

## Three Practices for Living a Happy Life



A dear friend of mine died peacefully the other day, and his death really brought home to me how incredibly short and precious our lives here really are. Then I got to thinking, what a tragedy it is that we spend so much of our lives in either fear or anger. We may not be overwhelmed by terrible fear or rage day in and day out, but if we are really honest with ourselves, we are at least mildly anxious or irritated most of the time.

I then thought back over the last 30 years of my life - during which I have been on an incredible awakening and healing journey – to see if I could work out how we can rise above our endless fear and anger so that we can spend each and every day of our lives in love, peace and joy. I then came up with a few core ideas that I would like to share with you this month.

First of all, we need to revisit our painful past so that we can replace all our grievances about past events with gratitude. Have you ever thought how strange it is that human beings can hang onto a grievance against their own loving parents, siblings, or ex-partner for decades? A friend of mine has a sister who is now in her 70s, and every time they meet, this sister really complains about how much her mother hurt her emotionally when she was a little girl. She has been hanging onto this childhood grievance for over 60 years, and where has it got her? Is she a happy, fulfilled older woman? Not at all!

Now I am not saying that it is at all easy to let go of all the emotional pain that we have stored in our hearts and minds from traumatic past events. As part of my own challenging healing journey, I have cried my eyes out several times, and even screamed my head off once or twice, as I released a lot of deep emotional pain from my childhood and early adulthood. This healing process has taken many years. However, as I have done this, I have noticed that something truly miraculous has happened. Instead of feeling upset whenever I think of my childhood and my adoptive parents for example, I now feel so much love and gratitude towards them for all the wonderful things they did for me as I was growing up – such as making sure I received a top notch academic education.

Gratitude is very closely linked to love and so I have noticed that cultivating gratitude for absolutely all of my companions – past and present – on this journey through life has really increased my ability to open my heart to unconditional love and compassion for all human beings.

The second practice that I have found really helpful in training my mind and heart to dwell in peace, love and joy is to accept whatever is happening to me in the present moment. Again, this is not at all easy to do. We all have this strange tendency to believe that there must be an alternative reality out there somewhere that is better than our present reality. For example, we find ourselves eating a rather bad meal in a noisy restaurant and we think to ourselves, 'This food should be better and this background music is driving me nuts. They should have turned it down.' But as Byron Katie so wisely points out, arguing with our present reality like this is like trying to teach a cat to bark!

It definitely seems to take an awful lot of practice to accept our lives as they are moment to moment, and I am certainly still 'work in progress.' But the more I breathe through any uncomfortable situation that I find myself in, and the more I tell myself, 'This too will pass, just relax

and appreciate being alive moment to moment', the more I find that I can still dwell in peace, even when the world around me is not exactly as my fussy personality-self would wish it to be.

The third core practice that I have adopted for many years now is to stop believing my own thoughts when I hear a voice in my head insisting that I should be really afraid of the future. We all do this don't we? We watch the nightly news for example, and at least one item in it triggers a fear in us that the whole world is going to hell in a handcart. We then tell ourselves that we are living in exceptionally dangerous times, and of course we then feel at least a little anxious, if not downright terrified, that Armageddon is just around the corner.

Luckily for me, I am now old enough to have lived through so many world crises – for example no one my age can forget thinking that a nuclear war was definitely going to break out during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. So, partly because I am now getting on a bit, but also because I have practised not believing any of my egoic fears about the future for quite some time now, I can now usually pull my mind back from fearfully ruminating about any kind of future disaster. I just tell myself, 'This fearful thought is not based on any real truth and so I am not going to believe it. I am just going to delete it so that I can come back to dwelling in peace, love and joy'.

Now I am not claiming that this practice works 24/7. Sometimes a deep fear is triggered in me by something going on in the world around me, and for a while at least that fear imprisons me – until I finally manage to let it go. But I would say that on a scale from 1- 10 - with 1 being a fearless person and 10 being a horrendously fearful person, I have very gradually and effortfully moved from being an 8 to a 3.

So there we have it. Three core practices – one for healing the past, one for enjoying the present, and one for not fearing the future – that can take us from living our lives primarily in fear, anger and conflict to living our lives mainly in peace, love and joy. But please do not take my word for it. Please take just one of these practices, try it out for a while, and notice whether it makes a difference to your own peace of mind. I am pretty sure that it will. Because always remember, 'You are awesome!'

Peggy Foster  
May 2017