

There Are No Idle Thoughts (*A Course in Miracles*)

Most of us believe that if only our external circumstances were improved, we could be happier and more fulfilled. We tell ourselves that if we could change our bank balance, our partner, our parents, our job, our health, our home, or whatever, we



would be much more content. But this is simply not true. Interestingly, recent research into happiness has found that between 1949 and the present day, real income in the United States more than doubled and yet the number of Americans reporting themselves to be 'very happy' actually decreased slightly. Even more surprisingly, other research has found that cancer patients are almost as happy as the rest of the population.

According to the economist Richard Layard, we now have far more food, clothes and holidays than ever before and we also enjoy far better working conditions and physical health than any previous generation and yet we seem to be no happier. Layard concluded from this, 'if we want people to be happier, we really have to know what conditions generate happiness and how to cultivate them.'

Well, I have some incredibly good news to share with you and Professor Layard, we *do* know how to cultivate the conditions for happiness and the means to do so are really simple, cost nothing, and do not even take a lot of time to put into practice!

The first key to cultivating happiness is to understand the power of our thoughts. We never see the world exactly as it is. We all interpret the world through our thoughts about it, and so we all live on totally different planets. For example, I live on 'Planet Peggy' whilst Gloria lives on 'Planet Gloria' even though it looks like we both live in Manchester, UK, Planet Earth.

Gloria and I can be sitting together in our living room and one of us will be happy and the other will be miserable because of the different thoughts we are having at that time. So, the first step to cultivating happiness is simply to become mindful enough to notice what type of thoughts we are thinking most of the time. Are we thinking mainly life-supporting, loving /compassionate/grateful thoughts or are we thinking life-destroying fearful/angry/resentful thoughts?

If you observe your thoughts for a while, you may notice that you think quite a lot of fearful thoughts or angry thoughts on a regular basis. I have always seen myself as a naturally anxious person, but having mindfully observed my own thoughts on and off for several years now, I can finally see that I think a load of anxious thoughts and it is these thoughts that then create waves of anxious energy in my system. For example, recently, I have entertained quite a few anxious thoughts about how angry everyone in the UK is getting over Brexit. Then, I noticed that these anxious thoughts were creating uncomfortable sensations in my body, particularly a sore, tight feeling in my solar plexus. These uncomfortable physical sensations then told my brain that I was feeling anxious.

The same cycle occurs with angry thoughts. For example, if I think, 'How could that person be so thoughtless!' I create a wave of energy in my system that then produces certain physical sensations in my body such as a tightening in my jaw or a jagged heartbeat. I then start to feel physically uncomfortable and tell myself 'I am feeling angry right now.'

This negative cycle stemming from just one anxious or angry thought inevitably leads to a lowering of my energetic vibrations that makes me feel even more out of sorts. Lo and behold, I then find myself having even more angry or fearful thoughts until I have spiralled down and down into a quite hellish state of consciousness.

'Where is the good news in all of that?' you may well be asking. The miraculous news is that if one fearful or angry thought can set off a cycle of us spiralling down into hell, one loving thought is all it takes for us to start spiralling back up again. Then, if we *keep* mindfully thinking loving thoughts throughout our day, we can spiral upwards until we reach a heavenly state of high consciousness and energy. Can all of this really start with just one loving thought? YES!

The even more miraculous news is that if we get together with a group of like-minded individuals, we increase the power of this practice exponentially. If we collectively practise gently focussing on breathing in and out at the physical heart whilst thinking thoughts of love, compassion or gratitude, we not only start to feel individually wonderful, we also create a collective field of powerful love energy that has a miraculous life-transforming and world-transforming power within it. How do I know that this is absolutely true? I have experienced the power of this collectively generated love energy over and over again on

many of the 100+ spiritual retreats and workshops I have attended over the last 30 years of my life.

As I write this message, I still have waves of strong love energy pouring through my system after returning from a 5 day retreat at Trigonos Retreat Centre in North Wales. On this retreat Gloria, Jacky and I led an amazingly wonderful group of people in a range of practises designed to assist us to feel love in our hearts. Within a short space of time and just a few heart-centred meditations, the whole group began to feel fantastic, and the love energy that we shared just kept getting stronger and stronger until we all spiralled upwards into a pretty heavenly state of heart and mind.

Getting together with any kind of awakening Sangha with a commitment to practise opening our hearts to love is powerful beyond measure. But going on a retreat like this once or twice a year is not enough to transform our own life and then to transform our whole world. What counts is not just the short, but intense times, we may spend on retreat, but the quality of our day to day thoughts and feelings. I worked out the other day that I have now spent around two years of my adult life on spiritual retreats, but that means that for 95 percent of the time, I was not on retreat. So which is likely to have had the greatest impact on my awakening and healing journey? The intense practices that I may do for 5 percent of my life, or the practices I manage to remember to fit into my daily life?

Well probably both are of equal importance because the intensity of healing and awakening we can experience on a genuine spiritual retreat is beyond price. Nevertheless, the drip, drip effect of short, simple daily awakening practices cannot be underestimated.

So this month, I would love you to start each day with a thought of love or gratitude and then, just before you go to sleep, think another loving or grateful thought. If one day you forget to do this, no problem, just do it the following day. How hard can that be? Yet the longer term positive results of this simple practice will delight and amaze you. I even guarantee that if you keep this simple practice up for the rest of your life, you will not only be much happier, but you will naturally spread that happiness out into the world around you and thus be of real service to our troubled world.

Peggy Foster
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