

## Training Ourselves to See the Glass as Half Full

Are you someone who sees the glass half full, or do you usually see it as half empty? If you tend to be rather anxious about life, do you realise that this anxiety is built into all human brains so that - in the far distant past - our species could survive all kinds of physical dangers?

According to the authors of *Buddha's Brain*, our brains are designed to focus far more on potentially threatening events than pleasant ones so that we will avoid threats to our security and survival - such as a wild beast sniffing around our cave!

The authors of this fascinating book summarise the way our brains work with a really memorable statement: 'Your brain is like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positive ones – even though most of your experiences are probably neutral or positive'.

Whilst remembering negative experiences more than positive ones may have been a great strategy for the survival of the species millions of years ago, clearly this biological bias is not so good for promoting a lasting state of inner peace or serenity for those of us living in modern societies. So now, we have a mammoth task to undertake. We have to train our own minds to focus much more on the positive than the negative. Once we learn how to do this, we can actually re-wire our brains so that the pathways that promote inner peace and happiness fire up much more quickly and brightly than the pathways that generate fear and irritation within us.

I am so pleased that modern scientists are finally catching up with ancient contemplative wisdom. Scientists are now convinced that however old we are, our brains are still malleable and trainable, and so, we always have a wonderful opportunity to create a better future for ourselves - and for our world. It is just going to take some effort on our part to reverse a deeply engrained bias in our brain to focus on negative events, rather than positive ones.

Now that we know that we can change our own minds for the better, the key question becomes: What practices should we adopt to train our brains to become more positive? There are many different self-help, spiritual and energetic practices that really can make a difference. But in this message, I am just going to share with you just three practices that have helped me change from being a pretty miserable, pessimistic, neurotic individual into a much happier and far less anxious person!

The first practice I love and use regularly is the cultivation of heartfelt gratitude for all the little things that go right in our life, or that bring us comfort or pleasure. One really practical way to do this is to keep a 'Thank You!' journal for a few months, or even for one whole calendar year. At the end of each day, even a day that seems to have gone badly, you just write down in your 'Thank You!' journal 3, 6, or even 9 things that happened during the day that you can give thanks for. For example, even if you have had a really, really bad day, you can at least give thanks that you are still breathing – and by the way, if you are breathing

easily and painlessly, you are so much better off than a lot of people who have serious breathing problems of one kind or another.

I know that this practice works because many years ago, I noticed that I was tending to blame men for a lot of the world's problems, and for my own unhappiness, and so for a while, I kept a gratitude journal just about men! Each evening, I wrote down three reasons to be grateful to some man in my life, or a man in the public eye, and pretty soon I began to develop a much more positive attitude towards men in general. I also noticed more and more lovely men coming into my life as if by magic.

The second practice that I love is to pause whenever I notice that I am becoming anxious or stressed, so that I can just take several deep, slow, mindful breaths. Breathing slowly and mindfully can be life-transforming all by itself, but these days, I like to add a little 'oomph' to this practice by putting my hands gently over my heart as I breathe and then thinking of someone or something I love to encourage my heart to open up to all the joys of life.

The third practice I have adopted is not really a formal practice at all. It just involves making time each day to do something that really makes my heart sing. For example, I listen to some classical music virtually every morning, and then take a moment or two during the day to tune into at least one tree, bush or beautiful plant in my local environment. I also tend to eat at least one delicious little treat each day too –such as a Pain au Chocolat with my morning Cappuccino. But your heart may sing in response to a completely different set of daily treats, so please make a list of treats and then commit to giving to yourself at least one on a daily basis – I just do not recommend watching or listening to anything too dark or violent!

So there we have it. You really do not have to sit and meditate for twelve hours a day to turn your life around. Adopting some pretty simple, and not very time consuming, daily activities can train your brain to focus much less on all the potential dangers in this world and far more on all the wonders of our breathtakingly beautiful universe.

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