving excuses and that I am not responsible for other people's feelings. I know it sounds funny, but actually hearing someone giving me permission to say no was exactly what I needed.

Now obviously you must not confuse this reasoning with not caring and intentionally hurting someone; **that is not what I'm talking about here**. I'm talking about feelings about you; more precisely, the feelings you get towards self from others.

The goal is to get the feelings about self from self. When you have an internal deficiency of positive, loving, and healthy feelings towards self, you need to make up for that somewhere; so you look externally. These external forces only add a temporary positive deposit and need to be continually maintained to remain balanced. It becomes a constant struggle to stay balanced and honestly it's freaking exhausting!

What other people think about you is none of your business; what you think of yourself is.

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

- *Eleanor Roosevelt*

Today I officially give YOU permission to say no! Try it out... the next time someone asks you to do something you'd rather not do, just say no. That's it, shut up after that. You're not responsible for the reasons they create in their head. You might be surprised at how few people actually ask you why.

We're judged by our actions rather than our intentions.

As I worked through the process in this book, I discovered more than a few amazing things about myself; some of which were hard to accept. Two specific things were: 1) I didn't like who I was and 2) I lacked a realistic view of myself.

Both of these were difficult to accept since I always viewed myself as having a high self-esteem—yet it was obvious by the way I had been living and treating myself that I wasn't my own best friend. I wasn't very kind to me.

The second discovery was how I presented myself on the outside was not what I was feeling on the inside. It also became apparent that, although I wasn't a bad or mean person, I wasn't as loving and caring to others as I perceived myself to be. My actions weren't always a direct reflection of my intentions. Let's just say my follow-through sucked. The point is I had an unrealistic view of my relationship with others since it was based on my intentions; what I thought about doing and knew was kind and thoughtful. Yet outwardly I often portrayed something else all together.

This talk about actions versus intentions may be a little confusing; which I understand. Or maybe you're not quite sure what I'm trying to get at. As you work through the process of self-discovery and getting to know your true self through acceptance and self-love, your perception of how you see yourself will change. So too will the way you act and behave as your intentions and actions become more in line with each other.

The goal is establishing a healthy and realistic view of self—rather than one based on intentions alone. In our quest for happiness and acceptance our actions often reflect what we want others to see rather than how we see ourselves. As we begin to know and accept our true self, void of self-serving ego, what we need to be happy becomes more

clear and available regardless of how we believe to be perceived by others. As a result, our actions automatically become more altruistic in nature as we need less externally to make us happy. In short; **the less we need externally to make us happy, the more pure and good our intentions and motives become.**

Again, happiness is the result of living a life true to ones ideal self and values. Wow, that sounds easy right? The reason why people struggle with this concept is they have no idea what their ideal self looks like. More than likely they're striving towards an ideal self they feel expected to have or were given and feels like a pair of shoes a size too small. Moreover, those who have an ideal self often feel it's unattainable. Worse yet, and most terrifying of all, was the fear I had and described earlier; **what if I strive for this "ideal" self, achieve it, and I'm still miserable? Then what?**

The answer to that question can be summed up in one simple statement:

“If you want something you have never had, you must do something you've never done.”

-Author Unknown

The only question left is: what are you willing to do to discover your ideal authentic self and find happiness?

Your First Action Assignment

Before you read any further in this book I want you to take a moment and write down what you're ideal self looks like. Included in the Appendix is the **Ideal Self Worksheet** to help you with the process. Don't worry if you find it difficult or vague, this is just a baseline for you to start from. You're true authentic self will reveal itself as you work through the 7 steps in Part III.

Chapter 4: Taking Out The Trash

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony."

-Ghandi

I believe Gandhi's view of happiness to be right on. Thus, we need to get three things in harmony; **our thoughts, words, and actions**. The result of such harmony is a healthy self-image based in reality. Happiness is the by-product of having our thoughts, words, and actions in harmony with our authentic self.

It has been my experience that thought, words, and actions based upon love bring the greatest serenity and happiness into our lives. This begins with love for self as it extends outward. Personally, I did not wake up one day and love everything and everyone... how could I? I did not truly love myself—or so I discovered through this process. It has been a long journey and one that continues on a day-to-day basis.

When looking at these three areas, there appears to be a paradox. You have to do (**action**) and say (**words**) the right things in order to think (**thought**) healthy about yourself and your world in order to be happy (i.e. you can't think your way into good living, you must live your way into good thinking). It's all about action. **You cannot intellectualize and read about happiness and wake up one day happy**. It just doesn't work that way, at least not for me or anyone else I've known. Yet in order to do the right things (**action**), you have to think them first. That is why it is important to realize this journey is a process. It takes practice and gets easier over time. Eventually, the right thoughts are the first to come into your mind, followed by the right actions. The natural result being self-respect and a positive self-image based in reality.

I must point out why I use the phrase *based in reality*. As we discussed briefly earlier, it's easy to confuse actions with intentions. Our intention doesn't mean squat if not followed with appropriate action which can lead to a skewed perception of how we are actually perceived by others.

In short, your head is full of crap. Whether you realize it or not, there are thousands of thoughts running through your head every millisecond; most of them are sabotaging your ability to be happy. The result of working through the following 7 steps is simple yet not easy; take inventory of your thoughts, character traits, fears, etc.—the good and the bad—keep the good and discover what you can learn from the perceived bad, and then let it go. It's about accepting who you are completely, embracing humility, and the realization that the power to be completely happy is already inside of you waiting to be unleashed. Happiness is your natural, authentic state.

Here are the steps we're going to take together:

Step 1 – Awareness

Step 2 – Surrender

Step 3 – Acceptance

Step 4 – Self-Searching and Inventory Management

Step 5 – Atonement and Forgiveness

Step 6 – Spirituality

Step 7 – Maintenance

I hope you took the time to fill out the **Ideal Self Worksheet** found in the Appendix. I encourage you to be completely honest with yourself and just write down whatever comes to your mind. Write down what you strive to achieve in yourself or habits, vices, or character traits you wish you could change or wish you had. Again, this is only a baseline to see where you're at and help you start to visualize where you want to go.

Before we get into the steps directly, I'd like to make something clear on the topic of spirituality. All that is required is that you believe in the possibility that there may be something outside of self, outside of your control, which (whether you believe it to be real or not) can, may, or will provide you with some type of guidance in your life. Call it God, Buddha, the Universe, a Greater Conscience, etc. it doesn't matter. **If you believe you are the center of**

the universe, this isn't going to work. If you're not sure, go outside and look up. Do you know what's out there, beyond what your eyes can see or mind can comprehend?

Let's get started.

Part III: 7 Steps to Discovering And Loving Your Authentic Self

“The image of myself which I try to create in my own mind in order that I may love myself is very different from the image which I try to create in the minds of others in order that they may love me.”- W.H. Auden

Chapter 5: Awareness

“Awareness is empowering.”

- Rita Wilson

I've always liked the saying, “I didn't know what I didn't know.” For years I was unaware there existed a better way to live; a life based on the acceptance and knowing of my authentic self that could bring true inner-peace and happiness. Character building, in terms of living a purposeful and fulfilling life, was not something I sought for happiness but rather as a means to obtain something; a tool rather than a virtue.

At age twenty-two, I fulfilled a childhood dream by becoming a full-time zookeeper—primate keeper. I was happy... for a few years. Then one day I woke up and realized I wasn't happy anymore. It was that moment when I discovered a deep awareness that no matter what I accomplished in life, I would never be satisfied. **I felt it in my soul.**

For the next sixteen years, I continued to search for satisfaction outside of myself. With each new job or relationship, I was fulfilled for a while, but eventually the dissatisfaction with life would return. Although I was aware of this uneasy and restless feeling, I had no idea what to do about it. I was aware of a problem, but was unaware not only of the source, but that there was a solution.

Not until I was forced out of pain and desperation to seek a different way of living, did I become aware of the source of my unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life. I was trying to fill an internal hole with material (external) things. Out of this awareness came the greatest discovery of all: I could not fix myself.

Awareness

The first step to inner-peace and happiness is awareness. This awareness is comprised of two parts: 1) the awareness that something needs to change, and 2) awareness of your thoughts and inner-dialog.

In regards to change, I'm talking about real change here; not geographical, professional, or material, but a significant change in your perception of the world and your place in it.

Change of this magnitude must come from outside self. Yes, I know this point goes counter intuitive to what most think of self-help. My journey consisted of finding those that had what I wanted—true inner-peace, happiness and serenity—and asking them for help and taking action on the suggestions they provided. Even though the decision to make a change came from within self, the actions that followed required guidance and help from forces outside myself.

This idea that change must come from outside self may be difficult to grasp at first; after all, haven't we always heard that real change must start from within? To some extent this is true, but be honest with yourself, if you have the capacity to make this change, why haven't you done so? The awareness is the realization that you need help and a new perspective, something you can't get on your own.

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

-Albert Einstein

Meditation and Thought Awareness

To discover just how self-sabotaging your thoughts can be, you need awareness of what your thoughts are telling you about yourself. One such way is through the power of meditation. One myth is that meditation is all about thinking nothing or clearing the mind. There are different types of meditation; one such type is Vipassana which means having insight or acute awareness of what is happening as it is happening. This type of meditation helps us become aware of our thoughts as we're thinking them.

Whether or not you've tried Vipassana meditation, you should seriously consider it. If you're interested in a simple guide to meditation, I highly suggest an awesome book on meditation titled *Mindfulness in Plain English* by Ven. Henepola Gunaratana. Gunaratana explains that meditation is not easy, yet invaluable in harnessing the power of awareness. The following section from this amazing book expresses the importance of becoming aware of our thoughts and feelings. The section I choose from the book below is a bit lengthy. I tried several times to shorten the excerpt but felt it was all too valuable. The emotions and concept describes me perfectly. I'm sure you'll find some familiar emotions in this section as I did.

Meditation is not easy. It takes time and it takes energy. It also takes grit, determination and discipline. It requires a host of personal qualities which we normally regard as unpleasant and which we like to avoid whenever possible. We can sum it all up in the American word 'gumption'. Meditation takes 'gumption'. It is certainly a great deal easier just to kick back and watch television. So why bother? Why waste all that time and energy when you could be out enjoying yourself? Why bother? Simple. Because you are human. And just because of the simple fact that you are human, you find yourself heir to an inherent unsatisfactoriness in life which simply will not go away. You can suppress it from your awareness for a time. You can distract yourself for hours on end, but it always comes back—usually when you least expect it. All of a sudden, seemingly out of the blue, you sit up, take stock, and realize your actual situation in life.

There you are, and you suddenly realize that you are spending your whole life just barely getting by. You keep up a good front. You manage to make ends meet somehow and look OK from the outside. But those periods of desperation, those times when you feel everything caving in on you, you keep those to yourself. You are a mess. And you know it. But you hide it beautifully. Meanwhile, way down under all that you just know there has got to be some other way to live, some better way to look at the world, some way to touch life more fully. You click into it by chance now and then. You get a good job. You fall in love. You win the game, and for a while, things are different. Life takes on a richness and clarity that makes all the bad times and humdrum fade away. The whole texture of your experience changes and you say to yourself, "OK, now I've made it; now I will be happy". But then that fades, too, like smoke in the wind. You are left with just a memory. That and a vague awareness that something is wrong.

But there is really another whole realm of depth and sensitivity available in life, somehow, you are just not seeing it. You wind up feeling cut off. You feel insulated from the sweetness of experience by some sort of sensory cotton. You are not really touching life. You are not making it again. And then even that vague awareness fades away, and you are back to the same old reality. The world looks like the usual foul place, which is boring at best. It is an emotional roller coaster, and you spend a lot of your time down at the bottom of the ramp, yearning for the heights.

So what is wrong with you? Are you a freak? No. You are just human. And you suffer from the same malady that infects every human being. It is a monster in side all of us and it has many arms: Chronic tension, lack of genuine compassion for others, including the people closest to you, feelings being blocked up, and emotional deadness. Many, many arms. None of us is entirely free from it. We may deny it. We try to suppress it. We build a whole culture around hiding from it, pretending it is not there, and distracting ourselves from it with goals and projects and status. But it never goes away. It is a constant undercurrent in every thought and every perception; a little wordless voice at the back of the head saying, "Not good enough yet. Got to have more. Got to make it better. Got to be better." It is a monster, a monster that manifests everywhere in subtle forms.

Go to a party. Listen to the laughter, that brittle-tongued voice that says fun on the surface and fear underneath. Feel the tension, feel the pressure. Nobody really relaxes. They are faking it. Go to a ball game. Watch the fan in the stand. Watch the irrational fit of anger. Watch the uncontrolled frustration bubbling forth from people that masquerades under the guise of enthusiasm, or team spirit. Booing, cat-calls and unbridled egotism in the name of team loyalty. Drunkenness, fights in the stands. These are the people trying desperately to release tension from within. These are not people who are at peace with themselves.

Watch the news on TV. Listen to the lyrics in popular songs. You find the same theme repeated over and over in variations. Jealousy, suffering, discontent and stress.

Life seems to be a perpetual struggle, some enormous effort against staggering odds. And what is our solution to all this dissatisfaction? We get stuck in the 'If only' syndrome. If only I had more money, then I would be happy. If only I could find somebody who really loves me, if only I could lose 20 pounds, if only I had a color TV, Jacuzzi, and curly hair, and on and on forever. So where does all this junk come from and more important, what can we do about it? It comes from the conditions of our own minds. It is a deep, subtle and pervasive set of mental habits, a Gordian knot which we have built up bit by bit and we can unravel just the same way, one piece at a time. We can tune up our awareness, dredge up each separate piece and bring it out into the light. We can make the unconscious conscious, slowly, one piece at a time.

Ah, there it was, in the second to last sentence, “**We can tune up our awareness, dredge up each separate piece and bring it out into the light.**” That’s important! That is what we’re going to do!

You may find it too difficult to meditate at this point in your happiness journey. What you can do is start tuning into *the committee* (your thoughts) and pay attention to what they’re telling you about yourself.

Awareness Actions

Thought Awareness

Your exercise for this step is fairly simple, at least on paper. If you’re not used to being completely aware of what you’re thinking, this might be a little more difficult. The exercise is using a thought journal to increase awareness of your inner-dialog.

If you’re like me, it’s difficult at times to stop my mind on one single thought. By writing down what I’m thinking, not worrying about grammar, syntax, or the way it sounds, I get a better understanding and awareness of where I’m at mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. When I first started this practice I carried a Moleskin pocket sized notebook around in my pocket to jot down my thoughts anytime I had a spare moment.

The power behind this exercise isn’t so much what you write in your journal, but the action of becoming aware of your thoughts. Pay attention to your inner-voice and what it’s telling you. Become aware of how you perceive yourself and the tone of your inner dialog. The first step in changing this dialog is awareness.

Get yourself a notebook or journal (better yet, get several); keep one by your bed, in your car, in your desk, and start jotting down your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Again, it’s not how you write, just put down on paper whatever it is you’re feeling and thinking as often as you can. Continue your thought journal and within a few weeks you’ll begin to notice how you’re treating yourself mentally.

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