

6 Essentials to Emotional Health and Happiness

by Dr John Briffa

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Introduction

In my professional and personal life I do not attempt to hide my passion for the concept of self-help health. Taking steps to better health can be very physical in nature. In fact, a lot of my work is dedicated to giving what I hope is trustworthy and practical advice about the lifestyle choices that are most likely to sustain health and well-being both now and in the future.

However, there is no doubt in my mind that not just our physical behaviours, but also our mental ones, can have a profound influence on our health and experience of life. Our thoughts, and whether these are essentially positive or negative in nature, have an obvious impact on how we feel about ourselves and our lives. And this may not only impact on our mental well-being, but our physical health too.

Since qualifying as a doctor I have personally been very interested in psychological and spiritual approaches to life that can serve us well in this regard. Over the years, I've had the opportunity to learn so many things that I feel have made an enormous difference to my own sense of self and my feeling of happiness. This book, quite simply, is a distillate of the learnings and approaches that I have found to be of most benefit.

All the approaches in this e-book are based on having thoughts and feelings about ourselves, our lives, and others that can free us from the negative emotions and feelings that can have a corrosive effect on our lives. Where relevant, I have shared quite intimate experiences from my own life. However, my work as a doctor has given me the privilege of recommending these approaches with many others. My experience in practice is that often small, simple changes in the way we look at things can bring profound and lasting benefit to how we feel emotionally, and physically too.

Not all of the information in this e-book may be relevant to you. However, I generally find that almost anyone will find information here that will help to inspire and empower them, and assist them in their quest for health and happiness. My sincere wish is that this also turns out to be true for you.

Dr John Briffa

If you have feedback or experiences that you would like to share, please feel free to email me at john@drbriffa.com

Chapter 1

Honour Yourself

It seems incredible that in a World of more than 6 billion people, no two people look the same. Even identical twins have subtle differences which allow them to be distinguished. Not only do we look different on the outside, we are different on the inside too. Factors such as our nutritional needs and the biochemical and physiological workings of the body are known to vary considerably from person to person. Looking even more deeply, another human aspect which is unique and personalised is our emotional make-up. Each of us has a set of beliefs, feelings and motivations which is exclusive to us, and every bit as individual as our fingerprints or facial features. From our basic emotional characteristics come our true needs and desires. How in touch with these we are, and how well we fulfil them, is critical to our sense of happiness and contentment.

To be or not to be, that is the question

Learning to act in accordance with our innate selves is fundamental to our ability to live abundantly. After all, if we don't know what really moves us, or are failing to act on this, how can we ever hope to find life satisfying and fulfilling? In addition, failing to honour ourselves can create emotional disharmony that may take its toll on the body too. Let

us not forget that the body and mind are inextricably linked. The feelings of disappointment, regret and resentment that may come when we suppress our true selves and live a life of unfulfilled dreams do nothing to support physical health either. Of all the emotionally-related issues which are factors in ill-health, I believe not honouring our true selves is perhaps the most common.

How would know if you are living your life in accordance with your innate self? Start by asking yourself what it is that you *really* want from your life. Do you find yourself hesitating, or that no answer comes at all? Do you feel that there is something missing in your life, but can't seem to put your finger on what it is? Can you find yourself doing things in your life which you don't really *want* to, but feel you *ought* to? If you have answered 'yes' to any of these questions, then this suggests that you are not living your life in tune with your true wishes and desires. In this case, learning the art of honouring yourself could transform both your physical and emotional well-being. The first step, is to know who you are.

Who do you think you are?

Ridiculous though this may sound, it seems that many of us simply do not know *who* we are. Beyond obvious things such as our name, where we live and what we do in our day-to-day lives, it is amazing just how little some of us appear to know about our true beliefs, motivations and

inspirations. Many of us have issues with making choices and decisions in our lives, often because we feel we just don't know what is best for us. Some of us even struggle to think of something, just *one* thing, which excites us or captures our imagination. Let's be frank, these are not signs of an innate sense of 'self-knowing'. Losing touch with our core beliefs and values is a major cause of the dissatisfaction common in modern-day society.

Losing sight of who we are and what we want appears to be a trait we acquire with age. Newborn babies, for instance, seem to have a very good sense of what they want and don't want in life. If a baby is hungry or feels cold, it cries. Once a baby has what it wants such as its mother's breast or the warmth that comes from an extra blanket, peace and tranquillity quickly descend. Clearly, when we start out in life it seems we are very in touch with our needs and have no compunction about letting all around us know what they are!

It is as we progress through life that we seem to lose sight of what our individual needs are. One reason for this is that, as we mature, the choices that are available to us seem ever-expanding. Let's face it, our needs when we are born are pretty basic. Love, physical comfort, food and warmth are our main requirements. Yet, by the time we are adult, we are generally faced with a sometimes bewildering array of possibilities on a day-to-day basis. Coupled with this is the fact that, throughout our

lives, we can be subject to a myriad of influences which can 'condition' us and pull us away from our innate selves.

Under the influence

Conditioning can start early with the experiences and interactions we have with our parents or guardians. Other important influences may come from relatives, such as grandparents and siblings, and from family friends and acquaintances. In this day and age, we are quite likely to have our beliefs and attitudes shaped, at least in part, by exposure to a variety of different media, including television, radio, the internet, magazines and books. Our schooling and perhaps further education undoubtedly further mould us. Still other important influences may come from religion and social convention. I'm not saying that any of these external factors is inherently 'good' or 'bad'. What I am saying, however, is that problems may come if we end up taking on attitudes, views and behaviours that simply do not reflect who we are.

In my own life, I know there have been times when I have suppressed my true nature, and know the discomfort that this can cause. No more graphically is this demonstrated than in my professional life:

I make no secret of the fact that I am passionate about natural medicine. However, it wasn't always this way. At medical school, I was actually

wedded to the principles and practice of orthodox medicine. I believed (or thought I did) that conventional medicine was the only true answer to the ills of the World. I was very into the idea of high-tech, pharmaceutical-based medicine, and for some years courted the idea of becoming a transplant surgeon.

Coupled with this apparent attachment to conventional medicine was my utterly disparaging opinion of complementary medicine. My official position on the forms of natural medicine such as acupuncture, homeopathy and herbal medicine was that there were a lot of unscientific, unproven mumbo-jumbo. A good friend and colleague when I was at medical school was Jesse Kenton, son of Leslie Kenton. Leslie Kenton was then, and still is, a respected holistic health journalist. In my view she has been instrumental in helping to open many people's consciousness to some important themes in natural medicine and holistic health. I recognise her now as being an important force in helping to pushing this area forward, and believe she actually helped forge a path for my own work. I'm embarrassed to admit it now, but when I was at medical school, I thought Leslie Kenton was peddling the work of the Devil.

Whilst I did not realise it at the time, I see now how some of the attitudes I had to conventional and natural medicine were not really my own. I may have given off the impression that conventional medicine was for me, but deep inside I had serious reservations. It occurred to me, for

instance, that conventional medicine did not seem to address the true underlying causes of illness. What was also apparent, was that the treatments used in orthodox medicine were often ineffective, or worse still, had harmful effects of their own. Another deficiency of seemed to be how little emphasis conventional medicine places on the prevention, rather than the treatment, of illness and disease.

While it is easy for me to articulate these qualms now, during my training I simply chose not to recognise them, preferring instead to proceed through my training led by what can only be described as 'blind faith'. Despite the fact that I thought that my future was in conventional medicine, my heart was simply not in it. I was a sporadic attendee at lectures and teaching sessions. The only study I ever undertook was motivated by fear of failing examinations, not through any real interest in the subject matter.

I believe the issues I had when I was studying medicine stemmed from the fact that my 'chosen career' did not truly reflect my true beliefs and interests. From a young age I had been interested in paranormal phenomena such as telepathy, hands-on healing and dowsing. During my teens, I would read about the concepts behind and the practice of natural medicines such as acupuncture and hypnotherapy. When asked during my interviews for medical school what I would do if I were not accepted, I replied that I would take up some form of complementary medicine.

Yet, once I got to medical school, I did what I could to 'fit in'. I chose to suppress my interests, and tried to convince myself that conventional medicine was my life's purpose. However, while I clung to the idea of being a doctor, it never really felt right. I was certainly motivated by medicine, but never inspired by it. However much I tried, I felt like a square peg in a round hole. Basically, for a lot of the time I was at medical school, I was struggling.

Finally, around the time that I qualified as a doctor, something clicked. The thought of spending the rest of my working life doing a job which I was not passionate about seemed just too much to bear. I decided that I would not attempt to fulfil my ambition to be a surgeon. In fact, I resolved that I would not work in conventional medicine at all. I decided to leave medicine, and find something else to do.

I did eventually rekindle my interest in natural medicine. Quite how this happened is relevant to the central theme of the next chapter, and I'll pick up this story there. However, what my experience of learning medicine shows is the type of struggle and emotional discomfort that can come when we suppress our true selves, and choose to be something that we are not.

Judge Not

You might ask what it is that causes us to dispense with our innate nature in favour of something else. Often at the root of this is the erroneous belief that there is something better for us than what we truly desire for ourselves. Inherent in this belief is that some aspect of our nature is somehow invalid or unworthy. Dropping any judgement about who we are and the worthiness of our true needs is important if we are to really honour ourselves.

Most of us do not like being judged or criticised. Generally, we take it personally to be told that we are arrogant, insensitive, a bad parent, overweight or whatever. However, often the harshest criticism that we experience doesn't come from other people, but from *within*. Some of us are simply not comfortable with who we are, and as a result can harbour destructive and negative feelings towards ourselves. Quite often when we are struggling with an issue, the angst is compounded by the fact that we berate ourselves for actually having the issue! I have seen this happen a lot on practice. For instance, I regularly see individuals who suffer from fatigue, who are also annoyed at themselves for not having the energy to do the things they want to in their lives. Also, individuals who want to lose weight are often intensely critical of how they look. Whatever the precise nature of your health issue, do you sometimes find yourself giving yourself a hard time about it?

The very act of focusing on what we perceive as our problem is what often causes it to perpetuate. As the saying goes: 'What you resist, *persists*'. One thing that is critical us to be able to move forward in our lives is to accept ourselves as we are.

Accept Yourself

You cannot get away from the fact that you are going to spend the rest of your life living with yourself. Now, you can choose to do this by judging and criticising yourself making each day an emotional battle field. Or, you can choose to accept yourself for who we are. Self-acceptance can take the struggle out of life. Self-acceptance, however, is not the same as complacency. I am not for one moment suggesting that if we perceive there is an issue in our life we should merely accept it without question. Self-acceptance does not mean never endeavouring to improve ourselves or striving to attain our goals. It does, however, mean recognising what it is we would like to change about ourselves and our life, *without judging or finding fault*. The drive for self-improvement is completely healthy as long as it comes from a place of self-love rather than a feeling of inadequacy.

Focus on what you do want, not on what you don't

If we want to create positive change in our lives, then we need to focus on the positive changes we want. Essentially, change comes when we are moving towards something we *do* want rather than when we are running away from something we *don't*. So, whatever it is we want to transform, whether it be essentially physical or emotional in nature, it makes sense for us to put our focus and attention on the end result we desire.

See it

The first step in achieving change is to have a clear image in our mind of what it is we really *do* want. For instance, if you feel that shyness is 'holding you back' and not allowing you to live your life to the full, firstly visualise yourself acting with confidence. Imagine a situation in which you have felt self-conscious in the past, such as a party. Put yourself in that situation in your mind's eye, this time seeing yourself acting in the way you would prefer. Maybe see yourself approaching someone with self-assurance, engaging them in easy conversation.

If your issue is of a more physical nature, then the trick is to see yourself as you would ideally like to be. If you are struggling to lose weight, for instance, imagine yourself of the size and shape you aspire too. If you are troubled by fatigue, see yourself going about your daily life with abundant energy.

Feel it

Once you have this positive image in your mind, the next step is to engage with the emotion you may feel as the result of the change. For instance, how would you feel to have more confidence socially? Experience the excitement you might feel if you were to have lost the weight you want too. What would it feel like to have all the energy you want? Allow yourself to tap into the positive emotions that your positive image brings forth.

Be it

The final, and critical, step in actualising change is to act! This means behaving in a way which is in accordance with this new image you see and feel. As much as possible, act in a manner which you would expect this transformed version of you to behave. If confidence in social situations is the issue, throw a party! If your weight is keeping you from joining a dance class, join anyway. If your fatigue is keeping you from your favourite hobby of walking, put on your gear, get outside and see how far you can get (you might be pleasantly surprised). By acting in the way you would prefer to be you are actually sending a very strong message to your unconscious. What you are telling yourself is that you

can be whatever it is you want, and this can be a very powerful catalyst for positive change.

Case Study

When Richard first came to see me, his major preoccupation seemed to be that he was soon to turn 50. I couldn't help him with this! However, he did also have a number of physical symptoms (principally fatigue, poor mental concentration, athlete's foot, and a degree of excess weight) which I felt were relatively easily explained and treatable from a physical perspective: Candida overgrowth, food sensitivities and blood sugar imbalance seemed to be the core issues.

However, his comment about the imminent chronological milestone made me feel that there were perhaps some other issues that could benefit from discussion. As the consultation unfolded, it was clear that Richard was far from happy. By his own admission, he had seemingly made a number of 'bad' choices in his life. In particular, he had chosen financial services as a career, which he was less than passionate about to say the least.

Richard told me his father had been a dominant character, and a strict disciplinarian. Richard confessed to feeling frightened of his father, and was an obedient child as a result. Richard also bought into the disciplined

and controlling environment he was exposed to at school. He was a 'good' student, and worked hard to enable him to go to university. Soon after leaving college, Richard married a 'strong' woman, who he continually looked to for guidance. In his work, he had generally taken a back seat, and was unhappy that he was not able to exercise more control in his business dealings. In pretty much every area of his life, Richard appeared to have denied his true self, choosing instead to satisfy the expectations of others. It was clear that his choices in life had been largely dictated by all sorts of influences other than his own.

On a conscious level, Richard felt that he needed to address his physical health through his diet. Clearly, though, there was more to it than that! I broached with Richard the subject of the need to honour oneself. In an effort to highlight what I saw as Richard's core issue, I simply asked him what he would really love to do in his life. He hesitated. When I pushed him, he said he didn't know. Richard appeared to have become so far adrift from his core self, he had even lost sight of what we wanted from life.

I encouraged him to use his imagination and not be bound by any beliefs about what is 'right and proper'. After a bit more prodding, he told me that ever since he was a child, he had always loved gardening. We explored this. Richard told me that when he was small, he often spent his pocket money on flower seeds. He would plant these in the central strip

of grass on the driveway of the family home. He told me of the intense excitement we would feel as the seeds would germinate and grow into flowers. As he recounted this story to me, tears of joy filled his eyes. Richard suddenly seemed to come alive for the first time in the consultation. Yet, even as Richard told me this story, I sensed some sadness. It seemed odd to me why he would plant the seeds in the driveway. Why not the garden? Even at a young age, Richard had not wanted to draw attention to his flower-growing hobby. Somehow, at this tender age, Richard had come to the conclusion that gardening was not a 'worthy' pastime.

Although Richard had a garden, he did no gardening. He said he just didn't have the time. Richard had suppressed his passion, and added that even the thought of gardening was now a painful and vivid reminder of how 'lost' he had become in his life. When I asked Richard what he was going to do about all this, he still seemed resigned to working in financial services. In Richard's eyes, gardening was not a 'proper job', and one that would not sustain him financially.

I felt this belief needed breaking down. I cited the example of musicians and artists who can appear very passionate about their work, but nonetheless earn a living from it. Richard then began to talk to me about his younger brother. According to Richard, his brother had always appeared to do 'exactly as he pleased'. He refused to bow to his father's

rather patriarchal ways, and did not apply himself at school. Instead, he preferred to spend much of his time listening to music and playing guitar. He left school and went on to become a respected session musician, playing with a string of successful and high-profile rock bands. Here, in Richard's own life, was a glaring example of how living in accordance with one's true self can not only be fun, but might also be sustaining and supportive. I suggested to Richard that his 'little' brother might have a lot to teach him about life!

I asked Richard to close his eyes and imagine himself tending a garden. As he did this, a smile came to his face. I encouraged Richard to experience the pleasure that this image conjured up to the full. Richard was able to do this with relative ease, and became more animated than he had been at any other point during the consultation. I then simply suggested Richard do something practical in the next day or two, however small, that was in keeping with this new vision of himself.

When I saw Richard two months later, he seemed like a different person. After our initial consultation he had visited a garden centre where he had bought a selection of books about gardening, and some gardening gloves. He was already spending a considerable part of his weekends tending his garden and was more than enthusiastic about this. He had reassessed his finances and come to the conclusion that he could afford to work part-time. He planned to continue working three days a week as a financial

advisor, and spend the other two 'working' days in the garden. His wife was utterly supportive of Richard's plan, and his change of direction had even seemed to impact positively on their relationship. Along with some dietary change and the taking of supplements designed to combat his specific physical imbalances, Richard was feeling physically stronger and his original symptoms were considerably better.

Richard did indeed go on to realise his dream of part-time gardening. But it did not stop there. Within two years he and his wife had left London and bought a small farmhouse with some land in the South-West of England. This 'downsize' had freed up some money, which meant that he could resign from his job. The last I heard, Richard was in excellent health, and was mixing his time giving independent financial advice a day or two each week with the tending of a substantial garden and small-holding.

Richard's story does exemplify the kind of dramatic move forward in our circumstances and sense of fulfilment we can experience by simply honouring ourselves. How, though, do we know what is truly representative of who we are? What signposts can we use to tell us which path to take in life? While some of us may put our faith in the advice of a counsellor, tarot reader or clairvoyant, or seek guidance from horoscopes or the I-ching, the fact is all of the guidance we need is contained within us. The key to making the right choices in life is to *trust our intuition*.

Summary

- Each of us possesses a unique set of emotions and beliefs
- Honouring our innate selves is fundamental to our ability to live satisfying and fulfilling lives
- The effect of external influences such as our parents, teachers and the media can lead us to become detached from our true selves
- Believing that there is something better for us than what we truly desire for ourselves is often a key component in our failure to honour ourselves
- Accepting who we are and the innate needs we have is critical to the process of honouring ourselves
- Focusing on what is it we want to change can actually perpetuate the issue - what we resist, *persists*
- An important key for change is not to focus on what we *don't* want, but on what we *do* want

6 Essentials to Emotional Health and Happiness

- It helps to see a vision of the positive change we desire
- Experiencing the positive emotions associated with this perceived change is also a powerful catalyst for change
- Acting as though change has already come further accelerates the process of transformation

Chapter 2

Trust Your Intuition

One thing that all of us have in common is the need to make decisions. From day-to-day choices such as what clothes to put on in the morning and what to eat for lunch, to life's bigger questions such as which career to pursue and whether or not to start a family, there is no getting away from the fact that life is full of decisions. When considering our options, a swift decision allows us to get on with the actual experience or at least frees us to move on to something else! The more quickly and confidently we make decisions, the richer our experience of life.

Yet, while decision-making is of undoubted importance in our lives, it is an area where many of us can stall. Decisions over fundamental areas such as work, personal relationships and family may leave us hesitant and unsure. Wavering over which path to take in life and the choices open to us encourages stagnation, not flow. And while making decisions can be hard, making the *right* ones can be even harder. Even once we have made a decision, how often do we find ourselves wondering whether it's for the best? And how many of us had occasion to look back at our lives and conclude that we have made some 'bad' choices along the way? The internal angst this can cause has the capacity to erode both enjoyment of life and our physical health.

So, what is it that hinders our ability to make decisions or causes us to make what appear to be the 'wrong' ones? There seems to be a common perception that problems with decision-making stem from not giving them enough thought. However, my take is that problems with decision making are not the result of too little thought, but too *much*.

It's not the thought that counts

One approach to making a decision is to 'weigh things up' in our mind. Using some logic, going through the pros and cons, and giving a decision 'some serious thought' are all concepts we are familiar with. There is no doubt that engaging our brain before making decisions has some merit. If you are looking to buy a family car then your logical mind can be relied upon to do the job of telling you a two-seater sporty number is out of the question! However, have you ever found the mental dialogue you engage in when endeavouring to make a decision can tie you up in knots? Can you find yourself 'agonising' over a decision, spending time and mental energy considering the choices, only to find that you there is still no real clarity at the end?

While our culture and education system generally put a lot of emphasis on the need to use intellect and reason in one's daily life, these attributes do not necessarily assist us in our pursuit of happiness. While we may put a lot of store in things which 'logically' should bring us happiness, such as

wealth, success, marriage and a family, we only need to look around to see that while this theory is one thing, reality is often another!

You may know or at least know of individuals who have wealth, or fame, or success or whatever, who nonetheless appear to have come up seriously short on the happiness stakes. There's plenty of people about who one might think *ought* to be happy, who nevertheless *aren't*. And, many of us will know of individuals who have none of what are thought to be the external trappings of happiness, who are nonetheless content and fulfilled.

Happiness is an emotion

Whatever achievements we may 'think' will bring us happiness in life, let us not lose sight of the fact that happiness is not an achievement, but an *emotion*. While deciding what will make us happy in our head may seem to be logical and correct, this approach may fail to satisfy us on a deep level. Because what we are truly striving for is *emotional* satisfaction, does it not make sense to live our lives based not so much on what we *think*, but how we *feel*? That's where our intuition comes in.

Intuition – a barometer for life

I like to think of our intuition as a sort of internal barometer. The intuition is a signal from our unconscious which reflects our true selves. These messages from the unconscious tell us much about our innate wishes and desires. We may not be consciously aware of these, but they are there. When making a decision or planning a course of action, our intuition points the way for us. The critical thing here is for us to tune into (and not ignore!) our intuition, because it tells us everything we need to know about what we really *feel* about the options and choices that present themselves in life.

When something 'feels right', that is a sign that it *is* right! On the other hand, if our gut says 'no', then we need not be in any doubt about the message here either. All we need to do is trust our intuition, and act on it.

In the last chapter we explored how our true wishes can get buried under beliefs and attitudes that are influenced and conditioned by factors such as our parents, teachers and the society 'norm'. Because our intuition comes from our subconscious, it reflects a part of us that has not been conditioned by these influences. The beauty of listening to our intuition is that it strips away what doesn't belong to us, revealing our true selves as it does this.

I have found trusting my intuition to be a powerful force in my own life:

In the last chapter I wrote about how I finally made my mind up to leave conventional medicine. There was certainly no 'logic' to this decision. Medicine, after all, is a relatively secure and well-paid job which many people believe still confers a degree of kudos and social status. Plus, in my final examinations I had won academic prizes which generally earmark young doctors for rapid progression in their chosen speciality.

All of this may be true, but the plain and simple fact of the matter was that I didn't feel comfortable about staying in medicine. Whatever my academic achievements were, and however long I had spent studying medicine, something in my gut was telling me that a career in conventional medicine was just not for me.

When I left conventional medicine, it took me a couple of years to 'find my feet'. I toyed with a number of different ideas including becoming an actor and retraining as a psychotherapist. Having left the secure environment of conventional medicine, I found myself with no career, no regular income and no real idea of what to do. I felt vulnerable and quite alone. Throughout this time, though, I clung to the idea that although I didn't know what I really wanted to do, at least I was not doing something I knew I didn't want to! I reasoned that at least by leaving medicine I had created the space for something else to come in.

Whilst contemplating what was to become of me I took temporary jobs as a junior doctor in hospital medicine. On one such posting, I saw an elderly man who had come in for a hernia repair. Although he was in his seventies, he didn't look older than sixty. He was fit and robust, and, unusually for his age, had not been in hospital before. I was fascinated with how this man had managed to keep himself in such good health. When I asked him about this, he told me that he'd always eaten a simple but healthy diet, which now included organic vegetables grown on his allotment. Most days, he would cycle several to and from this allotment, and worked hard tending it too. He also confessed to taking nutritional supplements, in particular the mineral selenium which is known to have anti-ageing and disease-protective effects.

During my conversation with this man that it dawned on me that perhaps the real secret to health was not so much a matter of luck, but more to do with how we live our lives. Maybe, factors such as diet, exercise and our emotional health were the real determinants of health. This may seem obvious now, but to me at that time it was a major revelation. That very afternoon I bought a book on nutrition and began reading it that evening. I am not exaggerating when I tell you that from almost the first page, I was gripped.

For some months I read voraciously about natural medicine and nutrition. I was excited by the information I was discovering, and eager to learn

more. I cannot express what a joy it was for me to be studying something not because I felt I had to, but because I wanted too. So enthralled was I by the whole subject, that I decided to make natural medicine my career.

The problem was I knew nothing about the natural health industry, and what opportunities lay within it. My decision to embrace natural medicine was made without planning or much in the way of thought. However, I felt that this was the right move for me, and to this day, have had no regrets. I don't want to sound smug or self-satisfied, but my experience with natural medicine, both personally and professionally, has been an incredible journey. It has not always been 'easy', and there have been challenges along the way, but I have no doubt that I am doing the work I was born to. I truly believe that I have come to this point not through some grand plan or logical scheme, but simply through following my intuition.

Excitement Points the Way

If I was to use one word to sum up how I felt about natural medicine when I became reacquainted with it, it would be *excitement*. Whatever it is we are contemplating, we can rest assured that if it's excitement we feel, then our intuition is shouting 'yes!'. All we need do then, is act on it. Fundamental to living a truly fulfilling life is doing what excites us. As

long as we keep doing precisely what sings to us on an emotional level, how can we fail to be emotionally fulfilled? The answer, of course, is that we can't.

The idea of acting on what excites us is clearly counter-intuitive in a culture that teaches us about concepts such as 'living up to our responsibilities' and 'planning for the future'. And I'm not saying there is anything 'wrong' with these and similar ideals. So long as they excite and resonate with us on some level, then why not utilise them in our lives? However, if how we live our lives is dictated more by duty and responsibility than excitement, then the danger is we can easily find ourselves short on happiness and contentment.

Sometimes it can take time to re-learn the art of listening to our intuition and following what excites us. If this is true for you, then it might help to keep in mind the following advice:

Take time

Some of us have become so far removed from our essential selves that we have simply forgotten what it is like to feel truly impassioned. I think that children have a lot to teach us in this respect. Have you noticed how children can get almost delirious with excitement about, say, the thought

of a family holiday or a birthday party? The eager anticipation and delight with which a child unwraps a present is a joy in itself. Unfortunately, for many of us, such a sense of excitement can be a bit of a distant memory!

If this is true for you, then do allow yourself a little time. If you have spent years, even decades, doing a good job of ignoring your intuition, it can take just a wee while to get back in touch with it. Be kind on yourself and give yourself some time.

Practice makes perfect

When I speak to individuals who seem to be having real difficulty tuning in to their excitement, I suggest that they start by surveying all the options available to them. Even if none of these seems particularly exciting or appealing, the trick is to tune into the one which is even *slightly* more attractive than the other ones. This at least starts the process. Gradually, we can grow more accustomed to responding to our excitement, finally finding that following our heart comes natural to us. As with most things, practice makes perfect.

What's the big idea?

One thing I have found that may hamper our ability to following our heart is if we wait for that eureka! moment when we glimpse a grand vision so

utterly exciting and compelling we are powerless to resist. Hanging out for 'the big idea' can mean that we spend our time waiting for an elusive explosion of inspiration. Of course this can happen and it's wonderful if it does, but it doesn't have to.

Excitement can come in different ways and to different degrees. While it may manifest as an explosion of enthusiasm and zest, it may also translate into a sense of peace and calm. For instance, while I was excited about the thought of working in natural medicine all those years ago, I wasn't jumping up and down about it. I did, however, have a certain 'knowing' that the direction I was taking was right for me. It's fine if you find yourself barely able to contain your enthusiasm and emotion, but remember a sense of inner knowing does just as well.

Everything is valid

Another thing that can derail us moving towards what excites is the belief that our dream is somehow unworthy. Remember Richard from the last chapter? Even though Richard's true passion was gardening, one of the main reasons he had not acted on that was because he did not view gardening as a 'worthy' occupation. Some of us may be tempted to believe that if our excitement is not attached to something 'significant' or 'proper', then it's simply not valid.

However, whatever it is that you want to do, the fact that is a reflection of your true desires is justification enough to do it. If saving the World from ecological disaster is what truly excites you then of course that's fine. However, anything that excites you, however 'grand' the vision appears, is as valid as anything else.

Make it easy on yourself

Another factor which can cause some hesitation and put a brake on our moving forward is when we seem to be faced with two or more concepts which seem equally exciting. My advice in this situation is to do the thing that you are most capable of acting on. Why not take the path of least resistance? For instance, if you find the idea of starting an organic vegetable patch in your garden equally as exciting as running an organic food company, start the vegetable patch and see where it leads you. Life does not need to be difficult, so don't make it!

What's stopping you?

Even when we are excited about the prospect of doing something our lives, and have the means to act on this excitement, there is no assurance that we will actually *take action*. What, though, is it that stops us from acting on our excitement? Often, it's that head again!

Time and time again I have found that the reason why we fail to follow our joy is because we end up talking ourselves out of it. Its amazing how we can sometimes conjure up in our heads all sorts of reasons and unpleasant scenarios which may cause the excitement to fade and the dream to die. Is there anything we can do to protect our excitement from the mental processes can sound the death knell for our excitement? I think so, but critical to this is to understand the nature of motivation.

To my mind, there are only two motivators in life. One is to get pleasure. The other is to avoid pain. Basically, if we are failing to act on our excitement, then we have come to the conclusion that doing so would either give us less pleasure or more pain. The belief that forms the basis for this conclusion needs shifting if your idea is going to be compelling enough for you to act.

Let's look at an example: In Richard's case, one of the beliefs was that gardening would not sustain him financially. In Richard's head, less money meant less pleasure (and perhaps more pain too). However, by changing this belief, and seeing downsizing as a viable proposition, Richard was able to remove the self-imposed obstacle which was a major factor in keeping him from living his dream. So, if you are hesitating, examine what negative beliefs you have about the outcome of your proposed action, and change them to beliefs that work for you.

Still teetering?

If you still find you're teetering on the brink, it will normally be because doubt has crept in. Maybe you feel that you simply cannot *trust your* intuition and follow your excitement. However, in these situations it can help to remember that there is no such thing as a lack of trust. Doubt, is not a lack of trust. What doubt really is, however, is trust in a reality we simply don't prefer. You are always putting 100% of your trust in something. The secret is to put your trust in a reality you *do* prefer. So, decide what it is you want, and trust that you can have it. If you still have any 'doubt' about taking the leap, I suggest the following approach:

Look to the future

Projecting into the future can sometimes be very useful for bringing about change. Let's assume that you have a vision of something that excites you, but still find it difficult to take action. As we have discussed, a fundamental belief here will be that acting will either bring you less pleasure or more pain. If you are having difficulty trusting the concept that the change will bring you more pleasure, another approach would be to trust in the idea that *not* changing would bring you *more* pain!

It won't come as any surprise to you to learn that I do not advocate people experiencing more pain than necessary, however I have found the

following approach to work well when all is needed is that final little push. The trick is to project sometime into the future, say a year, and imagine how you might feel if you had still not acted on what excites you. Let's say, for instance, that you want to leave your job and set up on your own. Go a year into the future and imagine how you might feel if you have not made the break. Are you feeling any discomfort? Is emotional pain creeping in? If not, go further into the future, say five or 10 years, and ask yourself the same question. Go as far into the future as you need to to bring on a enough pain and discomfort so that you are left in no doubt at all that acting on your excitement is really will bring you more pleasure and less pain.

Trusting our intuition and acting on our excitement can take the doubt and hesitation from your life, and transform it into a thrilling journey. However, as we proceed through life we can sometimes have our experience of it tainted by experiences we have had in the past, or by expectations we have of the future. Living our lives in the past or the future can take us away from the only time we have – *now*. A fundamental tool for experiencing life to the full is the ability to *live in the moment*.

Summary

- Life is full of decisions - the quicker and more confidently we make them the richer our experience of life
- Happiness is an emotion which is not inherently 'logical'
- Because of this, it makes sense to live our lives not in accordance with how we *think*, but how we *feel*
- Our intuition gives us messages from our unconscious that are free from external influence
- Doing what excites us is key to our enjoyment of life
- Getting back in touch with the emotion of excitement can take time
- Acting on what seems at least slightly more exciting to begin with, and seeing all visions as equally valid can help this process
- When faced with more than one option that seem equally exciting, it makes sense to choose the option that is easiest to act upon

6 Essentials to Emotional Health and Happiness

- What stops us from taking action is the belief that doing so will give us less pleasure or more pain
- Projecting into the future can help motivate us to make a change and may be a powerful catalyst for transformation

Chapter 3

Live in the Moment

Stop and think for a moment about how we experience life. We travel from one 'present' moment to the next; behind us we leave our past, in front of us is our future. Yet, whatever has gone before, and whatever is to come, the plain and simple fact remains that the *only* time we have in which to experience life is *now*. A key to living abundantly is the ability to extract as much as possible from each and every 'now' moment in our lives. Well, that's the theory, anyway.

In *practice*, though, many of us find living in the present moment a real challenge. Some of us find that 'bad' experiences in our past continue to tie us in emotional knots and erode our sense of peace and contentment. Another common issue that can impact on our enjoyment of the present is the belief that happiness is for the future, and something that will only come once we have satisfied certain ambitions. Whether we are allowing our past to cast a shadow on our present, or we are putting our happiness off to the future, learning the art of living in the moment is a fundamental key to experiencing true happiness and fulfilment.

What happened to you?

Many of us can have our feelings of contentment and fulfilment dampened by past experience. Perhaps the traumatic break-up of a relationship is the reason why we find it difficult to trust new partners. A poor relationship with our parents can cause us to conclude that we are simply not 'good enough' as we are. Maybe a business failure has made us fearful of starting a new venture. It sometimes seems as though life has dealt us a 'bum deal', and that in some way we are suffering for this. The hurt and pain that we may have felt earlier in life, and perpetuates to this day, can put a major brake on our emotional well-being. Also, in practice, I have many individuals whose physical health issues seem to be related to their interpretation of painful events in the past. Transforming past experiences is often a key to regaining abundant health and well-being.

Healing the Past

It is not uncommon for us to internalise and interpret past experiences in a way which simply does not serve us. Should this come as much of a surprise? After all, when we are young we do not necessarily have the emotional or intellectual maturity to find our own truth in the experiences we have. As we discussed in chapter 7, we can end up taking on views and beliefs that are not innate to ourselves. The seeds for problems here are generally sown early in life, often through interaction with our parents. While the parent-child relationship is perhaps unlike any other,

and offers unique potential for growth and fulfilment on both sides, it can be an emotional minefield too!

Some of the most common and destructive emotional issues I see in practice concern low self-esteem and insecurity. Very often, individuals say they spent their childhoods feeling unloved, and as result, now feel *unlovable*. Whatever the precise cause of such an issue, it is clear it does nothing to enhance our experience of life. This may seem like I'm stating the obvious, but if we're not happy with ourselves, then it's virtually impossible to be happy, *period*. For many people, regaining a sense of self-esteem and learning to love themselves is a key to true happiness and fulfilment. The question is, how? The first step, is to take responsibility for how we feel.

Take Responsibility

It's quite a commonly held belief that people outside of ourselves can *cause* us to have certain emotions. We might believe, for instance, that the way our parents raised us has made us feel insecure and inadequate. Or that our partner leaving us is the reason why we feel angry and resentful. However, other people do not implant emotions in us. Emotions are something we generate internally. While we may believe our parents or siblings or teachers or whoever are responsible for how we feel, the fact is *we* are.

Some of us do not immediately warm to the idea of being responsible for our emotions, because this suggests we are somehow to *blame*. I am keen to point out, however, that responsibility is not the same as blame. Break down the word responsibility and what we get is *response-ability* – the ability to respond. Through our ability to respond to life's experiences, past and present, we have the power to see all of life in a way which allows us to learn and develop as individuals.

My belief is that the events in our lives have no inherent meaning, only the meaning we give them. This concept will be discussed more fully in chapter 11, entitled *See the Positive In Everything*, and I'll save the ins and outs of this until then. However, what I want to say here is that there is nothing anywhere that says any experience *must* be 'good' or 'bad', it's up to *us* to decide. By giving past events positive meaning, we can integrate these into our lives in a productive way. When we see events that have occurred in our lives in a positive light, this effectively dissolves the emotional debris that is attached to them.

The present is the result of the present

Sometimes, it can be difficult to see how we can transform the effect past experiences have on our lives. Surely, what went before *must* impact on us somehow? Many of us believe that 'bad' experiences in the past

inevitably lead to a 'bad' experience of the present. However, by changing our interpretation of past events, and therefore the emotions that go with them, we have the capacity to change their effect on us in the present. The present is not the result of the past, it's the result of the *present*. This concept is exemplified by the following story.

I was once consulted by a young actress called Sally. She came complaining of a range of symptoms, principally fatigue and digestive discomfort. It was my impression that Sally was suffering from poor digestion, principally related to low levels of stomach acid. I discussed the management of this with her, but also suggested she have a test for stomach acid secretion. This indeed showed low acid secretion, and we went on to take steps to manage this naturally.

When Sally returned some weeks later, she had made some progress, but not as much as either of us would have liked. Plus, Sally mentioned that she had had a problem with anxiety for as long as she could remember, and wondered whether we could tackle that too. This seemed a good time to explore any emotional factors which might be playing a part in Sally's health.

On the outside, Sally was very engaging and outwardly content. However, she was very critical of her work and not at all accepting of her evident talent. She told me that even when she was complemented on a

performance, she found it difficult not to focus on something that she felt she could have done better. Clearly, Sally was a perfectionist in her work, but self-criticism did seem to colour her experience of life and detract from her enjoyment of it.

Sally and I began to discuss the idea that nothing she did was ever really good enough. She was open to this idea, so I then asked her where or from whom she had learned this idea. Without any hesitation at all, Sally replied that she believed this idea had come from her mother. Sally proceeded to tell me how nothing she did seemed ever to satisfy or give real pleasure to her mother. I asked her to think back to the first time she felt like this. She told me that at the age of six, she had prepared a little play with her older sister to perform in front of her parents. She and her sister had spent much of the day rehearsing the play and getting their costumes ready. In the afternoon, they presented their self-written play excitedly to their parents. At the end, Sally remembers her father clapping and getting up to give her and her sister a big hug.

What had really stuck in Sally's memory, however, was her mother's comments. Apparently, she remarked that the girls had not learnt their lines properly, and what was needed was more rehearsal time! Sally remembers feeling upset and deflated at her mother's comments. Another event Sally recalled was coming home with a school report. Although her grades were good, Sally's mother had focused on her

weakest subject, mathematics, suggesting that she must 'try harder' in this area. Sally told me that similar such episodes peppered her childhood.

It appeared that Sally had learnt from these experiences that nothing she did was ever really good enough. Sally appeared to be playing out this belief in her own life, and this seemed to be manifesting as an extreme criticism of herself, particularly her work. I was keen to see if Sally might be able to change her sense of self-worth. I asked her to tell me more about her mother, and in particular, whether she was a critical person generally. Not surprisingly, it turned out that she was. Sally could clearly remember her mother's criticism of pretty much everyone including other family members and friends and acquaintances. Sally said her mother always seemed to be nit-picking about someone or something.

I suggested to Sally that it appeared no-one was immune to this trait in her mother. While Sally had seemingly taken her mother's criticism personally, I suggested it was quite possible that the issue was not 'personal' at all. She could go on believing that her mother viewed her as never quite good enough and perpetuate this feeling in her life, or perhaps it would serve her better to see the issue as one coming from her mother's critical nature. Basically, it seemed quite possible that her mother's tendency to find fault had simply spilled into Sally's life.

Sally now had the choice about what she wanted to believe. More importantly, she now had the option of transforming her experience of the present by changing her interpretation of the past. As Sally contemplated the idea of viewing her childhood experiences in another light, I could almost see a weight lift from her shoulders. The next time I saw Sally was several months later. Purely by chance, between visits I had seen her on the television, and complemented her on her performance. She did not dismiss my praise, but thanked me for it. Most importantly, Sally seemed much more at ease with herself. The anxiety she had suffered from for years had gone, as had her stomach symptoms.

As Sally's story demonstrates, taking responsibility for our emotions and changing our beliefs about the past can have a positive effect on our experience of the present. 'Letting go' of pain from the past and resolving feelings of bitterness, anger or resentment can be very liberating for both body and mind. Another critical element in the letting go of past events is *forgiveness*.

Forgive, don't forget

When we have been 'wronged' by another, we sometimes get stuck on the idea that we are simply unable to forgive the person who has wronged us. This does nothing to resolve the pain associated with the experience, and only serves to perpetuate it. As we continue to feel the pain

associated with past events, it's natural to do what we can to protect ourselves. One way we can do this is to 'bury' issues somewhere in our psyche so that we need not look at them. In short, we may feel it's better to forget than forgive.

Yet, experience shows that sweeping our emotions under the carpet usually just stores up problems for later on. While attempting to forget the past may appear to give us some respite from whatever it is that is causing us angst, in the long term the problems usually return to bite us on the ankle.

Holding anger, bitterness or resentment in one's heart is a major drain on our emotional energy, and may well have unwanted repercussions for our physical health too. Anger, for instance, has been found to increase the risk of heart disease.

See it their way

For some of us, forgiveness is easier said than done. When we find forgiveness difficult, it helps to understand why someone has acted in the way that they have. Look, we all have issues. I do, you do, and everyone else does too. A lot of our issues, as we have been exploring, come as a result of our past experiences. Sometimes, people behave the way they do because often that's the way they've been *taught* to behave.

We've all heard the statistics about how individuals who abuse their children were very often abused by their own parents. It's no-one's fault, it's something that happens. Sometimes, seeking to understand the issues others have allows us to feel the compassion we need to extend true forgiveness. The concept of understanding and compassion as a route through to forgiveness is aptly demonstrated in the following story.

Bethan, by her own admission, did not have a good relationship with her father. The main issue seemed to revolve around the events which occurred more than 10 years previously. Her parents had divorced when Bethan was 12, and her father had subsequently remarried. When Bethan was 20 she learnt to drive, and her father offer to 'go halves' on a car. However, once she had bought a car, her father rescinded without explanation, finally giving only what Bethan viewed as a nominal sum. Bethan felt simply unable to forgive her father for this, and had not spoken to him since. She commented to me that if she never spoke to her father again, it would not bother her. However, while Bethan appeared to be giving off an ambivalent attitude to her father, her body language and tone of voice told another story – one of hurt and resentment.

As we started to talk more about this issue, Bethan became very upset. A lot of suppressed emotion that had got buried along the way seemed to be bubbling to the surface. It seemed that Bethan would do well to heal

the issue with her father, and I felt that forgiveness was critical to the healing process. Maybe, through understanding better why her father had behaved in the way he did, Bethan would be able to resolve the issue. I asked about whether similar issues had come up when she was very small. Did, for instance, Bethan's father promise her things when she was a girl but not deliver? Bethan did not recollect this, and believed that the issues she had with her father started after he left the family home and remarried.

In an effort to seek to understand Bethan's father's behaviour, I asked if she knew much about his own upbringing. This seemed to trigger a whole new stream of consciousness for Bethan. In particular, she remembered a conversation she had had with her father about his own father. Bethan's grandfather had himself divorced and remarried, after which he seemed to give Bethan's father very little support, either financially or emotionally. Bethan's father had never reconciled the feeling of resentment he had for his own father over this. I suggested to Bethan that her father was repeating a pattern from an unresolved issue which he himself had experienced. In the light of this better understanding of what perhaps lay behind the issue over the donation towards car. Bethan could see that she at least had the ability to forgive her father.

Bethan wrote to her father expressing why she had been so upset, and asking him to 'give his side of the story'. In particular, she wanted to know why he had rescinded over his financial offer. Bethan was very happy to get a letter back from her father. In it, he explained that his second wife had persuaded him not to give the sum he had promised for the car, insisting that she was no longer financially dependent on him. Bethan's father said he had bowed under pressure, and that he had felt guilty about this ever since. Try as he might, he just couldn't seem to make amends. Bethan's letter, however, had 'broken the ice', and he was keen to re-establish a relationship.

Bethan responded well to her father's letter. It helped her understand much better why her father had acted in a way which had hurt her. This understanding is what allowed Bethan to forgive her father, and they went on to resume a close and loving relationship.

Everything is significant

One final point I'd like to make before we leave the issue of the past is this; every single experience we ever have has meaning and is valid. The reason I point this out is because I often find that when we are letting go of the past, we can fail to move forward because we judge our 'old' behaviour. When an age-old issue evaporates into the mist just by seeing an experience in a more productive light, some of us berate ourselves for

not resolving the issue earlier. This is just getting rid of an issue, only to replace it another one! Do, remember, that each and every experience we ever have in our lives has led us to where we are now. This basic fact allows us to see that all of life is both meaningful and valid.

Living in the Future

While dwelling on the past can impair our ability to enjoy life to the full, so can living in the future. Many of us may feel dissatisfied with our lives, but cling to the idea that we will be happy when (and only when!) certain conditions are met. Maybe we feel fulfilment will come with a job promotion and increase in salary we are hankering after. Perhaps we have the impression that finding a 'soul-mate' is the key to our eternal bliss. Does the idea of having another child seem it will make everything alright?

Setting external conditions on our happiness in this way is basically putting that happiness off to the future. Yet, the future does not exist, and will never exist. I know I've said it before, but I'm going to say it again – the only time we have is *now*.

Happiness is not something that we have to plan and strive for. It isn't something to be earned. Neither does it only come to those who 'deserve' it. Happiness is an emotion. Like all emotions, we have the

power to create it. Either we choose to be happy, or we do not. We can choose to look at our life in a positive, abundant way, or we can choose to see it through a lens of negativity and scarcity. What is important here to remember here is that our ability to be happy does not depend on us meeting some arbitrary criteria we have set for ourselves. The only conditions there may be on our happiness are the ones that we make. We can expend a lot of time and energy searching for a reason to be happy, when the reality is there may be no reason *not* to be!

Count Your Blessings

In a World which can sometimes be so geared to consumerism, I suppose it comes as no surprise that we can tend to feel like we're lacking something. When we compare what we have to what we might have, it's easy to feel like we've been short-changed somewhere. A good first step to embracing happiness in the moment is to appreciate what it is you *do* have in your life.

A useful trick here is to imagine how you might feel if you were suddenly stripped of all you have. You may feel you would like a larger home. Imagine, though, how you would feel if you had nowhere to live at all. Maybe you would like more friends. Think for a moment, however, what it be like if the friends you do have suddenly disappeared from your life, never to be seen or heard again? Maybe you are feeling underpaid in

your work, what if your salary was even lower or perhaps you had no job at all? The point of this is not to make you feel miserable! However, imagining life without what it is you have can be a useful way of getting in touch with the emotion of appreciation.

There's more to abundance than wealth

Another tool which can be used to allow happiness into the present is to change our definition of what it means to be 'abundant'. Many of us think that the word abundant refers to money and possessions. If we lack these things, how can we possibly be abundant? However, I would like to challenge this notion. The only reason we believe abundance is essentially about wealth is because we have been taught to believe that.

However, it often serves us better to view abundance as the ability to do what we want to do, when we want to do it. Money and possessions are simply not a prerequisite for this. The fact is, we don't actually need anything at all to be abundant. For instance, if what you really want to do is lie in a field and soak up the sun, is that being as abundant as lying on a beach in the Caribbean? Is a good heart to heart with a close friend over a cup of tea not every bit as abundant than an expensive restaurant meal with some business colleagues? Is not looking at a fabulous sky or some trees as fulfilling as having a priceless oil painting on our wall? Loosening up our definition of what abundance really means, and seeing it

more as a state of being rather than a statement of ownership, can help us see how happiness is for us in the here and now, and not something to be put off to the future.

Living in the moment is critical to our ability to move ahead in our lives. As we do this, we must keep alive to the fact that what we want out of life can change. When we sense this, we may want to change our circumstances to match our new desires. However, what we see in our lives is really a reflection of ourselves. The secret to changing what appears to be on the outside is to change what's going on *inside*. Whatever it is we would like to transform in our lives, it helps to *see life as a mirror*

Summary

- The only time we have to experience life is *now*
- Sometimes we may feel that 'bad' experiences from our past have cast a shadow over our present
- We may believe that other people or external events are responsible for how we feel, but the fact is *we* are
- Our emotions depend on the beliefs we have about events - changing our beliefs is what allows us to transform our emotions
- Forgiveness is often an important key to letting go of negative past experiences
- Seeking to understand the behaviours of others and extending compassion to them often helps the process of forgiveness
- Seeing all our past experiences as valid is important if we are to learn from them and move on in our lives
- Happiness is not something to be put off to the future - the only time we have to experience it happiness is *now*

- Appreciation of what we have is key to experiencing happiness in the moment
- Seeing abundance as the ability to do what we want to do, when we want to do it, helps free us from the concept that wealth is a prerequisite for happiness

Chapter 4

See life as a Mirror

Sometimes, we can get the impression that the World is dishing us out more than our fair share of bad luck. When things go 'wrong' in our lives, it's easy to feel buffeted by fate and bad fortune. Often, elements of our lives can seem completely beyond our control, somehow external to us and unpredictable. And even when we attempt to change our lives for the better, it can sometimes seem like our best efforts come to nothing. Many of us seek to improve our lives through changing circumstances such as our work, home and personal relationships, but often end up feeling no more fulfilled in the end.

It is my belief that we do have the power to manifest the lives we truly desire. Sometimes, though, we just go at it all wrong. While life may appear to be external to us and essentially uncontrollable, I believe this is far from the truth. In this chapter we will be exploring the idea that life is like a mirror, and merely reflects back to us what we project into it. If we want to change our lives the secret is not to try and change the mirror, it's to change what we reflect into it.

All change

When we sense some dissatisfaction in our lives, it's natural to want to change things. Don't like our house? Build an extension. Better still, move somewhere else. Don't like our job? Ask for a raise. Or maybe get a new one. Not happy with our relationship? Tell our partner that things have got to change. Or maybe just chuck the whole thing in and get someone new. Despite the fact that we can strive to change the circumstances of our lives, it's amazing sometimes just how the 'same' we can feel. Once the excitement of moving home, starting a new job, or embarking on a new relationship has faded, how often do we find we have the very same sense of dissatisfaction as we had before. The reason for this is because, as we shall explore, life is like a mirror. What we give out is what we get back.

Imagine you are in a car driving along the motorway. Say the speed limit is 70 mph, but you and some other drivers are doing 80 in the fast lane. Quite suddenly, the cars in front of you slow to 70 mph. At first it is not clear why they have, but then you notice a police car in the inside lane! Imagine for a moment how motorway driving must seem to the policeman driving the police car. For the most part, he sees other motorists on the motorway complying obediently with the speed limit. Imagine now the policeman comes to the end of his shift, and is driving home along the motorway in his civilian clothes in an unmarked car. What he experiences now is motorists clacking along in the outside lane at 80! So, the reality the 'policeman' gets depends on whether he looks like a policeman or not.

What reality the policeman has reflected back to him from the mirror of life depends on what he projects into it!

The mirror of life reflects our beliefs

We know if we go around being kind and considerate to others we generally get a better reaction than if we are rude and aggressive. This sort of cause and effect is obvious in our lives. However, the mirror of life has other more subtle qualities. What the mirror also reflects back to us is beliefs we have that we may be totally unaware of. Let me explain:

If we want to see a 'happy' reflection in our reality, we have to project happiness into it. As we discussed in the last chapter, happiness, like all emotions, comes from within. And like all emotions, happiness stems from belief. If we are feeling unhappy it is because we *believe* that we have something to be unhappy about.

Seeing isn't believing

You'll be familiar with the expression 'seeing is believing'. However, if we accept that what we see in our lives is as a reflection of our emotions, and that emotions stem from beliefs, it becomes apparent that seeing isn't believing at all, it's the other way round!

Believing is seeing is the truth of the matter. There may sometimes not seem to be any point to the 'bad' experiences we have in life. However, once we accept the idea that life is of our making, it means that we can see every single experience as an opportunity to learn more about what really makes us tick. Once we find out what beliefs we have that are creating any sense of pain or unhappiness, we can (if we choose) change those beliefs to ones we *do* prefer. Changing our beliefs gives us the power to take control of our lives and make them what we want.

You don't get happiness by contorting the mirror

Looking for happiness by changing the external circumstances of our life is akin to attempting to contort the mirror. Many of us attempt to bend the mirror a little this way or that to improve the reflection we see. This may work, but not for long! Even if we do get a slightly different reflection in the mirror, the effect can be difficult to sustain. In terms of changing what reflection we get, contorting the mirror generally does not work! Quite frankly, the simplest, most effective way of changing what we see in the mirror of life is to change what we project into it. Changing our beliefs is the key to changing our reality.

Lose control

Another area where we might try to exert some control is with other people. Some people are desperate to manipulate and 'force' people into being a certain way or doing certain things. Commonly referred to as 'control freaks', these individuals can often spend enormous time and energy getting people to be who they want them to be in order to fulfil their own needs. It's exhausting work. And, try as they might, control freaks generally don't get the satisfaction they seek.

Here again, the real power to get what you want from your life, including other people, comes from the recognition of the fact that reality is a reflection. Whatever you want to change, remember it's you who has to. This is what puts real power in your hands. When you understand this, you will see how changing your reality needs not be exhausting, and requires only the deftest touch.

One of the most profound experiences in my life concerns how changing our beliefs can be mirrored in our experience of life.

My father has what you might call 'a good mind'. I remember him helping me with my Latin homework when I was at school. Well into his 50s he still had good command of Latin, a subject he had not studied since his schooldays more than 30 years previously. In stark contrast, within a couple of years of leaving school, I had forgotten pretty much every bit of Latin I had ever learnt!

Another recollection I have from my schooldays concerns my learning of a Shakespearean speech for an English lesson. I asked my father to check me as I attempted to recite the piece from memory, and handed him the book opened at the relevant page. As I fumbled my way through the speech I became irritated when it was clear he wasn't even looking at the book. However, while I thought he was simply not paying attention, the fact was he could remember the speech from his own days at school. I challenged him to recite the speech from memory. Which he did. My memory, on the other hand, is so bad that I simply cannot remember which speech it was or even the play it came from!

You might think from these stories that I had a very close relationship with my father. This, however, was not the case, in fact it was what you might term 'strained'. While he had obvious powers of intellect, I wasn't really interested in that. The issue, from where I was standing, was that he didn't really seem to be very in touch with his emotions, and did not demonstrate his love to me in a way that I wanted.

After I moved from home to go to medical school, our relationship seemed only to become more distant. This did not seem to be helped by me failing my examinations at the end of the first year at college. We talked occasionally when I could be bothered to pick up the phone, but

then only briefly. In the six years I spent at medical school, I remember my father called me once, and that was because of some crisis.

Some years after leaving medical school, I attended a lecture on feng shui. Feng shui is the Oriental art and science behind how the physical nature of our environment can affect the energy flow around us. Feng shui teaches that the placement of objects and the design of the space around us can have a profound impact on every aspect of our lives. However, the lecture that I went to wasn't about which direction to face your desk in your office and where to put the rubber plant, it was about feng shui from the inside out. The concept here is that if we clear and order our internal 'emotional' space, then we do not need to worry so much about putting candles in the 'relationship area' and plumbing water fountains into our living rooms.

One of the areas covered in the lecture was that of elders or parents. The lecturer pointed out that one of the issues children have with their parents is that they often feel they are not loved by them. Sometimes children feel that their parents love is 'conditional', in other words it depends on them being a certain way. However, the lecturer pointed out that parents generally do love their children, but often they may difficulty showing it! More than that, however, if we feel we cannot love our parents until they love us in a way we want, then we are being conditional. And if we are

being conditional, bearing in mind life is a mirror, is it any surprise that we feel we are getting conditionality back?

These messages struck a real chord with me. I left the lecture theatre making a strong commitment to opening my heart to the concept that my father did indeed love me. And secondly, it dawned on me that for my relationship with my father to change, it was not he who had to change, but me. I knew in that instant that the secret to this was to extend unconditional love to my father.

The following day I was writing at my desk. The phone rang. It was my father. My immediate reaction was that there was a crisis. But, as it turned out, my father had just phoned for a 'chat'. He told me he had been in the newsagents that day and found an article of mine in a magazine. Apparently, he had shown it to a shop assistant and announced that he was my father. The shop assistant, he said, just looked at him as though he was mad.

The very next day after me making my internal adjustment, my father and I were communicating in a way I always hoped we would. For me, this was utter confirmation of the idea that we can transform our lives once we see them as a mirror of ourselves.

Don't wait for the reflection to change

While attempting to manipulate and mould our external reality is not the best way to transform it, neither is waiting for it to change spontaneously. Some of us, when confronted with a reality we don't prefer, sit back in the hope that our reality will finally give us something we can be happy about. This is akin to staring into the mirror with a frown, hoping that at some point we will see a smile coming back at us. I was doing this. Frowning into the mirror I was waiting for the reflection (my father in this case) to smile back at me. I don't need to tell you that this approach doesn't work! If we see something in our external reality that we don't like, the only person that has the real power to change it *us*.

It's not about forcing a smile either

In the last chapter we touched on the importance of not burying our emotions, lest they may just fester in our consciousness and cause problems down the line. One way some of us can hide our emotions is simply to gloss over them, to ignore them, to pretend they're not there and that everything's fine. Sometimes, it seems the best thing to do is put a brave face on and move on regardless. However, this is like looking in the mirror and forcing a smile. It's not a real smile, and you can't fool yourself that it is. For things to really change, we have to change our beliefs. How, though, do we know when we really have changed?

What tells us that we have really changed, is when we have no expectation that our external reality will change too. Once positive change has occurred on the inside, we need to detach from the idea of any change on the outside. If we are constantly on the look-out for signs of improvement, it is clear that we are simply not trusting that change will come. If we truly believe that change will come, and have 100% trust that that this is so, then we need not have any expectation about how our reality may change. We know that we have truly changed when we respond differently to our reality, even if it stills looks the same.

When I walked out of the feng shui lecture I felt something had shifted. The moment I recognised my father's love and was willing to extend mine to him without condition I felt very different. I honestly had no expectations about what might happen. My commitment to change my beliefs and attitudes was without condition. It was this, I believe, that lead to such an immediate shift in my external reality.

See yourself in others

Sometimes we can get angry, hurt or frustrated by the actions of others. Yet, if we see life as a mirror, it opens us up to the idea that often what we see and don't like about others may well be the very things we don't like about ourselves! The upside of this is that other people can alert us to aspects to ourselves that are not serving us. If you ever feel resentful

of how someone else has behaved (we all do from time to time), then it often helps to pause for a moment, and ask yourself honestly whether that person is exhibiting traits you yourself have.

For instance, while I was feeling resentful of my father for offering what I thought was unconditional love, there was I doing precisely the same thing! Once you recognise something about yourself that you would prefer not to exhibit, then you have the choice to about whether to exhibit it or not!. However critical you may be of someone at first sight, remember that you may end up thanking them for making you aware of something about yourself you now choose not to exhibit. The next story is a good example of this.

Robin was in his mid-50s and came to see me complaining of low libido. He separated from his second wife some months previously, and was now with a new girlfriend. However, Robin's low libido was causing problems in the relationship. His girlfriend was taking his apparent disinterest in sex personally, and Robin was feeling under pressure to perform. Up until recently, Robin had always enjoyed a health sexual appetite, so what had gone wrong?

I enquired about his separation. After 23 years of marriage, his wife confessed that she was having an affair with a family friend. Robin was devastated and had immediately filed for divorce. However, according to

Robin, his wife was keen for them to 'sort things out'. She suggested joint counselling. However, Robin could just not see his way to forgiving his wife, and clearly still harboured a lot of bitterness and resentment toward her.

It seemed entirely possible that Robin's issues with low libido were related to the unresolved issues with his wife. He may have tried to patch his emotions up with a new relationship, but perhaps the wound was a little deeper than that. Because life is like a mirror, I thought I might dive in and ask him if he had ever been unfaithful in his marriage. Robin admitted that he had had three affairs during their marriage but quickly added: "But they were different, they didn't mean anything." As we delved a little deeper, it turned out that Robin's infidelities were really a reaction to what he felt were deficiencies in the relationship. Was it not possible, I suggested, that his wife's affair had also been a reaction to a certain dissatisfaction with the marriage? In this way, was not her own behaviour really just a mirror of his?

What had not been obvious to Robin suddenly was. Once he saw his wife's behaviour as nothing more than a reflection of his own, a lot of the 'bad' feeling he had towards her just evaporated. I asked him whether he loved his wife, which he did. So then I asked him what he was going to do about his situation. Quite voluntarily (and without prompting!) he said he was going to "come clean" with his wife about his own infidelities. His

plan was to tell all, and see if they could work on the real issues that had not yet been dealt with.

I didn't see Robin again, but I did get a letter from him some weeks later. He had spoken frankly to his wife, and she was very receptive to his honesty. They did indeed go on to have joint counselling which enabled them to look at issues had been simmering for many years. Through more open communication they had resumed their relationship, and were enjoyed a health sex life once again.

While other people can exhibit 'undesirable' qualities that can alert us to our own issues, they can also reflect back to us aspects of ourselves that are welcome and positive. This is useful to remember because, quite frankly, many of us simply do not recognise our more attractive qualities. How often do give yourself credit for your 'good' qualities? For that matter, are you even aware of them? If you see something you like in someone else, just stop for a moment and look within you for that same quality. You may be surprised at how often you find attributes you never even knew you had!

Seeing ourselves in other people is a useful aid to learning more about ourselves. When we see something we don't like, it allows us to explore those things about ourselves we would like to change. And when we see something we do like it can help us appreciate things about ourselves that

we were are aware of or perhaps do not give ourselves enough credit for. In short, either way we win! In fact, all of life is like this. Whatever we experience in life, we always have the opportunity to learn and grow through it if we choose. Another fundamental tool to living abundantly is to *see the positive in everything*.

Summary

- Life can often appear external to us and uncontrollable
- Life is like a mirror - what we give out is what we get back
- Our external reality reflects our core beliefs
- The secret to changing our reality is not to attempt to change the circumstances of our lives, but to change our beliefs (without expectation)
- Other people can alert us to our own characteristics
- Seeing undesirable qualities in others can help make us aware of our own traits which we might like to change

6 Essentials to Emotional Health and Happiness

- Seeing positive qualities in others can serve to remind us of our own attributes

Chapter 5

See the Positive in Everything

Life is rich with experience, some good, and some bad. Generally, we don't mind the good stuff, it's the bad that causes the problems! But what is it about events that occur in our life that make them 'good' or 'bad'? We may view events such as having our car stolen or losing our job as bad, but is this always the case? If the insurance payout on our stolen car enables us to buy a brand new one, what's so bad about that? If being made redundant leads us to find more fulfilling work elsewhere, are we going to grumble? This chapter explores the concept that nothing that happens in life has any inherent meaning – only the meaning we give to them. By being open to the idea that *you* are the one that gives your life meaning, you can choose to take something positive from any and every experience you have.

Often, the reason why we interpret an event as either 'good' or 'bad' is because we've been taught to. Through the sort of influences we explored in chapter 7 such as our parents and teachers, we *learn* to ascribe certain meanings to certain experiences. For example, winning the lottery is 'good', while being declared bankrupt is 'bad'. Yet, we've all heard stories about people who win the lottery who tell of the headaches this has caused. I personally know of someone who had a once-successful building company which went to the wall. He is now a yoga

instructor and says he is happier than ever! The point here is that winning the lottery is not *always* good, and being declared bankrupt is not *necessarily* bad.

Reality is not 'fixed'

Nothing, and I mean *nothing*, in life is fixed. Even our experiences of life which seem completely indisputable are essentially a matter of opinion. Let's take the colour of grass as an example. We all know grass is green, right? However, for arguments sake, let's imagine an individual who is colour blind and sees grass as blue. So, is the grass green or blue? You might argue that most people are not colour-blind, and will therefore see the grass as green, so therefore the grass *is* green. However, it is also true that if someone sees grass as blue, to them it *is* blue. And even if people with 'normal' sight have numbers on their side, does this invalidate the experience of the person who is colour-blind?

If we for one moment let go of our sometimes rigid perception of our World it becomes clear that grass is neither green nor blue – it's *both*. What colour we see it as depends on our perception. This is an important idea because it throws up the possibility that more than one reality can exist at the same time. Even something that appears fixed, such the colour of grass, can vary depending on who is viewing it. Grass could, indeed, be any colour under the sun!

Even 'science' is open to interpretation

From my background in medicine, I know that there are plenty of people who believe that life is indeed fixed, and that science has the capacity to dissect the realities of the Universe. Yet, when we look closely, we very often find that science does not give us the clear-cut answers we expect. I can think of countless examples in the scientific literature where two similar studies have produced quite different results. For example, recently I became aware of two studies which examined the effect of vitamin E on the heart. One study concluded that vitamin E was of benefit, the other did not. What is more, these studies came out within two days of each other. Talk about confusing! There are good arguments on both sides of the debate about vitamin E and its role in preventing heart disease. Which camp someone falls in is essentially down to *opinion*.

Even when the answers science gives us do appear to be clear-cut, even these are open to interpretation. Let me give you an example. Imagine a scientific study designed to establish the effectiveness of a new treatment for an incurable disease. A group of people are treated with the real treatment, and the same number is treated with an inactive treatment or 'placebo'. At the end of the study it is found that the drug cured 50% of people. Looks good so far, doesn't it? However, it turns out that the

same study found that 50% of people taking the placebo were also 'cured'. From a *scientific* perspective, the real treatment is viewed as ineffective. Yet, one might argue that because it cured 50% of people with what was thought previously to be an incurable condition, that the treatment does indeed have some merit. Some might argue that withholding a treatment shown to help 50% of people treated with it is morally objectionable. Who says medical treatment needs to be 'scientific' anyway? Not everyone may agree that scientific evidence for the benefit of a treatment need be a prerequisite for its use in medicine.

I'm not making a case that any of these view is 'right' or 'wrong'. However, the point is that even the principles and practice of something as apparently 'correct' as scientific research are open to question, and demonstrates just how much the events around us are essentially a matter of opinion. If we accept that the nature of reality is not fixed, then it is certainly true that our interpretation of events around us is not either. This throws up the possibility that we may, if we choose, see all of life's events in a positive light? How though?

Let go of the negative

In the last chapter we explored the concept that life is like a mirror. The secret to seeing the positive in our experiences of life is to approach them from a positive point of view. The first step here is to let go of whatever

attachment you may have to the idea that any event may be inherently negative. Whatever the event, we sometimes need to suspend our judgment about it for just a moment. Once we have, we can then start to look for the positive in the experience.

Look for the positive

Once we have suspended any negative judgement, we can start to look for the positive meaning in our experience. This is obviously a personal matter, and the positive you find in any experience will be individual to you. The principle of seeing the positive in our experience of life assumed great relevance in my own life when it helped to transform my relationship with my mother.

In the last chapter I wrote about how I had viewed my father as very much a 'head' person. My mother, on the other hand, is what I regard as a more 'heart-centred' person. My mother is a person who feels a lot. She has great intuition, and is very sensitive to the way others feel and the experiences they have. No doubt these skills were of great value to her when she was practising as a doctor, and I know that she still uses them in her daily life. Yet, while I now recognise the beauty of my mother's heart-centred approach to life, when I was younger it was a source of great irritation to me.

When I was at medical school, I developed this idea that my mother was not intellectual enough. Despite the fact that my mother was a doctor, I regarded her as not well-read enough, and intellectually inadequate (I cringe as I write this but it's the truth). Now, I realise this attitude was simply a reflection of my own insecurities (for much of the time I was studying medicine I believed that I was academically inferior to my peers). However, at the time this was not obvious to me, and I just thought that my mother was simply not 'brainy' enough. As with my father, communication with my mother was not great, and we had an 'at arm's length' relationship.

Relatively soon after embarking on my career in natural medicine I saw a patient who was a psychic and healer. I didn't know much about healing, but I was certainly interested in it. After talking about the concept of healing, he asked me if I would be interested in developing my own healing potential. I was excited by this but didn't know where to start.

Quite spontaneously, he suggested that I start by recognising that I have inherited a lot of healing potential from my mother. He then went on to describe some of my mother's attributes, including her ability to sense individual's issues and offer advice and support. In this instance, I saw my mother in a whole different light. Whereas before I viewed her as intellectually inadequate (ouch again!), I could now see wonderful qualities which I simply had failed to recognise. In fact, I could even see

that not being bound up in her intellect might be the very thing that allowed her to make best use of her more subtle qualities. In the space of just a few minutes, I experienced a complete sea change in how I felt about my mother, which came from having my eyes opened to the 'positive' in her.

This really was a turning point for me. There is no doubt in my mind that this change in perspective has greatly enhanced my relationship with my mother. Over the last few years I have learnt a lot from her approach to life. I now recognise her to be a very intuitive woman, who often seems to feel peoples experiences without them having to tell her anything. She has a distinctly positive approach to life, and does not seem at all phased by the challenges that life can bring. Now I recognise that her attributes have, in many ways, been an inspiration for the emotional and spiritual component of this book.

Likewise, I also recognise my father's qualities as being an important influence on me too. While I used to see his 'intellectual' approach to life as an encumbrance, I now see this also as an immense gift. In my own life, I recognise that the ability to use a modicum of logic and rationale is what got me through medical school, and has afforded me the ability to understand better the way the body works, what can go wrong, and what can be done to put it right. This has clearly been invaluable in my work,

including the writing of the more physically-oriented component of this book.

It is my belief that seeing the positive attributes in my parents, and drawing from these in my own life, has been invaluable in the writing of this very book.

See the positive in your emotions too

If we are open to seeing the positive in the events around us, we may also be able to see some positive in our emotions too. In my experience, one of the, if not *the* most destructive and paralysing emotions of all is fear. Fear is one of the major reasons why we choose not to do things in our lives and follow our heart's desire. Whether it be fear of failure, fear of feeling pain, fear of making the wrong decision, or even fear of success, fear can be a major block. However, it doesn't have to be this way. Remember, *everything* can be positive if we choose to view it from a positive perspective. So, what's so great about fear?

Transforming fear

The first step to transforming fear is to recognise that you have it. Quite often because we believe fear is something bad, we push our feelings down, and divert ourselves away from the issue, hoping that it will just go

away. In chapter 9 we touched on the idea that glossing over our emotions and pretending they're not there does not work, and often makes things worse. Fear that is pushed down has not actually gone anywhere. If you still have the fear, then this may be reflected in your external reality.

Recognise the fear

Imagine an individual who has an unresolved fear of abandonment stemming from childhood and the time their father left the family home. Let's assume that this fear is now manifesting as an inability to feel trust in romantic relationships. In order to deal with the relationship issue, it makes sense to deal with the fear which is at its root. The first step is recognise the fear is there in the first place.

What are you doing to protect yourself?

Once you acknowledge the fear, the next step is to ask yourself what you might be doing in your life to protect yourself from that fear. For instance, the person with a fear of abandonment may choose not to get involved in close relationships. No relationship, no chance of abandonment, right? The problem here, of course, that the real issue, the *fear*, has not been dealt with. Protecting yourself from a fear just

gives a false sense of security. Facing the fear by exposing yourself to it gives you the opportunity of resolving it for ever.

Find the beliefs that are at the root of the fear

As we discussed in the last chapter, emotions, including fear, stem from beliefs. If you don't have a belief about something, then you cannot have an emotional response to it. Whatever it is you may feel fearful about, there must be some belief that is driving that emotion. It is because of this that fear can actually be a very positive thing. Why? Because, quite simply, it alerts us to beliefs that we have that do not serve us. The next step, therefore, is to find what belief you have that has caused the fear. In the case of the individual who fears abandonment, the issue may revolve around a feeling of rejection from their father.

Change the belief to something you do prefer

The final step in transforming fear is to choose a belief that works better for you. As we explored in chapter 9, the present is not the result of the past, it's the result of the present. So, for instance, the individual fearing abandonment might choose to recognise that what led to him going was relationship issues with his wife, and not to do with a rejection of his child. Seeing the event in a new light can help the feeling of abandonment, and the fear that goes with it, to evaporate.

Using fear as a tool to unearth and transform the beliefs that do not serve us is aptly demonstrated in the following story.

Patricia, a lady in her mid-50s, came to see me complaining of arthritis in her hands and spine. These problems seemed related to a number of different underlying factors including food sensitivity and hormonal changes that had come with the menopause four years previously. I recommended dietary and lifestyle changes which along with some nutritional supplementation was designed to help her symptoms. I enquired about her domestic situation to gauge whether or not she had any help in the home.

At this point Patricia became very upset. Her husband to whom she had been married for 28 years had left her only two months before. He had, she told me, fallen in love with a lady from the United States who he met on the internet. Without warning, he suddenly announced to Patricia that he was leaving and left the very same day. Patricia was devastated. Not only had her husband leaving come as an incredible shock, she did not even know where he was. Her only means of contacting him was by email. She had sent him a string of emails pleading for him to reconsider. However, she had only has two replies; one to say he was safe, the other to say he was not coming home.

Patricia was upset and confessed that she had no idea what to do. It occurred to me that if her husband had run off to America to be with a woman he hadn't even met, then perhaps there were issues with the relationship. Sure enough, Patricia told me that there were, although she had thought that things weren't "that bad". I asked what issues they had. It turns out that their relationship had taken a distinct turn for the worse after the death of her father six years before. She felt that her husband had offered her little support at this time, and was very resentful of him for this.

Yet, despite this simmering bitterness towards her husband, Patricia never actually discussed how she felt with him. Their relationship had become quite functional. He went out to work while she looked after the home. She had previously worked as an office manager, but had given this up a few years ago after some pressure from her husband. Their sex-life had become very sporadic, and by her own admission, there was little in terms of companionship either. Yet, however unfulfilling the relationship was, Patricia seemed to have come to the conclusion that it was better than no relationship at all. Patricia was clearly fearful of life on her own, and believed that this would be somehow worse than a continuing relationship with her husband.

I challenged Patricia's beliefs about life without her husband, and also discussed with her the principle that no event or experience has any

inherent meaning. I suggested that she might transform the situation by opening up to the potential of a positive outcome, and changing her beliefs about the after-effects of her husband's departure. Possibly, Patricia could see this event as a release. Plainly she was not fulfilled in her relationship, could its end therefore spell a whole new chapter in Patricia's life, one of liberation and adventure? I wondered also, whether her joint pain may be a physical metaphor for her sense of feeling 'stuck' in her relationship. Perhaps, liberating herself from the relationship would also 'free up' her hands and spine.

Looking at her situation from a more positive perspective seemed to have an immediate impact on Patricia. Her mood changed from one of despondency to one of self-assurance. Clearly, Patricia had at least glimpsed the benefits that were evident in her husband's leaving. I was keen to learn how she got on.

She returned three months later saying that her attitude to her husband's leaving had changed from one of sadness and desperation to relief. While Patricia had been fearful of life without her husband, she now was choosing to believe that life was infinitely better without him. The fear evaporated as a result, and this gave her the impetus to get on with her life.

Immediately after the consultation she went home and emailed her husband saying that she wanted a divorce. She also vented her spleen regarding her resentment she had felt since her father's death. Patricia's told me her husband agreed to a divorce, and that she had sought the advice of a solicitor. Patricia's joint pain was considerably better and for the first time in years she was feeling 'alive'. Her friends had been a tower of strength to her, and she was enjoying an active social life. Patricia was also intending to resume work, and in the meantime had taken a temping job as a secretary in an architect's office. She was, undoubtedly, optimistic about the future.

As Patricia's story demonstrates, personal relationships can be challenging. In a way, our interactions with other people possible afford us the greatest potential for growth. Yet, as many of us know, they can also be the source of great heartache and pain. The following chapter explores ways in which we may enrich our relationship with ourselves, and how to use that as a basis for the love we extend to others. In short, this final chapter is about how to *be love*.

Summary

- Nothing in life has any inherent meaning, only the meaning we give it

- The first step to seeing the positive in any event is letting go of the concept that it is inherently 'bad'
- Once we have let go of the negative, we can seek what positive learning an event or experience has for us
- Even fear can be positive in that it alerts us to beliefs we would prefer not to have
- Recognising fear and not protecting ourselves from it allows us to learn more about ourselves
- Changing the beliefs that are at the root of our fear is critical to transforming this emotion

Chapter 6

Be Love

Our experience of life is not generally one of isolation. Living in today's World inevitably brings us into contact with other individuals, and from this contact many different kinds of relationships can be born which enrich our lives. It is through our interaction with others, whether they be family, friends, acquaintances or 'love interests', that we get to experience all facets of life. And while relationships can give us true pleasure, they can also be the source of intense pain. It is not uncommon for issues to spring up between family members, for instance. And most will know the challenges that romantic relationships bring. Friendships sometimes offer their own challenges.

In this chapter, we will be exploring some of the major reasons why relationships can falter. And we'll also be looking at ways of approaching relationships which can enhance our experience of them. A key element in truly fulfilling relationships is love. Love, like all emotions is not something to be lost or found, it comes from *within*. The secret to having truly loving and fulfilling relationships with others is to first have a truly loving and fulfilling relationship with ourselves.

You're always in a relationship with yourself

For most of us, the word 'relationship' is generally taken to refer to a connection between *two* people. Those of us who are not currently romantically engaged usually regard ourselves as being 'not in a relationship'. The fact is, though, we are *always* in a relationship – with *ourselves*. What is more, this is undeniably *the* most important relationship we will ever have. While relationships with others may come and go, we will *never* be out of a relationship with ourselves. What is more, the better the relationship we have with ourselves, the better our relationships with others.

In chapter 10 we explored the concept that life is like a mirror - what we give out is what we get back. The more love we experience internally, the more love we experience in our lives as a whole. But how many us really do have true love in our hearts for ourselves? For instance, do you believe some aspect of your physical appearance is simply unacceptable? Or perhaps you find some aspect of your personality unpalatable? Maybe you have a feeling of low self-worth because of an issue with a feeling of being unloved as a child.

Love Yourself

The bottom line is that many of us do not love ourselves, and as a result, have made the judgement that we are not 'worthy' of love. If we do indeed feel this way, is it likely that we'll find throngs of people falling

over themselves to show us otherwise? Even if we do find ourselves in a relationship, if deep down we feel we do not 'deserve' true love, what are the chances that we are going to derive emotional satisfaction from that relationship and find that it endures?

Many of the concepts in the preceding chapters have explored ways of developing nurturing and loving relationships with ourselves. In chapter 7, we discussed the concept of honouring ourselves. Within the context of relationships, knowing who you are is important because if you don't, how do you really know who you're in a relationship with? Would you commit to a life-long relationship with someone you didn't know? Well, *exactly*. Another important lesson from chapter 7 is the idea of *self-acceptance*. Accepting yourself and allowing yourself to be who you are is critical to having a loving relationship with yourself, and others too.

Once you know who are and have accepted that whole-heartedly, the critical thing is to *be who you are*. This is essentially the theme of chapter 8. An important element here is not to compromise your true wishes and desires. When you do this you have sacrificed a part of yourself. Sacrifice is a sign that you believe you don't deserve what it is you want, including your heart's desire. When you honour yourself by being who you are, and act on that without compromise, the message you are sending out to the World is that you know what you want, you believe you can have it, and that nothing less will do. Once you love who you

are, and honour your true wishes and beliefs, then your reality has no choice but to reflect that back to you. We may look to others to supply us with the love we feel we need, but we're really looking in the wrong place. Remember that everything you need is right inside you. If you are 'looking for love', you need look no further!

Transforming the past

Learning to love ourselves can sometimes mean transforming our experiences of the past. In chapter 9 we explored the idea that past events can leave a 'negative' imprint on us, and colour our experience of the present. Quite often, an individual's issues with relationships, romantic or otherwise, can stem from experiences in childhood. It is not uncommon for someone to feel unloved by one or both parents, and therefore essentially feel *unlovable*. Quite often, the root through to more fulfilling relationships involves the healing of a relationship with one or both parents.

As we discussed in chapter 9, the way to transform the emotions associated with the past is to change our *beliefs* about them. In particular, it can help to change the belief that our parents did not love us, to the belief that they *did*. As children, we can sometimes be very exacting about how we want the love of parents demonstrated to us. Our parents may indeed love us, but whether we express that in a way which

we recognise and accept is another matter! It is by having the *belief* that our parents love us that we can begin to experience that love. I saw this work dramatically in my own life when I accepted my father's love and at the same time dropped the conditional nature of my love for him.

Another emotional sticking point for many of us can be our experience of past romantic relationships. Sometimes, we can feel emotionally bruised by one or more relationships which did not 'go our way'. Again, these experiences can often do with being transformed. I have found that one useful thing to bear in mind here is that nothing has any inherent meaning, only the meaning we give it. This theme was discussed in the last chapter. Because of this, we have the potential to look back at past relationships and see them in a more positive light.

What, for instance, did the experience of a 'bad' relationship help us learn about ourselves? Maybe looking back at a relationship we can see how the experience stemmed from an issue with our own insecurity. Perhaps the judgement and criticism we feel for an ex-partner can help alert us to the judgement and criticism we feel for ourselves. Whatever the precise experience of a relationship, it can always teach us more about ourselves, and help us become aware of things we'd like to change. Seeing all relationships in this positive light is often very effective in dissolving the negative emotions that go with them.

A relationship cannot 'fail'

Sometimes, our feelings about past romantic relationships can be based around a sense of failure. When a relationship comes to an end, we often say it has 'failed'. However, there is no such thing as *failed* relationship. All relationships, however long and whatever the precise experiences they bring, are an opportunity to learn and grow. The success of a relationship is not determined by its longevity or how fulfilled we felt within it. It's determined by our willingness to take from it the learning it offers. By understanding that all relationships are equally valid, it can free us from the negativity which comes with notion of failure.

There's no need for need!

There are essentially two ways to approach relationships: one is to believe we *need* to be in one, the other is to feel we *want* to. Neediness is a feeling that comes when we believe we are dependent on that relationship for our happiness. If our belief is that our sense of fulfilment and happiness comes from our relationship with another person, then the idea here is that they, not us, are in control of our happiness. This is not a particularly empowering place to be in! Let us not forget that the idea that someone else controls our happiness is an illusion. Everything we need we already have – *inside us*.

Once we see happiness as something that we choose and of our own making, then we can let go of the idea that a relationship is something we *need*. If we do not need relationships, what purpose do they serve? There are plenty of good reasons for being in a relationship. It is often through our relationships, romantic and otherwise, that we get to learn more about ourselves. All relationships are an opportunity to grow and develop emotionally and spiritually, and they can be a lot of fun too. There is not any reason why we should not engage in relationships, learn from our relationships, and above all *enjoy* our relationships. The important thing, though, is that we do not lose sight of the fact that while we may *want* to be in a relationship, it is not something we *need*.

Marriage

A lot of people express the desire to be in a 'committed' relationship, and commitment is generally regarded as a 'good' thing in a relationship. In modern-day society, the most common way couples declare their commitment to each other is through marriage. To this day, marriage retains a rather sacrosanct image; one of enduring love, monogamy and stability. A lot of people regard marriage as something which provides stability and security – the ideal environment in which to raise children. But for all its positive public image, is there any evidence that marriage lives up to its reputation?

In the UK, more than 40 % of marriages end in divorce. In the USA, more than half of all marriages 'fail'. Of the marriages that remain, we can only guess at how many of them are truly happy. Couples may state their eternal love for each other during the marriage ceremony, but for how many couples does actually turn out to be true? The fact is, the way two people can feel about each other can *change*. People fall in love, and they can fall out of love too. Individuals can want to be a relationship with someone, but later find that they don't. Sometimes, relationships run their natural course.

And while marriage may seem to provide a suitable environment to raise children, it does not provide immunity from trouble. It won't be news to you to learn that there are some pretty unhappy families out there (you may have had experience of this yourself). And while some couples stay together 'for the children's sake', there is no assurance that this is for the best at all. For instance, I have a good friend whose parents separated and divorced when he was 14. He says, in all honesty, that after years of disharmony, he was genuinely relieved when his parents finally parted.

Despite our beliefs about marriage, it is true that many do not last the distance, and they can be the cause of considerable emotional distress. Why, though, can marriage turn out to be such a bitter disappointment for many? Why, one might ask, does marriage often fall short of expectation?

The illusion of security

If we find our expectations of a relationship are not met, it makes sense to look at what those expectations are. What is it that drives a desire to be married? Social convention is an obvious motivating force for many. But what other reasons are there for tying the knot? For many, marriage appears to give stability and *security*. Yet, as we have discussed, this is often far from true. Could it be that if we are looking for marriage to give us security, we are looking in the wrong place?

As we have discussed before, all emotions come from within. The only place we can find true security is inside ourselves. Remember, life is like a mirror. For many, getting married is simply contorting the mirror – a conscious or unconscious effort to create a *sense* of security. If there is a desire to create security, it perhaps suggests the real issue for many of us is insecurity? Could it be that being married and in a 'committed' relationship can in some way protect us from having to deal with this issue?

Challenging whatever insecurity we feel means examining the beliefs we have which are at the root of this emotion. Do you, for instance, believe that you can only be happy within the context of a life-long relationship? Have you come to the conclusion that only by being married are you

socially acceptable? Whatever your belief, the fact remains that your sense of happiness and fulfilment is not dependent on *anything* but *you*. Once you are secure in this fact, then the need to seek security in relationships simply evaporates.

Marriage can sometimes tie people together through fear

Marriage can sometimes cause people to stay together not through love, but through *fear*. Some people view the financial, social, legal and emotional ramifications to divorce as a deterrent against one or both parties just walking away from a relationship. Let's face it, divorce does not appear to be a particularly attractive proposition to most people! Could it be that some people remain married, however bad it gets, because they are fearful of the implications of divorce? Can fear really be a healthy basis for a relationship?

Commitment can only really be for now

When we 'commit to' or marry someone, we are making a promise to them. The problem is, do we know this is a promise we are going to want to keep? Can we really predict with any certainty how we are going to feel in the future? Ask yourself honestly; do you feel the same about all elements of your life as you did 10 years ago? Or even five years ago? The fact is, we simply do not know how we are truly going to feel in the

future. Not in 10 years, not in 10 weeks, and not in 10 minutes for that matter.

We cannot predict the future. Remember, all we have, and will ever have, is *now*. Because of this, the *only* time we can be absolutely sure about how we feel is *now*, and therefore if we are being truly honest, the *only* time we can truly commit to someone else in a knowing way is *in the moment*. This, I know, may seem like relationship heresy. I don't deny that this concept is challenging. Whilst there is undoubtedly a certain 'logic' to marriage and long-term commitment, as we have said, we only need to look around to see that these concepts provide no immunity from relationship issues, and do not necessarily ensure security.

While our perception may be that marriage makes it more that our partner may stay put, marriage is no prerequisite for this. Two people don't need to be married to want to explore and resolve whatever issues come up between them. And marriage is not a prerequisite for a happy family life either. Is it not entirely possible for a couple who are not married to have children and bring them up in a loving and nurturing environment?

While I may sound like I'm rampantly anti-marriage, this is actually not the case. However, it does occur to me that sometimes our deepest motivations for being married can revolve around insecurity. Unearthing

the root of the insecurity, and resolving this, is what will ultimately lead to enduring security. It is this which allows us to be truly empowered in a relationship (married or not!).

Communication is key

Have you ever found yourself in a relationship where so much seems to be *unsaid*? Maybe you have harboured the desire to marry someone but have been fearful of bringing the subject up. Perhaps you have felt real love for someone but not been able to express it. Have you ever harboured a grudge against a partner for something that they said or did, but did not communicate to them how you felt? Whatever our feelings (good or bad), communicating them is key to successful relationships.

One of the reasons why issues perpetuate between two individual is because of a breakdown in communication. For instance, Patricia (from the last chapter) was seething with resentment about her husband's lack of emotional support, and yet had not communicated her feelings to him. For six years, Patricia had endured a bubbling bitterness and resentment about which she had said nothing. This issue was quite likely affecting her health, both physically and emotionally, and did not seem to be doing much for the relationship either. As the relationship drew to a close, however, Patricia's expression of how she felt about her husband's lack of

support appeared to be accompanied by a considerable physical and emotional release.

Expressing the issues we have within the context of a relationship is only half the story. It also helps to communicate to others what we like and love about them too. Yet, many of us can have real difficulty with this. Sometimes, we may feel uncomfortable about paying our partner a compliment. Perhaps we simply take for granted our partner's qualities. Some of us may *feel* love but have real difficulty uttering the words 'I love you'.

If any of this resonates with you, it can help to take sometime to look at this issue. One useful question to ask yourself is whether the failure to express love and affection to others maybe a reflection of a failure to express love and affection to yourself? How often do you give *yourself* a pat on the back for who you are? How many of your attributes do you think you might be taking for granted? Be honest now, do you *ever* say 'I love you' to yourself? Again, because life is like mirror, by recognising your own positive qualities, you are likely to find it easier to articulate your love and appreciation other people.

Tell the Truth

Truthfulness is a fundamental component in successful relationships. But how many of us truly believe that honesty really is the best policy? Some

of us will have had the experience of not being completely honest about our feelings towards another. Perhaps we have sometimes kept our qualms about a relationship to ourselves. How many of us have not told someone else how much we love them? How often have we done things which we have deliberately kept from someone to whom we are close? If any of this is resonating with you, then it might help to look at what value honesty brings to relationships.

First of all, though, what is it that compels us to keep the truth from others? A desire to protect is often at the root of this. Sometimes, by not telling the truth we are seeking to protect *ourselves*. For instance, if we are being unfaithful to our partner, we may fear that being honest will cause us grief. Not telling the truth can protect us from the pain, but it doesn't get rid of the *fear*. In fact, it perpetuates it. We explored this concept in the last chapter. By not looking our fear square in the eye, and failing to confront what beliefs we have that are at the root of it, we are unlikely to take much from the experience.

While we may be keen to protect ourselves in a relationship, another motivation for not telling our truth is to protect the other party. After all, what they don't know can't hurt them, right? The assumption here is that learning the truth will have a 'bad' effect on them. This may turn out to be the case, but remember that precisely what effect it has is up to *them*. They can interpret the truth in any way they choose, including positively.

For instance, in chapter 10 I wrote about Robin, and how his wife had told him about an affair she was having. Initially, this did not get a good reaction from Robin. However, later on he chose to see it as an opportunity to be honest about his own infidelities, and explore with his wife deeper issues in their relationship. While we may feel that not telling the truth protects someone else, it is also robbing them of a valuable opportunity for personal growth.

Another problem with not being completely honest in a relationship is that it simply does not give the other person the opportunity to know *who* they are really in a relationship with. If you are not being your true self, then your partner is not really in a relationship with you, but *someone else*. Clearly, this is no basis for a 'real' relationship. Being who you are in every respect, and that means telling the truth, allows others to know who they are involved with!

Control Games

Have you ever found yourself in a relationship where you have wanted to change your partner in some way? Maybe you have even sought to manipulate that person to fulfil your own needs. A common example of this is when individuals who feel insecure in a relationship, attempt to feel more secure by undermining the other person. A comment about their

appearance here, a jibe about their personality there. It can all go to erode another's sense of self-worth and self-love and create the illusion that they in a way depend on the relationship.

Again, though, attempting to manipulate another person, however, is akin to contorting the mirror in an effort to see a different reflection. Within the context of our relationships we need to realise that whatever our needs, only *we* can fulfil them. Our experiences with others may facilitate that, but they can't do it for us. Once we have a complete relationship with ourselves, we can dispense with any need we have to control and manipulate others.

Give unconditional love

Once we drop the need to control other people, it can also open us up to the idea of unconditional love – love that is given without the other person needing to fulfil any criteria. In reality, though, we often offer our love only as long as our needs are fulfilled and our expectations of that person are met. Setting conditions about how you want another person to be does not make for truly fulfilling relationships. It perpetuates the illusion that our sense of happiness and peace comes from other people fulfilling certain criteria. The fact remains, however, the only person who can really meet your needs and expectations is *you*. It is by honouring yourself completely and having unconditional love for yourself, that you

will be able to give and receive unconditional love within the context of your relationships.

Summary

- The most important relationship we will ever have is with ourselves
- Knowing who we are, and honouring that is key to a good relationship with self
- All relationships are valuable learning experiences if we see them as such
- The idea that we may *need* another person for our happiness is an illusion and can often lead to disempowerment
- Insecurity is a common motivating factor in marriage and pledged commitment
- It is having internal security which allows us to be in relationships in an knowing, empowered way
- Because all we have is now, the only time we can be truly committed in a relationship is *now*

- Communication and truthfulness are key to loving, fulfilling relationships
- Unconditional love for oneself is what allows us to experience unconditional love within the context of relationships