

H A P P I N E S S

Turn On Your Inner Light

You Control the Switch

By Debbie Mandel



If we think that circumstances make us unhappy, we should broaden our view. Every week I speak to cancer patients; some wake up happy to savor each moment, living more fully than ever before. And you don't have to be confronted with your own mortality to enjoy life either. I have a friend who was fired from a lucrative, prestigious position and was delighted to try something new and exciting. "I never would have had the courage to walk out on all that money even though I was miserable at work. I'm glad they fired me!" Nevertheless, many of us can remember waking up in the morning with all our parts working and the sun shining brightly, feeling unhappy and not knowing why.

The last thing we want to hear when we are despondent is, "Cheer up!" Nobody can cheer up on command, especially when we are immersed in disturbing thoughts which cause us to feel sad, disappointed, anxious, resentful and disrupted. The way to achieve happiness is to change our thinking about those circumstances by letting go of the disturbing thoughts. You control the switch to turn on your inner light. Are you motivated to give up being a caterpillar that lives in a dark place and transform yourself into a butterfly that lives in the light?

Gifts Come In Different Forms

I would like to share with you my personal circumstances. I was a caregiver to two parents who had Alzheimer's disease, first my father and then my mother. Since I'm an only child, the burden was all on my shoulders. However, juggling terminally ill parents, a husband, 3 children, work and a dog, I realized that I was just going through the motions, but without my usual sense of humor and cheerfulness. While some people feel fatigued and drained when they are mildly depressed, I rushed from one busy activity to the

next to avoid thinking. I had this ache in my heart that wouldn't go away...and it somehow needed to be expressed.

Because writing is my passion combined with the experience of the destructive force of Alzheimer's, I felt intuitively that creativity would counteract it. And what could have been more creative than writing a manual for happiness. Because I wrote it from the dark side, from tragedy, I was able to see in black and white how to bring back the light. I rushed to finish the book that interestingly, took nine months to write: The birth of a learning-to-live-again process. And it went directly where it belonged. I put it in my mother's hands like a beloved gift while she could have a glimmer of what it meant to both of us.

From the Dark to the Light

From my experience I learned that happiness means to be reasonably happy and let me repeat that, *reasonably happy*, and that each one of us, you and I, have the ability to perceive happiness even in the middle of a difficulty. In fact, difficulty makes you appreciate and relish the good moments. In short, depression can make you more receptive to happiness.

By learning about energy—vitality for living—I learned what it is and what robbed me of it; and most importantly, how to restore it. I then discovered simple and easy steps to view the world differently to feel confident and fulfilled in being who I am, happier with the way I relate to those around me. Seeing the glass as 'half-full' rather than 'half-empty' may pay off in terms of a longer life. Optimism is associated with better health in general. Also, optimists cope with stress more effectively than pessimists do.

Here are a few stress-management strategies to rid yourself of limit-

ing assumptions and fill yourself with good energy to help you flick the switch and turn on your inner light.

Accept that life is filled with ups and downs. There will always be annoying problems and things that go wrong. Don't have unrealistic expectations that will hurl you into an abyss after you experience a disappointment.

If you expect a dramatic and immediate improvement when you are unhappy, forget about it. This is a depressing thought in itself. Work at making yourself happy and changing your perceptions. Slowly the clouds will lift and you will delight in the light.

Make time for yourself. You are good enough! When you make time for yourself, consider exercising- that's usually the first to go because it touches our own needs directly. Exercising for a few minutes to music will release stress hormones and raise endorphins. Exercise according to the intensity levels of your problems. Work out a bit longer or a bit harder to release those mood lifters. Then when the stress has oozed out of your body, you will be able to root out those negative, self-deprecating thoughts. When your body grows stronger, so does your mind. It's your choice: Puma or Prozac! Exercise has only good side effects and does not numb your senses, but instead will awaken them! You will begin to really taste your food, see colors more vibrantly and feel truly alive.

Stop depressing yourself with time limits for accomplishments or milestones in life, like getting a job, getting married, or having an ideal family. If you have experienced many broken relationships, the more people you meet, the odds increase in finding a fulfilling, lasting relationship. If you expect a job or relationship to be hassle-free, it will never work. Life is filled with difficulties.

Challenge your negative critical voice that tells you, for example, you will never accomplish and that you are worthless. See if your negative voice can logically prove to you that you are a failure. No one has a crystal ball to see future failure. Become your own defense attorney and argue with yourself how good and capable you really are.

Express yourself truthfully. Be who you are. Dress with your own sense of style and release your inner child. What you suppress chokes your spirit. How can you be happy when you do not live with a sense of whom you are?

Before you do something, ask yourself: How does it feel? What do your senses tell you? Do you get a bad taste in your mouth? A knot in your stomach? A headache? Then don't do it! Trust your feelings about it.

Ask for help and delegate as much as you can. If it's hard for you to ask for help, practice asking for help with small things. Other people feel good when they help you, so allow them to help.

Try to be present to whatever you do. This gives you time to liberate your mind from disturbing thoughts. If you are dicing vegetables, then just do that. Don't dice them along with worrying about your children's SAT's, your mother's doctor appointment or your presentation at the office tomorrow. 

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