



# The Secret Guide to *Happiness*



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*This book is dedicated to:  
my teachers, who taught me knowledge,  
my friends, who taught me humility,  
my mother, who taught me truth,  
my father, who taught me balance,  
and my children, who taught me love.*

*It is my hope that my children  
Gedalya, Ari and Kayla,  
and their offspring, will take the time  
to learn these hard lessons through this  
book and not through crisis.*



# *The Secret Guide to Happiness*

Discovering True Happiness  
in an Unhappy World



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## *An Unattributable Story*

A group of disciples once inquired of their enlightened master, “Master, why are people not happy?”

The master replied, “Because nobody *wants* to be happy.”

Seeing that his disciples did not understand the response, the master sent them out into the world to learn the answer themselves. He instructed them to ask the local villagers, “What do you want out of life?”

One villager answered that he wanted a new house. Another divulged that he desired recognition. A young man announced that he wanted to earn lots of money; a young woman told them, “Children.” An elder replied that he wanted to find spirituality and meaning.

None of them replied, “To be happy.”

*Dear reader, what do you want out of life?*



*Part 1:*  
*Happiness an Overview*



## *A Brief Introduction*

I always wanted to write a book. I tried a few times, but life is busy, and I never got past a half-decent first sentence.

Another goal of mine was to change the world. Then my life fell apart, I blogged<sup>1</sup> about the experience, and with a little retooling, this book was born. Maybe I didn't change the world, but I did succeed in changing myself.

This short book contains the steps that our generation needs in order to find the peace and harmony that seem so elusive. Who knows? Perhaps I can fulfill a few life goals with one broad stroke.



Our lives consist of experiences, the ones we have during the short amount of time we spend on this earth, between birth and death. In its essence, the currency of life is time.

People talk about “living in the moment.” I never really understood what they meant. I too, lived in the moment;

<sup>1</sup> [www.joshfeingold.com](http://www.joshfeingold.com)

how could you *not*? All living is in the moment.

What I learned is that life is really a collection of experiences. If you are not truly *experiencing* your life in any particular moment, you are not really living. Far from living in the moment, you are actually dead in the moment.



Since life is our most valuable asset, it is amazing how much effort we spend trying *not* to live.

Just think about the very phrase “killing time.”

We “kill time” by watching TV when we don’t enjoy the show, shopping when we don’t need anything, eating when we are not hungry, and working even we don’t need money and find the work unfulfilling. For others, drugs, alcohol and other addictions help them escape from the miseries of now. And many of us waste our “now” trying to ensure happiness in the future.

Choose your poison; I’m sure you have a favorite way to exit the world temporarily. Killing time is really a euphemism for distracting yourself from your life, and it prevents you from experiencing each moment. Often, we spend more time distracting ourselves from life than we do actually living it. We let our life, our now, slip silently past us. Why?

*Because we aren’t happy with our now, our moment, we distract ourselves from this dissatisfaction.*

This also explains why vicarious living exploded so quickly in the last decade. We watch reality TV, which we know is anything but real, and think that life can be amazing for some (though we do not really see their troubles). We



follow our friends on Facebook and Twitter, seeing their great successes and happiness (and not remembering that the sadness and failures that they never share). We meet our friends for coffee or beer and listen to them talk about their great lives (skipping over discussions about the pain they may have).

We look around, see the greener grass and wonder why we are not living a happy life, too. We ask ourselves, “What’s wrong with me?” What comes back are self-hating affirmations. “I must be unhappy because I’m stupid. Or I’m lazy. Or unattractive. Or mean.” Who wouldn’t want to distract themselves from that?



Most of us find ourselves somewhere on the spectrum of happiness. At one end of the spectrum are people who find life full of disappointments. They are seldom happy, but they think that’s how life is—hard. On the other end are people for whom life is good; they would say that they are happy most of the time.

However, even the happy optimists among us pass through this world in a state that is not *truly* happy. Many die without ever tasting the bliss that true happiness has to offer. Worse, there are those muddling through life feeling hopeless or depressed, without understanding why.



Have you found true happiness in life? Do you experience a feeling of deep contentment and oneness with yourself and the world? I suspect that the answer is “No” for the vast majority of readers. If happiness is your goal and you have not yet achieved it, this book is here to guide you. My goal is to use a systematic methodology to help you

find what is missing in your life, all from the perspective of a layman.

After all, that is who I am: a layman. I have no formal education or training in science, psychology or social work, aside from my Psych 101 course in college. I did read dozens of terrific self-help books, the best of which I list in the bibliography.

Rather than scientific jargon, I offer a book based on the experiences of someone who has lived and learned. I stumbled upon this methodology the hard way, by knocking my head against the wall until I figured out this damn thing we call life.



Disclaimer: I can't take too much credit for many of these lessons; quite a few of these ideas I have collected from other places. After all, how many unique insights into human nature are there still left to uncover? What makes this short book worth reading (and sharing!) are a few surprising discoveries and a distinct methodology that you can follow to find true, deep-seated happiness.

Of course, what worked for me may not work for you. However, there is a good chance that it will since we all share a basic human nature. While we might each look a little different, what's inside every person is pretty much the same.

A brief story to illustrate the point:

I once found myself outside the tent of a tarot card reader. My motto is "Never let a new opportunity pass by, unless it is bungee jumping or parachuting from an airplane!" (Though I might try the latter soon.) Since I never visited a reader before, I entered her tent. She flipped the cards

and proceeded to tell me *exactly* what was going on in my life and what I was feeling!

I was amazed at her accuracy! Only after I left did I realize that as a whole, we humans are very much the same. By understanding the stories of one, she was able to tell them all.



Why are most of us unhappy? Because no one taught us *how* to be happy.

In most everything that we do in life, we learn how to do it before we actually do it. We follow an instruction manual that shows how to assemble the bike we just bought, even if it is written in Mandarin Chinese. We train for our job by going to school or apprenticing on the job. Where, then, is the guidebook for finding happiness in life, which for most of us is the ultimate, if unstated, goal?

Our parents, of course, provided guidance. But did they *live* a truly happy life? Often, the answer is no. How can we possibly expect them to teach us what they themselves didn't know? Further, since we do not really understand the underlying issues, it is nearly impossible to reverse-engineer happiness on our own.

We are missing clear, written directions on how to achieve happiness. A systematic guide to understanding how we work and what we need to do if we wish to find happiness. A book for those of us who are *almost* happy but still searching for that elusive something. A book that will provide the key to unlocking true happiness, the happiness we intuitively know exists.

The amazing thing is that you *can* find happiness in a matter of months—if you know what you are doing and

take it seriously.

Thus, the goal of this book is to be your guide. In these pages, we will discuss:

- Why we are unhappy (Chapter 1)
- How we work from the perspective of happiness (Chapter 2)
- The tools and techniques needed to work on ourselves (Chapter 3)
- The step-by-step directions and exercises to help us find happiness (Chapters 4—9)



Self-discovery is not easy. To work through this process is hard, hard work. It takes great dedication and a sincere desire to figure out who you are. Taking time to think seriously and face your fears with honesty will be difficult, especially because we tend to take the path of least resistance. We'd rather not think deeply; we shy away from too much introspection. We tell ourselves life is fine, and if it's not, we tell ourselves there's not much we can do about it.

By following the tools and directives contained in this brief book, you will achieve total contentment and find true happiness.

I encourage you to be an active participant in this book. Otherwise, the process will remain academic and of relatively little value. Ultimately, what you do with this knowledge is up to you.

After all, who needs another self-help book lying on the

nightstand? Let's make this your last self-help book.

*Everything you have learned, from everyone you know and love, has failed to make you truly happy. You expected others to help you find happiness, but no one was able to help you, since they didn't have the answers themselves. You need a better model for life and happiness, and you are willing to try a different path to get there.*

*You'll even consider listening to the guidance of a stranger from Atlanta.*

I wish you the very best of success in your endeavors.

Josh Feingold  
Atlanta, Georgia | January 2013

# Chapter 1

## *The Path to Happiness*

*Why we are unhappy and what we need to do to  
achieve true happiness*

Let's begin our discussion with a working definition of happiness:

*Happiness is a feeling of total contentment with yourself  
and with your life.*

Based on our definition of happiness, then, unhappiness is a feeling of discontent. By removing this discontent, we achieve happiness.

No one knows the allure of happiness better than marketing executives.

Advertisers try to influence us to purchase their goods and services by creating an image of how happy we will be if we follow their advice. Ever see a sad person at the *end* of an advertisement?

This is because, as much as sex sells, ad agencies know that a desire for happiness motivates every purchase we

make. In fact, all we ever really try to buy is happiness, and advertisers know how to push our happiness buttons. They make us feel discontent without their product; if they are successful, they get a sale.



I should come clean, however. Making you happy is not my goal.

I can easily make you happy: Don't eat at all tomorrow. For dinner, I will send you to a fancy restaurant for a five-course meal. (Prepaid by me, including the tip!) When I stop by as you are finishing your coffee, I'll ask if you are happy. With a smile on your face you will answer, "I am."

Then I'll ask again. Are you *truly* happy? You will reflect for a moment, remember all of your problems, messy situations and failures and reply, "No. No, not really."

While I took care of your immediate need for food, your other needs remain unfulfilled. All I gave you was fleeting happiness, which I call temporary happiness.

Providing temporary happiness is insufficient, I want to give you the gift of true happiness.



Some people argue that true happiness doesn't exist. But I know it does, and I can give you a brief glimpse of the truth yourself. Enough of a glimpse, at least, so you can begin to invest in the exercise of trying to achieve it.

Watch children at the playground. They run around without a care in the world, with big smiles on their faces and shrieks of happiness. Why? Because children are born naturally happy.

Most children have their needs satisfied by their parents. They also have many fewer needs than adults do, since they are unaware that certain needs exist. So what is there to be unhappy about? Ignorance is bliss!

We have proof, then, that that true happiness exists and surrounds us daily. We just need to get back to our natural childlike state.



Children also help us understand how we, as adults, become unhappy. Children become unhappy when they think that their needs are not fulfilled. A child eats an ice cream cone and tells himself he needs a second ice cream. When he doesn't get it, he becomes unhappy. Of course, he doesn't actually need a second cone. He just told himself he did. Discontent grew from that unfulfilled "need."

Similarly, many of our needs don't actually exist. Rather, we create needs by telling ourselves that we can't live without something. And if we can't live without something, how could we possibly be happy?

Ironically, like a child, once we create a need, we feel that we *must* fulfill it, though it is simply an illusion that prevents us from being happy.

In fact, this is the key difference between a need and a want:

- A need is something that we *must* have to be content.
- A want is something that we *decide* won't stand in the way of our contentment.



Typically when we tell ourselves, “I need this,” we are really just listening to *our* self-created beliefs.

*Lesson 1: By recognizing our needs and how they are unfulfilled, we identify what makes us unhappy.*



Just as we learned unhappiness, we can unlearn it. But it takes work. How do we learn to be happy? By examining and fixing the beliefs that create our needs.

If you think about it, the fewer needs that we have, the less opportunity there is to be unhappy. We work backwards, unraveling and correcting the mistaken beliefs that we created as a child and that still form the foundation of our thinking. We need to track down each of our perceived needs and decide that:

- It is a want rather than a need, and as such, we can discard it.
- It is a true need, and therefore we must make sure to fulfill it.

Once we have done that, we will feel content and truly happy.

We will review our beliefs, one by one, until we are left with a very basic set of beliefs and a very short list of needs. It may not be simple. But it is possible.

*Lesson 2: To become truly happy, we must revisit the beliefs that formed our current needs and correct them.*



If this hypothesis is correct, then how do we explain

someone who has fulfilled all of their needs but is not truly happy? Someone with a great family, close friends, accomplished, etc., but still finds happiness elusive. Why isn't that person happy?

The answer is surprisingly simple: Something *is* still missing. They just don't realize it yet.



I was always an “old soul.” A mature thinker, aged beyond my years. (Both a good and bad thing!) Starting in high school—perhaps even earlier—I struggled with the question of meaning. Luckily, my parents sent me to a religious school in ninth grade where we regularly discussed such concepts. As a young naive man, I believed that if I applied myself to my studies, religion would provide the answers to my questions.

For the next two decades, I was a very religious and devout person. The real deal, no cutting corners. During these years, I married, had children and found reasonable success.

However, as my children grew up and asked me the same questions I had once asked of my teachers, I realized that religion is based on believing what *other* people told me that God wants and does not want me to do. This was not something that I was willing to buy into anymore, so I left religion and went my own, secular way.

Soon after leaving religion, though, my beloved wife of almost 13 years suddenly left *me*, without any real notice. (At least from my perspective!) My world fell apart, and I woke up from her decision, confused as ever, in a topsy-turvy world that I didn't understand. Once again, I had to confront the meaning of life.

My religious years provided me with a fertile basis to think about the big ideas, including the question of ultimate meaning. Through my extreme pain and unhappiness, however, I achieved a deeper level of introspection. During this six-month period of clarity, I was able to answer the question that had hounded me for 20 years: What is the meaning of life?

More importantly to you, I discovered the missing key to happiness. This key turned out to be a commonly overlooked need, a need that even the person who “has it all” has not fulfilled. A need that we will discuss next.



When we die, we lose everything we achieved in life. Our body, our home for a century (give or take) is gone. All we have amassed is lost. We know that dying without having ever lived is a waste of our one shot, our one opportunity. We know this is wrong, so we spend our life pursuing meaning.<sup>2</sup>

Probe deeper, though, and you realize meaning doesn't really provide the answer. One person finds meaning in giving food to the poor; another finds it in raising a family; still another finds it in his antique spoon collection hanging in the kitchen. However, none of them finds true happiness. Meaning is arbitrary. In fact, “searching for meaning” becomes just another distraction from life, just like watching TV and shopping, providing temporary happiness and enabling us to ignore our underlying discontent.

The irony is that while I always asked, “What is the meaning of life?” and spent so much time seeking the answer, the entire time I was asking the wrong question. There was a deeper question underneath, but I just couldn't see it because I was so focused on meaning.

<sup>2</sup> “Lose Yourself,” EMINEM

The *real* question that I wanted—needed—to ask and answer was the existential “Do I exist?”

This dissonance between what you know to be true (you know you exist) and what you experience (you aren’t so sure you exist) prevents true happiness. To find true contentment, you need to fulfill the need to know you exist.



I know what you are thinking. “Wow, I got all this way to learn that the secret to happiness is knowing I exist? I know I exist, and I’m still not happy!”

I posit that while you *think* you know you exist, you really aren’t sure, and you just don’t realize it.

Want proof? Did you ever wonder, as I did, about the meaning of life? If so, then you don’t actually know you exist.

I know this because once I figured out I existed, the question of “What is the meaning of life?” no longer had any real importance. Life no longer *needed* to have meaning. Life may or may not have meaning, and that’s OK.

After all, do you ever ask, “What is the meaning of my dog?” Of course not. It just exists. It is special because it exists in this world. Well, *you* are no different. Once you realize this at your core, you no longer ask, “What is the meaning of life?” any more than you ask, “What is the meaning of my dog?”

The reason we ask the question of meaning demonstrates that we are unsure of our own existence; we have no idea

who we are.



How does this happen?

As we grow up, we create beliefs that restrict us from achieving self-acceptance, causing us to lose our sense of existence. Our basic need to know we exist remains unfulfilled. We must examine these beliefs to find self-acceptance and fulfill this last basic need.

Only through the process of self-discovery and self-acceptance can we reach our true selves. Fully recognizing yourself allows you to answer the ultimate question of meaning and fill in the last gap needed to find true happiness.

*Lesson 3: In order to be happy in life, you must learn that you exist by examining those beliefs that restrict self-acceptance.*



To continue on this task, we will:

- Understand the interplay between our brains and beliefs (Chapter 2)
- Provide some tools to assist you in your efforts of uncovering your beliefs (Chapter 3)
- Learn what went wrong and how we lost touch with ourselves (Chapter 4)
- Accept ourselves and understand that we exist (Chapter 5)
- Learn how to really live (Chapter 6)
- Outline some basic healthy beliefs (Chapter 7)

- Dig deep to figure out our core beliefs (Chapter 8)
- Discard the rest of our nonessential needs (Chapter 9)

# Chapter 2

## *Introducing You/Fixing You*

*How the mind works, how beliefs influence our happiness, and how our mind and beliefs are interconnected*

### ***Introducing You***

Since beliefs and needs are creations of the mind, we need to understand how our mind works. Of course, nothing herein is particularly scientific; rather, I have based it on personal introspection.

We begin with a question. Who exactly are *you*? Are you essentially your thoughts? Your feelings? Your body? Some combination of them all?

Most of us assume that the voice inside our head is who we are. I refer to this inner voice as your conscious self; it is the part of yourself that you can “hear” in your mind.

Try this brief exercise:

*Listen to your inner voice as you ask and answer the question, “What is my favorite color?” Then continue*

*reading.*

You can actually hear yourself talking in your head, asking and answering the question! You can identify that inner voice. Is that voice “you?”

Actually, no. It certainly is a *part* of you, just as your hand is part of your body, but it is not the essential “you.” Want proof? Try the exercise again:

*Listen to your inner voice as you ask and answer the question, “What is my favorite color?” Then continue reading.*

Tell me, who was paying attention to that conversation in your head? Take a moment and think about it.

This observer, or as the ancients called it, your inner eye, is your subconscious self. This exercise helps you realize that your inner voice, the voice you may have been identifying with your entire life as “you,” is not the essential *you*.

Most people go through life identifying themselves with their conscious self, their inner voice. That voice is so loud and overbearing, it drowns out our recognition of our subconscious self. If you never identified with your subconscious before, welcome to a deeper dimension of you. Take a moment to reflect on what you just learned and practice identifying the observer inside yourself. Observe your inner voice as you ask and answer a few additional questions:

- What is your plan for tomorrow?
- What is your morning routine for waking up?
- What is the earliest memory you can recall?

However, even your subconscious self, this observer, is





not you. We have to go even deeper.

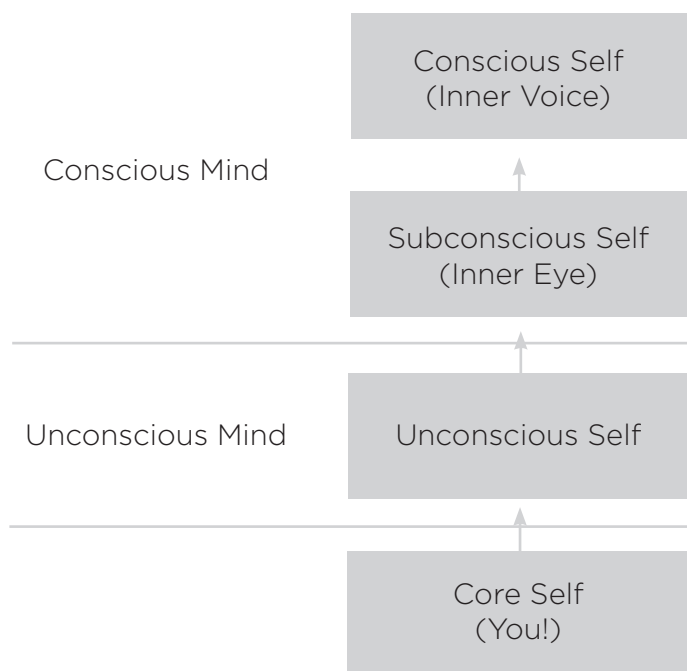
Another exercise:

*Turn your inner focus back on that subconscious self that you can now “see” and imagine a dog. Once you can envision the dog, continue reading.*

What part of you decided that you were going to choose that particular dog, the one that popped up in your mind? That was your unconscious self. This third and final part of you initiated the creativity of choosing the dog.

So where are *you* in all of this exactly? You reside somewhere in your mind *below* your conscious self, your subconscious self and your unconscious self. This is your core self. Your core self leverages the conscious and unconscious self to make its way through the world.

Here is a diagram showing the complete relationship:



I believe the core self is “who” we are, our life force. In fact, defining this core self is one of the mysteries of life itself.

*Lesson 4: You are not your conscious self. You are not even your subconscious self. Nor are you your unconscious self. Deep inside you is your core self that marshals all of these three “selves” for its own purposes.*



With the concept of “core self,” we can discuss feelings, since the two are directly related. In fact, feelings are simply a state of comfort or discomfort your core self feels.

There are two distinct types of feelings:

- Core feelings
- Emotions

The only two core feelings are contentment and pain. The core self feels content, or it doesn't. The core self feels pain, or it doesn't. Either way, when we experience a core feelings, we *feel* it as a physical experience.

Emotions are feelings that we create. They leverage core feelings to protect ourselves. Since pain is bad, we create protective feelings, such as anxiety and fear, to keep pain at bay. Similarly, since contentment is good, we create protective feelings like accomplishment and satisfaction to entice us to remain content, and therefore safe.

The key difference between core feelings and emotions is that core feelings are not belief based; they are biochemical in nature. However, emotions are our personal creations influenced by our individual beliefs.

Perhaps the following example will clarify the point.

Imagine if a close friend of yours dies. The pain you feel is a core feeling, but it is created by an emotion. After all, it makes you sad, but it has no real effect on people who did not know that particular friend. Your belief—that this friend was important to you— created the emotion of sadness that caused you pain.



Let's bring this back to how we feel and how that affects happiness.

Humans are complex beings, capable of conflicting feelings, even pain and contentment, at the same time. Usually, however, pain will drown any feelings of contentment, since we know we need to do something about our pain to protect ourselves.

Since happiness is "a feeling of total contentment with yourself and with your life," then to achieve happiness, we must rid ourselves of those emotions that are causing us pain.

Further, since these emotions are based on beliefs, to achieve true contentment, we must identify and change our beliefs so that they no longer cause us pain.

Of course, depending on the belief, identification may not be so simple! While some beliefs are in fact "simple", others are more complicated.

For example, if someone jumps on you from behind, you become scared. A simple belief created this feeling: Unexpected things could harm you.

However, if you were mugged in the past in a parking lot, and then see a newscast about the danger of mall muggings, the feeling of anxiety you have at the mall is likely one you created based on multiple beliefs and experiences, and it is a complex belief.

Complex beliefs, naturally, are more complicated to unravel than simple beliefs, because they are tangled up with multiple variables and experiences.

However, the common denominator of all of these feelings is that they are created by beliefs. By changing any of our

beliefs, we can ultimately change our feelings.

*Lesson 5: By learning how to identify and change those beliefs that create pain, you can change your feelings and find happiness.*



So what creates our beliefs?

Beliefs are like paint. If I give you two colors, you can mix them in many ways and end up with a complete spectrum of colors. The foundation of all you created is still those same two base colors, but mixing them in different ratios gives you different results.

The two “colors” of our belief system are our core being (nature) and our environment (nurture). The interplay between these two colors directly influences our beliefs.

**Nature** is comprised of our individual preferences, including:

- Our natural tolerance for pain
- Feelings of masculinity vs. femininity
- Other core attributes, such as whether we are introverts or extroverts, whether we have a cheerful disposition or a propensity for sadness

These factors intermingle, providing each of us with a unique nature.

**Nurture** includes the messages and beliefs we receive from our parents, friends, teachers, leaders and society. Most of us living in the developed world grow up in rather similar circumstances; we are able to fulfill our basic needs and focus on pursuing happiness. Therefore, there is a

similarity in many of our assumed beliefs.

All of our nurture-based beliefs come with the risk that they can actually contradict our natural beliefs. When this occurs, it creates a feeling of deep discontent, preventing happiness. It also prevents us from accepting ourselves and thus knowing we exist. We will need to unravel this if we hope to achieve happiness.



Let's look at some of the specific ways our nurtured beliefs develop. There are three key sources of many of our beliefs:

- Parents
- Religion
- Society

### *Parents*

Parents introduce us to the world, and we instinctively expect them to show us the ropes. The irony is that since our parents don't really understand how to find happiness, they can't possibly teach *us*. However, because we trust our parents deeply and instinctively, we take it for granted that they are happy, and we follow their lead. By the time we realize that our parents have their own issues, we are too old to realize that we should have been ignoring many of their mistaken beliefs. Unfortunately, in many cases, no one in a lineage "wakes up," and we keep passing these issues from generation to generation.

### *Religion*

Our religious upbringing also influences our beliefs. Modern religion is based on ancient wisdom, from a time when life was very different. Some of that wisdom is still valuable, certainly, but some is no longer relevant. Unfortunately, many religious messages and beliefs have

yet to catch up with modern realities, forging false beliefs that create internal conflict.

For example, people's lives used to focus intensely around agriculture. Ancient man spent much of the day on the procurement and preparation of food. From an agricultural standpoint, we can understand why religion *may* (strong emphasis on the word *may*) have censured homosexuality. After all, a homosexual relationship does not result in children who can help with the daily duties of food production.

Today, though, most of us spend our days in the office, not on the farm. The main purpose of a relationship is not to produce more workers. Despite the changes in our reality, though, religion still echoes ancient realities. It has not caught up with our modern way of life.

This is just one example of how ancient ways of thinking continue to reverberate in modern times, despite the vastly different lives we lead. We need to examine, rather than cling to, our religious beliefs.

### *Society*

Finally, we must look at the beliefs of modern society. Society creates beliefs for the benefit of society. After all, what kind of world would we have if everyone created his or her own belief system? However, society cares about the good of society, not the individual, creating beliefs that may be out of line with your own natural needs.

For example, one societal belief is that we should ignore our longing for contentment and fill it with shopping, food, fast cars and faster women. Of course, *you* know better but many do not.



Unfortunately, often many these nurtured beliefs contradict our natural inclinations. We need to identify these beliefs, review them to determine if they still hold true and disregard them if they do not.

*Lesson 6: Most of the messages and assumptions you believe are not your own messages but rather those you absorbed from the outside world, including your parents, religion, and society. Without taking time to think about these messages, you accepted them as your own personal truth. That may have been a bad idea.*



### ***Fixing You***

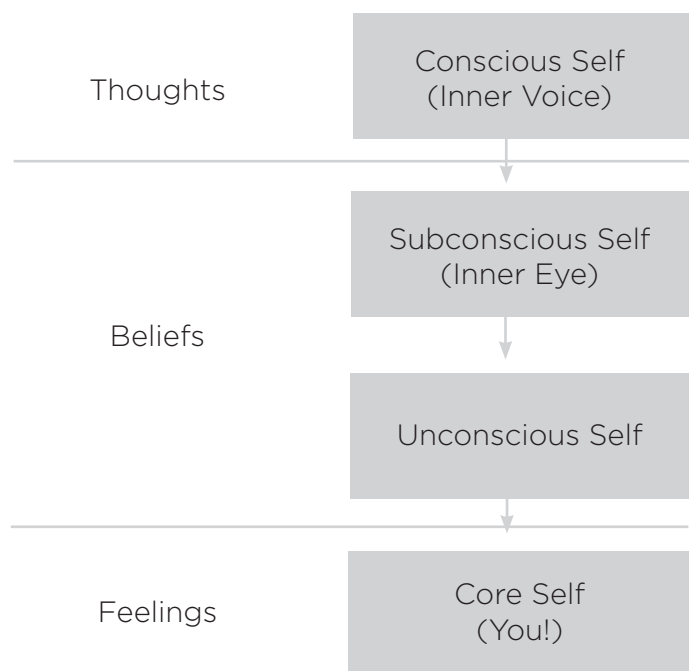
Now that we understand how our mind creates our beliefs, let's discuss how our mind and our beliefs interact.

Those beliefs that we realize, those we can articulate as thoughts, are part of our conscious mind. All other beliefs that influence us are found in the realm of the unconscious.

Beliefs bubble up from our subconscious/unconscious mind to our conscious mind in the form of thoughts. We then use these thoughts to decide what actions we will take. Alternatively, thoughts can also trickle down from our conscious mind to our unconscious mind, leading to feelings.



Here is a diagram bringing everything together:



Our goal, then, is to examine and change each of our beliefs, so we are masters of our feelings.

This is where it gets tricky.

We can access some beliefs directly from our conscious thoughts. Those beliefs are easy to access since they are just sitting there, waiting for us to pluck them. Once we do, we can decide if we want to change them or not.

For example, I used to believe that I was unable to be alone and needed someone in my life. At one point when I was feeling particularly alone, I began to give the concept

more thought.

Upon reflection, I realized that “being alone” is simply a state of mind. After all, I had good friends and family who were there for me, so I wasn’t truly alone. I decided to change my definition of “alone” to reflect my reality better. Being “alone” now meant living a life without meaningful relationships. Since that wasn’t true about me, suddenly, I was no longer alone!

However, the majority of our feelings are based on beliefs hidden in our unconscious mind. When your parents yelled at you, perhaps you integrated a false belief that you deserved the yelling or you were a bad person. Even though their yelling really reflected their own negative attitude, you internalized a false belief about yourself. It takes work to uproot this deeply ingrained belief. Our conscious mind cannot access these unconscious, deep-seated beliefs. So how do we hope to change these beliefs if we don’t even know they exist?

We do it by leveraging our subconscious self! The subconscious self can communicate with our unconscious self and act as a bridge, asking questions and bringing the beliefs to consciousness. Then, we can access and work on the thoughts.

Later in the book, we will discuss how to do that.

This is introspection: Our subconscious self reaches back into our unconsciousness and brings thoughts back to consciousness.

*Lesson 7: The goal of introspection is to bring those beliefs from unconsciousness to consciousness and examine them closely.*

Since we will be working with ourselves in our entirety,



let's briefly turn our attention to understanding the ultimate outcome of thoughts—action.

Until now, we discussed feelings/emotions and beliefs/thoughts, all of which are constructs of our mind. However, the part of our lives that we control is essentially a series of decisions that we make during our brief sojourn on Earth. Actions are the result of bringing decisions to fruition.

The road from feelings to actions is like a domino effect, each one influencing the next:

Feelings → Emotions → Beliefs → Thoughts → Decisions → Actions

Further, by examining our actions, we can work backwards and uncover our beliefs, which in turn, can change our feelings.

*Lesson 8: Emotions, beliefs, thoughts, decisions and actions provide the touch points that we use as we untangle and fully understand the beliefs that form the basis of our feelings.*

# Chapter 3

## *Plugging In*

*Tools and techniques to help us  
get in touch with our beliefs.*

We have articulated eight important lessons that will provide the background we need to understand the path we will take in in the rest of this book.

To find happiness, we must:

1. Examine our beliefs to get in touch with our needs and our self.
2. Identify those beliefs that create false needs or prevent us from achieving self-acceptance.
3. Determine which beliefs we need to change, with the goal of finding true happiness.

But ideas are easy, and this isn't a textbook. It is a guidebook. If we want to change, we need to take action! So let's move from ideas to action. Through specific exercises, we will bring these lessons to a deeper level of understanding. This chapter will introduce you to the most important tools that can help you do this effectively and efficiently.



The first tool is a habit of mind called *balanced thinking*.

We think by comparing opposites. Democrats versus Republicans. Good versus evil. Mets versus Yankees. Creating these spectral definitions allows us to think less and makes life easier, one of our other main life goals. However, a negative side effect is that it creates a perspective of black-and-white thinking. We have trouble seeing gray. It is in that gray area though, so delicately balanced, that we all breathe, live and thrive.

It always amazes me to think that if our planet were any closer or any farther from the sun, it wouldn't be able to support life. Earth's specific balance allows life to thrive. Similarly, our thoughts require balance in order to thrive.

Another perspective on balance: A wise person is someone who knows which truth to apply to a given situation. Since many of life's truths are contradictory, a wise person first needs to discern exactly what the situation is and then needs to figure out which truth applies.

One assessment, situational awareness, is "street smarts" and requires external emotional maturity. Another assessment requires introspection and self-awareness. To be truly wise, you need to merge both external and internal wisdom to create a synergistic super-wisdom to guide you.

Bottom line: We always need to identify the spectrum and be on the lookout for the middle ground. The truth, often, is hiding somewhere in there.

*Tool 1: Always search for the middle ground!*



The next tool will allow you to create an emotional model for yourself; more importantly, it will help you define yourself better.

When I ask you what blue looks like, you can tell me, but you can't tell me if your blue is my pink or my yellow. This is because each of us self-defines everything according to our own world. When I use a term, I could be using it the same way as you do, or perhaps in a different way, and you just project that we mean the same thing.

The good news is that all the work you will do is self-referencing, meaning that as long as you are clear on what you mean, everything will work out smoothly.

To do this well, you need to create some definitions. Since this is a book about feelings and emotions, you will describe each of your emotions and clearly articulate the impact of a specific emotion on your body.

This will become very important when we start working with conflicting emotions, when we are unclear about exactly how we are feeling. We think we might know, but often the stronger emotion wins out, and we ignore the weaker one.

To begin:

1. Brainstorm your emotional states in your journal.
2. Define each state.
3. Describe how your body feels in each state.
4. If you have time, think about the patterns of time when you are most likely to be in one of these states.

For example, I identified that:

- When I feel restricted breathing, it means I am anxious.

- When I feel my ears getting warm, I am embarrassed.
- Knowing that I am free and unencumbered by anything gives me a feeling of great pleasure.

Identifying and articulating your emotional states (you will probably find around 20, but you can refine them to about 10) allows you to wrap your arms around yourself and better communicate your feelings to others.

*Tool 2: Label your emotional states.*



With those basic tools in mind, we turn to strategies that will allow us to get in tune with ourselves. We start with a journal.

A journal helps us to:

- **Stay focused.** A journal allows you to stay focused. Typically, when we are thinking things through, we end up losing focus. The next thing we know, we are thinking about sex. Or work. Or other responsibilities. (For many, mostly sex.) If we want to keep focused, writing it down can keep our thoughts moving forward effectively.
- **Recognize patterns.** Writing down thoughts allows us to identify patterns of thought that occur over days, weeks or months. These patterns can lead to tremendous personal breakthroughs.
- **Identify subtleties.** As we write, we realize certain subtleties. It is often in these subtleties that we find answers.
- **Move forward.** I am constantly reviewing events

and experiences in my head, so keeping a journal allows me to stop some of that ruminating. When I put thoughts down on paper, I no longer need to keep thinking about it. The words are safe in the journal; they won't get lost. Whenever I am ready to start working through those thoughts again, they are right there waiting for me.

So go buy a nice journal. Something that entices you to write in it. Pages that just call out to you to fill them with wisdom and nice ink. Spend a few bucks on it. After all, you are going to entrust it with your most precious thoughts. Aren't you worth it? (Yes!)

Remember, you will want to feel secure that no one is going to read your journal. Find a good hiding place for it, or even a lock box. Make sure that you feel comfortable writing down the most embarrassing parts of yourself. If you are afraid someone will discover your journal, you can't write honestly.

*Tool 3: Get a journal to help you organize your thoughts and use it!*



Now that you are keeping a journal, we can spend some time talking about effective methods for using it. There are many ways to do introspection, which will bring unconscious ideas to your conscious mind.

Personally, I found that one of the most effective ways to write was to have a conversation, a dialogue, with myself. I then wrote down what my conscious self said and what my subconscious self responded.

There are two levels of this conversation. The simple level is about listening to the conversation between your



thinking self and your feeling self. In this conversation, your thinking self is your conscious self, and your feeling self can help bring those subconscious ideas to your consciousness.

- The thinking self uses logic to ask questions. It asks, “Why? How come? What?”
- The feeling self *feels* certain ways about experiences; at first glance, it doesn’t seem to have a logical undertone. The feeling self stems from a belief hidden in your unconsciousness; you just don’t know what it is yet. The goal of the conversation is to tease out the underlying belief.

This type of conversation is important on your journey to find self-acceptance and fulfill the need to exist. In fact, what is blocking your self-acceptance is that your thinking and feeling selves are discordant. The conversation will help align them by bringing the underlying logic to consciousness.

We start with a feeling and end with a belief. Here is a sample conversation on a day when you are feeling down:

**Thinking self:** Why are you feeling hurt today?

**Feeling self:** Because no one likes me.

**TS:** *Why do you think that?*

**FS:** *When I try talking to them, they seem cold.*

**TS:** *But what about the people that don’t seem cold when you talk to them?*

**FS:** *I guess they like me.*

**TS:** *So let’s refine this belief. “**There are some people who don’t like me.**”*

Of course, in my journal, I don’t write it screenplay-style;

rather, I let it run together as I'm thinking it through. It looks something like this:

*Why are you feeling hurt today? Because no one likes me. Why do you think that? When I try talking to them, they seem cold. But what about the people that don't seem cold when you talk to them? I guess they like me. So let's refine this belief. **"There are some people who don't like me."***

Don't worry about spelling, penmanship or punctuation. Remember that no one is going to read this but you, and the goal is to make this as fluid as possible. If you are thinking about your product, you are taking mental effort away from the real exercise.



Once we identify the first belief, we can dig deeper. Notice the bolded conclusion from the above discussion. Take that conclusion and start the process again. Dig deeper until you can't question the belief any more.

**TS:** *Why do I care if some people don't like me?*

**FS:** *Because people need to like me for me to have value.*

**TS:** *Where did you get that assumption from?*

**FS:** *My parents. They taught me that message when I was a child. I felt that I only had value when someone liked me or approved of what I did.*

Once that is complete, you have uncovered a belief that is ultimately preventing your happiness. The next step is to question this belief and ask:

- Is it true?
- Is it is helpful?

**TS:** *Well, do you still believe it is true? And if it is, is it helpful?*

**FS:** *Yes.*

**TS:** *Really? Think about it.*

**FS:** *Well, it is an assumption I have worked with my whole life. But I guess it might not really be true, just something that I accepted as true along the way.*

**TS:** *Exactly, because you do have intrinsic value even without others' approval.*

**FS:** *Yes, I guess I do.*

**TS:** *Since this belief isn't something that you really agree with, you can change it.*

When you drop that belief, your feelings will change to contentment, since you have successfully merged your beliefs between your unconscious and conscious self.



There is another way of experiencing the discussion between the thinking and feeling self, which is by having an internal conversation between your inner parent and inner child.

In this case, the parent represents the thinking self, and the child represents the feeling self.

This works because many of our beliefs were created when we were children. As children, we certainly had feelings, but did not yet have full cognitive ability. We left much of their thinking to the adults in our lives. By engaging in an adult/child conversation with ourselves, we can review those childhood beliefs. With our new perspectives and life experiences, we will realize how

ridiculous many of our beliefs are.

For example, perhaps you think you are weak. This perspective might have developed when you were a child. However, now you are an accomplished adult. Is that belief still true? Probably not! Through the eyes of a parent-child conversation, you can tease out these old, mistaken beliefs.

An added bonus to this approach is that your inner parent can also help comfort your inner child. Self-comforting is a very powerful way to empower self-protection and heal ones old wounds.

*Tool 4: Facilitate communication with the subconscious mind by having conversations between your thinking and feeling selves.*



At some point in the question-and-answer process, you will be unable to move forward. You've asked the question, but the answer is stuck in your unconscious mind, and you just can't reach it.

The next tool will allow us to get to a deeper level and facilitate communication between the subconscious and the unconscious. Interestingly, you already know how to get answers from your unconscious mind. In fact, you have actually done this before; you just didn't realize you were doing it.

The tool we use to do this is called focusing.

Think about the last time you left your house and had an anxious feeling that you forgot to do something. You thought about it a little and out popped, "I forgot to turn the oven off!" But that didn't feel right, so you kept

thinking, until you remembered that you forgot to lock the door. Once you had it, you felt an internal click, and a wave of good feeling passed over you.

Focusing creates that aha! moment, when your unconscious and conscious minds align.



Before we try this, we need to learn the language that our mind uses for internal communication.

Consciousness can only think about things that already exist in our vocabulary. Its language comes from experiences in the world. Try to think of infinity or nothing. They do not exist in our world, so you can't envision them in your consciousness. This is why the language that the conscious self uses to communicate is words. Words represent known things, which the conscious self can then use to articulate ideas.

However, in unconsciousness, beliefs are stored as concepts, passing through to consciousness as vague images. These images directly relate to how we have stored the concept. If the image is an elephant, it could mean "fat," "gray" or "fun like a safari," depending on the concept we associate with the image. Our unconscious self passes images to our subconscious self that we have to interpret.

My guess is that from an evolutionary standpoint, the conscious self developed later than the subconscious self did. Our modern minds build on the minds of early man, who communicated with pictures and images before spoken word evolved. "Language" focuses on the detail; before it developed, man "thought" more abstractly. Humans probably do the same thing as we move from birth to the first few years of age.

Before we continue, I want you to remind you to approach this process with an attitude of gratefulness and thanks. Accept whatever you see or learn about yourself, no matter how ridiculous it seems. Keep in mind that when you ask your unconscious mind a question about yourself, whatever it answers is correct. You just may not understand the message. If that is the case, you need to request a new message and wait for one that you understand. Keep probing for answers and be willing to dig deeper, embracing what you find along the way.

OK, let's practice:

*Exercise 1: Find something that is bothering you and bring it to your subconscious self/inner eye as a question. (I encapsulate the question in my mind and then allow my subconscious self to "see" the question. I make sure to quiet my conscious self/inner voice.) After a few seconds, you will find that the subconscious self presents you with an image or concept. Ask yourself what that image or concept represents.*

*Pay attention to your body. Does the answer feel right? (When the answer is correct, your whole body will relax, and you experience a feeling of everything clicking into place.) If it doesn't feel right, then request another answer from your subconscious. Wait and see what else your subconscious self presents.*

*Tool 5: Help bridge your unconscious and conscious mind through the power of focusing.*



The next tool accesses your unconscious beliefs through a form of meditation called *active imagination*. In active imagination, you use—surprise!—your imagination to bring

concepts to consciousness. It's actually rather simple and probably one of the more fun things you will do in this whole process.

Here's how it works.

Close your eyes. Think about an issue that you don't understand and focus on your subconscious self. In your subconscious mind, imagine that there is someone there to greet you. If you can't create this image, imagine yourself walking down a road and see who greets you along the way. Be patient. Someone or something will approach you.

From my journal:

*I started walking into a castle and met a knight. Soon, he turned into a small, red figure reminiscent of the devil. I stopped and chatted with him. He said I should walk into an inn down the road and ask my question there. I continued walking and entered. I asked the barman my question; he pointed me to the server, a woman with braided hair.*

*I asked her my question: Why do I want to be married?*

*She told me that I already knew the answer. But if I wanted to know more, she would give me three guesses. I told her my guesses: I am scared of being alone? I need the intrinsic approval that comes along with marriage? I am worried that a lack of a wife reflects poorly on me?*

*After each one, she shook her head. It was then that I realized that the fourth guess—I just like having someone to keep me company and share my life with—was the true answer. It was suddenly obvious to me.*

When it—whoever or whatever comes to greet you—

approaches, enter into a dialogue with it. Ask who they are and what they are doing there. Ask your deepest questions about what is bothering you and listen to the answers it provides. Often, I am given a mission, which allows time for reflection. I complete the mission in my imagination, and at the end, I get the answer to my question.

*I walk into a great hall. I greet the knight.*

*"Hello there, sir! How are you tonight?"*

***"Very well, thank you. What brings you to this part of the world?"***

*"I'm in search of answers, and I am hoping you can help me."*

***"Perhaps, it depends if you really want answers, or you're actually just happy with the question."***

*"No, no, I really want answers."*

***"OK, if you want answers, go to that wall over there. Polish the stones. When you are done, I'll give you the answer you seek."***

*I walk over to the stones and polish them. Then I return to the knight.*

*"Sir, the job is done. How does it look?"*

***"Very good. What is your question?"***

*"Why am I still sad?"*

***"Because you know something is missing. You want someone in your life."***

*"Thank you, kind knight, for your answer."*

***"It is my pleasure. Take care!"***

As you carry on this dialogue, write the conversation in your journal. This will keep you focused so your mind doesn't wander. Typically, at the end of a five-to-10-minute session, you will come away with a new insight into your problem and hopefully even some potential solutions.

Yes, I know there is a strong possibility that this sounds crazy! But try it—it works! And it certainly can't hurt. No



one will know what you are doing except you and yourself.

*Tool 6: Use active imagination to help bring beliefs from your unconscious mind to your consciousness and examine them.*



There are a number of other ways I have found to access the unconscious mind, such as hypnosis and breath therapy. However, I would be remiss if I didn't discuss the role of dream interpretation in tapping the unconscious mind.

It is important to understand that recurring dreams are how our unconscious mind tries to communicate with us.

I have had a number of recurring dreams.

In one, I am flying. Pushing myself off from rooftop to rooftop, flying around some random neighborhood, just enjoying myself. Sometimes this dream changes; I try to push off, but I can't take flight.

When I thought about and interpreted my dream, the message seemed obvious: While I knew I was capable of flying, something was holding me back.

Through some deep introspection, I was able to determine what was holding me back. Once I figured it out, I was back to free flying.

Dreams, especially repetitive ones, are telling you what you need to know. But you must listen carefully. Dreams come from your unconscious self and are a great way to find out what your unconscious really thinks. These lessons will help you find your center of balance quicker than any other method.

From my experience, the best person to tell you what your dreams mean is you. No one knows you better than yourself. Of course, a dream analyst can probably help you think of interpretations that you didn't consider on your own, but ultimately, trust your own interpretation.

*Tool 7: Pay close attention to your dreams and try to figure out what they mean to you.*



Another useful tool in this process can be a therapist or psychologist. I have been to a few throughout the years. To be honest, most of them were of little value in helping me break through to another level or giving me the tools and knowledge that I needed to improve my life. They offered incremental improvement but nothing huge. This is because most of them have not found happiness, nor do they have training in a *methodology* they could teach for finding happiness. If they did, this book would already exist!

However, there are certain people that do understand how to help someone walk through the steps needed to improve. Luckily, I was able to find one. While I believe that finding someone who “gets it” often happens by accident, we can increase our chances of finding success by knowing what to look for in a therapist.

Let's start with what a therapist is not:

A therapist is not a magic potion, nor a quick fix. Most people feel that they can go to a therapist once a week, and in that one hour, they will figure themselves out and find happiness. This is just as false as taking a class in which you show up for the lecture but don't do the homework. At best, you'll end up with a superficial

understanding of things. Worst case, you'll walk away *thinking* you understand things when really you do not.

Successful therapy needs time and the willingness to dig deeply. In addition to meeting with your therapist, you need to devote an hour per day, for a minimum of three months, to your journal and other exercises. This may seem like a lot of time, but once you get into it, you will find that it is actually a lot of fun. You must be consistent because if you lose your momentum, you lose the opportunity for the deeper insights. By the time you get towards the end of three months, you will find that the hour flies by, leaving you looking forward to your next opportunity to write in your journal.

Further, never blindly accept any answers that the therapist gives you. When we go to experts, we stop thinking for ourselves.

It's the trusted adviser problem. We delegate important thinking and decisions to people outside of ourselves, when in truth, we remain the best person to make the final decision.

For example, your doctor tells you that you have a disease and need surgery. Do you follow the advice, or do you go for a second or even third opinion and then figure out your own course of action? If a lawyer gives you convoluted advice, do you trust him blindly? Or do you ask questions, making him or her explain it in layman's terms, perhaps even getting a second opinion? Do you push back on the experts and make sure the course of action they are suggesting is the right one? Too often, we leave it to the experts to tell us what to do.

The same is true in therapy. The second you think your therapist has any real answers, you lose, since only *you* know the real you. At best, therapists know us through

their own lens of understanding, which may or may not be in concert with our own. Further, the therapist is not God. In fact, he or she is very much a human being just like we are, complete with quirks and faults.

When you go to an “expert” such as a therapist, look at them as an adviser; as one of many tools in your toolbox. Your toolbox also includes this book, your journal and your friends; you will use all of them to help you make the best decisions possible. However, you should never outsource the entire decision making to your tools. You have more information about you than anyone else has. Only you can best decide the most appropriate course of action for you. So if you look to the therapist for answers or approval, you are already on the wrong course.



So what *is* a therapist?

A therapist is an outside voice, a guidepost, to keep you on track and help you when you are stuck. Therapists are particularly valuable because they have dealt with hundreds of people like you and understand how humans work.

In truth, you could use any outsider, but a therapist offers security that your secrets are safe and might be able to give you a shortcut to finding the answers that are eluding you. But never take a therapist’s answer as the truth, unless it rings true with *you* 100 percent.

Your therapist is a professional, someone with whom you can share your extremely embarrassing fears. Your therapist is not your friend. You need to be comfortable talking to them, but the relationship needs to remain therapist-patient, not two buddies. If you find yourself becoming friends with your therapist, it is time to move

on. If you want friends, go to a social event. Or send me a check, and I'll be your friend for \$150 an hour.

What to look for in a therapist:

- Someone with life experience
- Someone who has been practicing for years, who has seen hundreds of cases like your own. While older and younger therapists each have their advantages, if all things are equal, I prefer the older, more experienced therapist.

There are also different types of therapists:

- *Cognitive therapists* focus on how your thoughts (cognitions) create your issues.
- *Psychoanalytic therapists* encourage you to talk about your life and your feelings; they look for patterns that emerge from your unconscious mind.
- *Behavioral therapists* try to modify your behavior to help you fix your issues.

All three of these methods are important to improving our life, and we use aspects of all of them in this book. However, when choosing a therapist to help support you in this journey, I think a cognitive therapist is most effective and combines aspects of all the types of therapy.

*Tool 8: Find a cognitive therapist to help you on your path to freedom. It's not necessary, but will certainly help speed things up and keep you on the right track!*



I would certainly be remiss if I didn't mention the important world of drugs.

No, not *those* drugs. I am referring to the drugs used

to combat anxiety and depression. While much of your unhappiness stems from issues that we can work on, sometimes the problem isn't cognitive but rather how the brain is wired, and biochemical interactions.

For some of you, or perhaps many of you, these drugs can help you find contentment in a safe and productive way.

However, drugs are not a panacea. You owe it to yourself to try to work through the method in this book, since medication can only get you so far. You need to journey through the process of self-discovery.

Unfortunately, there is a stigma surrounding mental and emotional issues. For some reason everyone expects everyone else to be perfect, though they themselves are not. This results in people feeling weak if they have any type of issues. However, there is no such thing as a perfect person. We are born imperfect; hopefully, we die a little less imperfect. So let's be honest. Drugs are an important tool in our toolkit, and we should use them when appropriate.

*Tool 9: If you need drugs, don't hesitate to take them, under the supervision and guidance of a psychiatrist.*

*Part 2:*  
*Finding Yourself*





# Chapter 4

## *Losing Your Self*

*Explaining how we arrived at a place where we  
no longer realize we exist*

Now that we have established a solid foundation of the academics behind finding happiness, the real work begins. First, we must fulfill our need to know we exist, and then we can move on to our other needs.

You would think that this first need would be the easiest need to fulfill, since we all definitely think we exist. However, in truth, it is the hardest. Let's discuss how our "need to exist" became skewed.

On a core level, knowing we exist means that we know who we are. However, no matter how well you think you know yourself, unless you have done the work we will discuss, you are just fooling yourself. While you certainly know certain aspects of yourself, you simply have not done the work to get in touch with your core self.

Getting to that realization is about digging deep and figuring yourself out. Asking questions like:

- What makes you tick?
- What provokes you?
- How do you really feel about things?
- What do you believe in your heart of hearts?
- What scares you?

Through the answers to these questions (and more!) you will uncover your core self. And it is your job to keep digging until you get there. Because if you don't, you'll never fulfill your need to know you exist, and you will be unable to find true happiness.



How do we lose touch with our core self?

It happened because we accepted false norms that caused our conscious self to become out of alignment with our core self. These norms include:

- **Family norms, such as statements that parents and other caregivers made about who you are and rules they stated about honesty, religion and way of dress that you incorporated.**
- **Societal norms like gender issues, sexuality, success and fame.**

The difficulty with “norms” is that they create false roles, expectations and definitions, further compounding the problem.



Let's add a little detail.

We are born with certain natural differences. These

differences are what make you special and unique. While you intuitively know and celebrate that, these differences probably constricted you, since society doesn't respect differences. Rather, society respects uniformity, with its members conforming to whatever it has deemed "best." And what is "best" for society changes from generation to generation. It is not stable or trustworthy, and it is certainly not necessarily what is best for you.

As children, we look to society to tell us what is "normal." For example, even today, in our modern, post-feminist world, popular culture still feeds us the message that beauty trumps brains. "Normal," according to society, is beautiful and blond and thin. If a woman is not those things, then she is not normal!

To add to the problem, our parents and caregivers may have neglected to inform us that society's "normal" may not be normal at all. In many areas of life, people rarely examine if there might be a difference between societal norms and their own. Since our parents often don't notice it themselves, they certainly can't point it out to us.

The problem is that you may or may not agree with the norms your family and society impose. Since we have a natural, perhaps instinctual, tendency to look to society to establish our own norms, when societal norms are not in line with our own personal instincts, we get "out of alignment." We believe society instead of believing ourselves.

The issue, then, stems from comparing what society told us to what we saw in ourselves. If we noticed incongruity, we had to make a decision about who was correct. To the extent that we modified our own beliefs to align with those of family or society, we distanced ourselves from our "core" self without even realizing what happened.

As you age, you continue to base your thoughts on these beliefs with which you never agreed. At some point, you became so far out of line with your core self that you lost sight of the real you—the knowledge that you exist—and true happiness was no longer achievable.



In college, I wrote the following rhyme:

*I am who I am, when only I am.  
And even then I'm not truly me,  
But I'm more of myself than I'd otherwise be.*

To be honest, the poem always sounded strange, because how can I only end up “more of myself than I’d otherwise be?” When no one is around, isn’t that me in my truest form? But for some reason, the truth seemed to stand that I was just “more of myself” so I left it as written.

It was only recently that I realized the depth of truth in that rhyme.

Due to outside influences, as we grow up, we end up becoming someone other than our true selves. Years upon years of false beliefs and outside messages actually turn us into someone that we are not. And we don’t even know it. This dissonance prevents us from fulfilling our need to know we exist and, in turn, prevents us from finding true happiness.

How can we fix this cognitive dissonance? By achieving self-acceptance, which we will explore next.



The path to self-acceptance is to learn to be truly you. The only way to do that is to stop caring what the world thinks

about you. Start thinking whatever thoughts you want to think and taking whatever actions you want to take. Get rid of those thoughts that others pinned to you for all these years.

You know this instinctively. However, you probably tell yourself that society is right and you are wrong. Since this is your world, though, you are right and society is wrong.

You need to recognize that you are, in short, a fraud. Many of your actions are not reflective of yourself and your values. However, you feel trapped, because you have become comfortable with the fake persona that you project to the outside world. You are scared to expose the real you, out of fear that others won't accept you. This fear traps you in a state of non-existence. The only way to fix it is to face your fears and become yourself.

We call this process self-alignment, and it consists of five basic steps:

1. Figure out who you are.
2. Compare yourself to society.
3. Determine how you are different from society.
4. Accept, and even celebrate, yourself for these unique differences.
5. Act in your own unique way.

Doing this takes very strong self-esteem.



Self-esteem plays such a central role in people's lives, yet I seldom meet anyone with solid self-esteem. Typically, when I think I have met someone who has great self-esteem, I find that underneath it all they are just a fragile

as I am. Or that they were lying to themselves or to me. Or they simply had no metacognition.

How strong is your self-esteem?

Often, those who believe they have great self-esteem are either unaware of their own poor self-esteem, or they mistake it for a bloated feeling of self-worth that they created (ironically) to cover up their feelings of inferiority.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are you a perfectionist? If so, are you covering up a fear of everyone finding out that you are really imperfect?
2. Do you feel a need to strive for success? If so, are you covering up a fear of people finding out that you are a failure?
3. Do you feel stuck in life? Is it because you aren't taking risks, out of fear that you will fail publicly and feel embarrassed?
4. Do you judge others or compare yourself to others? Is it because you aren't comfortable with who you really are.
5. Do you strive to make people happy or to like you? Is it because you think they wouldn't like the true you, and you are uncomfortable with yourself?

Until we get our self-esteem firmly in place, we can't actually find our place in this world or our purpose in life. We will roam the world trying to find our true selves, but we will never succeed. However, when we create a solid self-esteem—when we reach true self-acceptance—we anchor ourselves in this world and soon realize that in fact, our place (purpose) in the world is not a mystery at all! Our purpose is to be who we are, exactly where we are. It is where you have been the whole time. You just didn't

realize that you were there already!

Remember: We anchor ourselves in this world through our self-esteem, so getting self-esteem right is key to happy living.



Unfortunately, for many of us, our self-esteem is weak by the time we reach adulthood, which makes achieving self-alignment difficult. Let's examine why.

As humans, we are lucky to have metacognition, the knowledge that we exist. The downside of this is that many of us listen to false, negative messages in our childhood and end up thinking that we are not so great. To add (self-) insult to injury, we continue to reinforce those false messages as we grow older.

Another major reason stems from the fact that we don't fully understand our place in the world.

Self-esteem is the concrete knowledge of being at the center of our world. However, as a child, you realized that while you are the center of your world, you are not the center of anyone else's world. This fact results in a perspective that we can't think too highly of ourselves.

We end up with a realization that, "We are, but we aren't."

It is difficult to achieve both ideas simultaneously. Since we learn repeatedly that the world is correct, we conclude, at the expense of our self-esteem, that we aren't, not realizing that we just threw the baby out with the bathwater!

What is the healthier and truer approach that we should take?

A balance of both perspectives simultaneously:

- **Our concrete knowledge that we are the center of our world.**
- **Our concrete knowledge that we are not the center of anyone else's world.**



We must realize, “I am the center of my world and the most important person in my world. But I am not better than anyone else.”

This way, you are not putting anyone down in your positive assessment of yourself; rather, you are stating an honest fact, with which most people will agree. I think you are the most important in your world, and I would expect that you think the same thing about me.

This perspective will allow you to have a healthy perspective of your own intrinsic value, and through that develop a healthy self- esteem.

The next chapter will provide tools that we can leverage to help develop this perspective and in turn, fix any lingering issues with self-esteem.



# Chapter 5

## *Fix Your Self-Esteem, Find Your Self*

*Providing distinct exercises that enable you fix you self-esteem and thus find your true self*

Let's turn our attention to fixing our self-esteem.

We know that we lost touch with ourselves, due to messages we received, our fears and our low self-esteem. To bring ourselves back in line, we must fix those issues.

This chapter will present six beliefs that we must instill in ourselves. Making these beliefs part of our everyday thinking will help us achieve high self-esteem and find our true self.



The first thing to realize about self-esteem is that, like so much else in life, it is all in your head.

I always had an inner struggle with self-esteem.

On the one hand, I thought I was amazing. After all, I'm a reasonably accomplished person. Yet I could never shake

the feeling that I was nothing compared to certain other people.

Where did these beliefs stem from?

Growing up, people told me I was great. I reinforced that message by doing great things, causing people to tell me again that I was great. I also created an inner voice that told me, “Josh, you’re great.”

So what’s the problem? The problem is that I slowly taught myself that I was only great because of *what I did as compared to others*. That meant if I compared myself to someone who did something better, I was no longer great.

And that was the problem. I told myself that my self-worth was dependent on an outside force—I compared myself to someone else, or someone else told me I was great. My “greatness” was not internal. By placing my need for acceptance outside of myself, I created a need that I did not control. Further, it was a false message.

Self-esteem needs to stem from my own undeniable existence. My existence gives me a natural right to enjoy this world as much as the next person. No one is better than anyone else is; we all just are.

Similarly, we need to realize that people are not good or bad. Society may judge their actions as good or bad but that doesn’t affect the person. After all, even if we are good today, we may not continue that way tomorrow. And who is to say how many “bad points” we get for various actions we consider “bad?” This may not be how you view yourself, so please bring this idea to cognition.

If who I am and what I do not provide my self-esteem, then where does my self-esteem stem from? It’s quite

simple: I have self-esteem because I exist. If I want to put a positive spin on it and create positive self-talk, I can say, *I am, therefore I rock!*

This new message is independent from anyone else. It is not even dependent on my own self-approval, which is important, since our inner voice isn't always so approving.

This message is totally up to you to integrate and believe, but it is achievable through a simple change in perspective. Sounds crazy, I know, but all you need to do to "fix" your self-esteem is change your perspective.

Many of us heard throughout our childhood that we don't rock, and we continue to tell that to ourselves. However, if we want to work on our self-esteem, we must fully realize that, "I am, therefore I rock."

*Personal Belief 1: While my actions can be judged as good or bad, my "self" is neither. I am, therefore I rock.*



"You have to be something to be nothing."

One of the great ironies of life is that we are both something and nothing at the same time. I struggled with this for a long time until I figured out how they fit together. Once I did, I realized that like most conundrums, the truth was in its simplicity.

As you know, you are something. You are, and you rock. On the other hand, you probably have occasionally felt that you are nothing. Perhaps you felt this even at the same time that you felt that you were something. You wondered how that could be the case. The feeling of "nothing" stems from realizing that in the context of the world, you truly are nothing.

From the universe's perspective, you are nothing, but from your perspective, you are something. The trick is not to take the universe's message of nothingness and adopt it as your own. If you do, it will damage your self-esteem.

If you harbor a feeling that you are nothing, realize that you wrongly internalized the universe's message. The perspective of "You are nothing" is not the message you should adopt. Put your "nothingness" and "somethingness" in their rightful places: Yes, you are nothing in the grand scheme of things, but you are, and you rock!

*Personal Belief 2: I may think I am nothing, but I know I am something! And if I am something, then I know: "I am, therefore I rock!"*



As you probe deeper, examining your subconscious self and your unconscious self, you will eventually reach a part of you that doesn't ask the question of self-worth. You reach a place that just says, "I exist."

At our deepest level, there is no question of self-esteem. We create the question, and then we create an answer that we might not like! However, you just need to recognize that you exist. The dissonance between knowing that we exist and not feeling like we exist causes much of our unhappiness.

I spent some time in the National Gallery of Art when I was in Washington, D.C., and had an opportunity to see quite a collection of art from well-known painters whose names even I knew (which just means they are really well known).

Interestingly, I realized that many of the paintings I was admiring were not as nice as the paintings I purchased for myself at thrift stores, Goodwill and consignment shops around Atlanta, for much less money.

And that's when I realized that some things just are.

In the case of art, some things just are beautiful. You can't really say that a Picasso is more beautiful than a Monet is. They are both beautiful, in their own way. And I'll argue that the portrait of the sea captain in my den (bought for a few hundred dollars at a flea market), or the princess (bought at the consignment shop for a hundred dollars), or the still life (purchased for less than twenty dollars) or the pastel (painted by my mom and given as a gift) are all just as pretty as the Picasso or Monet. They are beautiful paintings, and you can appreciate each one.

Moreover, there were a number of pieces that I thought were ugly and wouldn't ever hang on my walls. Does my opinion make it less of a painting? Of course not. After all, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

People are the same. They have all kinds of attributes; some we love, some we hate, but no one person is more of a person than the next. From a societal perspective, we value some people more than we value others, but that is just an arbitrary societal judgment. How much credence would you give society's assessment of you? Not much. So people are another example of something that just is. No one is more or less of a person. (Some we just like more!)

This is the key message to building solid self-esteem.

Let's now apply this idea to us:

Self-esteem is relative. Bad self-esteem means you are

comparing yourself unfavorably to someone else. Why is that comparison untrue?

When you look in the mirror, you see a handsome person (or someone that needs to brush their hair), but not someone smart (even if you are). When you figure out—eureka!—why your bank statement was off by three cents, you see yourself as smart, but probably not all that kind (though you certainly may be). When you help an elderly person cross the street, you view yourself as kind, but probably don't think about how good you look in your new suit (even though it fits so well).

For some reason, we don't view ourselves in our entirety.

When it comes to self-esteem, we compare aspects of ourselves to others, and we often come up short. However, judging yourself on only one of your characteristics isn't a fair perspective. You are a whole person—overall a good one—and you know it. You just wish everyone else did, too.

The “whole person concept” says to view yourself as a whole person when you compare yourself to someone else. Since you don't really know anyone else, it is impossible to compare yourself to another person. Each of us is unique, with different strengths and weaknesses. We are all working together to further civilization. If you can grasp this concept, you can change your self-esteem with a snap of your fingers.

It's that easy. View yourself in your entirety, and you will never see yourself as “less” compared to anyone else!

The lesson is that the conscious self only looks at part of our self, resulting in us feeling less than we know we are. This dissonance furthers our feeling of unhappiness. However, now we know the truth—we exist, with all of

our plusses and minuses—so any comparison is futile and misleading.

*Personal Belief 3: You can't compare yourself to anyone. Always remember that you are a "whole person."*



How do we fix ourselves and integrate these three beliefs? By using the next three beliefs!

Each person is a world unto himself. You are the center of your world; everyone you know is the center of his or her own world as well. Therefore, anything people say and do just reflects their world, not yours. In our egotistical minds, we feel that people are reacting to us, when they are simply reacting through the lens of their own personal fears, hopes and dreams.

As such, people's actions are a direct result of their world, which is made up of their life experiences and their personal models for living. When people reject or insult us, we should not take it personally. Those people are just expressing their own worldview, based on how they are feeling at that particular moment.

If people get angry with you, don't take it personally. You didn't make them angry; they made themselves angry. We are responsible for our own feelings. Similarly, when someone offends you, remember that you did not cause it to happen. You were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Further, if they are insulting you, you should feel sorry for them. Because if they were happy, they wouldn't need to make you feel bad. Happy people don't have energy for negativity and don't want to increase their own negative state. So if they are insulting to you, the appropriate

response is, “How sad for them that they aren’t happy.”

If we ourselves aren’t happy yet, it is because we don’t yet know and appreciate ourselves. Then we take it personally, thinking, “Maybe they are right!” However, even in that case, it is important to realize that it’s not personal. It’s just another person’s perspective on life.

As a child, we are more egotistical than we are as adults. Children take things much more personally, even though the negative feelings are just a reflection of the other person’s issues. Remember that the messages that you heard do not reflect you but rather the person who communicated the message.

One sad part about these messages is that we might have heard it once or twice as a child, but we continue to tell it to ourselves, thousands of times. The messages become ingrained, showing their ugly heads repeatedly, until we accept them.

*Personal Belief 4: What people say reflects their world, and I won’t take it personally.*



How can we believe that one aspect of ourselves, or even our entire being, is unworthy? It is because we let the world define us.

The world thinks it knows better than we do. About our true selves and what role we should play. About what is right and wrong. About what is fun, boring, cool or blasé.

The problem is that we tend to believe the world and ignore ourselves.

Why is that?



Because it is very hard for an individual to stand up to the world. As we navigate “us vs. the world,” we internalize the message that the world is right, and we are wrong. And while we should listen to what the world says, we really need to listen to ourselves, because only we know what is best for us.

We must accept ourselves in spite of what the world says we are, in order to be ourselves and get our needs met. So be the authentic you. You should only accept the world’s messages about yourself if they jibe with your own personal beliefs.

The world constantly tries to define us. Instead of trusting ourselves, we adopt this definition and find ourselves playing the part of an actor in a scene. Our existence becomes fake. We need to define ourselves, to be authentic and honest to ourselves about who we are. This definition of ourselves, the one we have defined, is the one we need to present to the world.

We need to be willing to look at ourselves, in our raw form, and say, “That’s who I am.” Accept that person you see in its entirety. You can strive to be a better person, but only if you believe that it is the right thing to do. Your beliefs, not the world’s, should drive your actions.

Let’s look at masculinity and femininity.

A conversation with a close friend helped me articulate an idea that had been nagging me.

If you are a sensitive guy—a good friend, a guy who cares and listens—then society labels you “wimp” or “nerd.” If you are a macho guy, then society labels you a “boor” or “oaf.”

Women who are too smart or not attractive enough are classified as less of a woman. If you are too attractive, society labels you a dumb blond.

We must fight the extreme messages that society sends. As a human race, we are not very good at discerning shades of gray. We are black-and-white thinkers. It is easier to do, and our brains like easy. We walk around with this inner critic telling us we aren't good enough; we constantly judge ourselves and find that we come up short. We need to rid ourselves of these extremes, of this "either/or" way of thinking.

There is no ultimate qualification for being masculine or feminine. If you consider yourself masculine, then you are as masculine as they come. If you consider yourself feminine, then you are as feminine as they come. Remember, this is your world. You—not other people, not society—make the definitions. The world can only define you and your views if you want it to do so. But who would want that?

Ask yourself how many decisions you've made that were greatly influenced by wondering, "What would another person think or want me to do in this situation?" This "other person" could include family, friends or total strangers; it could include assumptions these same people planted in your psyche. When you allow yourself to think this way, you become enslaved to the whims of others.

Free yourself and make your own decisions. After all, if life is just a series of decisions, do you really want someone else living your life for you?

*Personal Belief 5: I will not let the world define who I am, what I believe or what is right for me.*



The reason that self-definition is so important is clearly expressed by David Viscott in his book “Risking.” He explains that in order to experience true self-acceptance, we have to be our true selves and allow others to accept us for our true selves. .

For much of my life, and perhaps even now, I wanted nothing more than for the world to accept me. I was living with a basic fallacy: If the world knew my true nature, they would never accept me, so I need to pretend to be someone else. In reality, the differences between the “real Josh” and the “pretend Josh” weren’t that great, but in my mind, they were two different people. The face I showed to the world was “pretend Josh.” The world accepted that person, so I never found true self-acceptance.

I finally told myself that I didn’t care what the world thought of me, and I wasn’t going to show them “pretend Josh” any more. As “real Josh” emerged, I found, to my surprise, that no one stopped liking me, no one dropped me as a friend and my life continued as before. Soon, I found self-acceptance.

I learned a lesson: You can achieve self-acceptance by not caring what anyone thinks about you and by realizing that people like you for who you are.

What prevents our self-acceptance? Fear.

Fear is the enemy of life. Fear has a purpose, of course, which is to keep us safe. Unfortunately, we let it roam, and it takes over. In the society of old, we needed to be brave in order to face battle, to hunt. However, our modern society has more or less protected us from those daily external threats, so “bravery” is not something we instill in ourselves or in our children. We let the world overcome us. But it doesn’t have to be that way!

Tell yourself: I am going to be brave. I won't let fear hold me back. In spite of my fears, I will take action. I won't let anyone tell me what to do or how to do it! I will fight back against my fears!

*Personal Belief 6: Bravely push beyond fear to express your true self.*

Now that we understand the skills needed to find our true selves, we will refine them with some specific exercises.

# Chapter 6

## *Conscious Living*

*Become fully conscious of your existence*

We need to find our true selves. To do this, we need to begin with some concrete exercises.

*Exercise 1: Start taking risks.*

At some point, I found that life became rather boring. Repetitive, in fact. Nothing new ever seemed to happen. Only later, I realized that the reason nothing new ever *seemed* to happen was because nothing new *was* happening.

You might say, “But Josh, you do new stuff all the time! You did this! And that! You traveled here! And there!” But here is the secret: My experiences may have been new, but they were well within my comfort zone. Nothing involved any risk to my self-esteem (and most failures will impact your self-esteem). Everything felt familiar and safe.

Once I realized this, I changed my ways. I started venturing into new territory, doing things I had always avoided out of fear:

- I took a stand-up comedy class that involved doing a three-minute routine with no notes in front of 200 people. There is nothing that makes me more nervous than making a fool of myself in front of a crowd! Of course, I had to say yes. ... and I did it. And I did a pretty good job!
- I followed that with an improv class that involved touching absolute strangers a little too intimately if you ask me, but well, that was the class. Once again, I did it, and I did well! I may even take the next level class in the future.
- To top it all off, I went to a park and sang at the top of my lungs, with a cardboard box at my side for donations. ... just for the experience. And it was an experience. (P.S. I was there for a full hour, and not one person gave me a cent!)

To encourage myself to take risks with my self-esteem, I remind myself that in 100 years, no one will remember me.

By acknowledging this simple fact, life becomes so much more meaningful. Our time on earth is so brief and our role so insignificant. No matter how significant we might think we are in the annals of history, our real value is how we view ourselves, in the now.

A conundrum that will actually make you feel better: Don't worry about how people might view your actions, since you are the center of your world. At the same time, don't get upset when others insult you, since this vast world will eventually forget you.

What are your fears? What have you never done because you were scared? Figure it out and learn to live! I now listen to that internal voice that says, "Oh I would love to do that, but I'm too scared to try." Then I respond, "Time to be fearless!" and I force myself to do it!

Follow this path and soon, you'll be living your life, not the life that others defined for you. You'll find that people accept you for being you, and you, too, will accept your true self.



### *Exercise 2: Break the rules.*

Humans like rules. They make us feel good. We also hate rules. They make us want to rebel.

Many of us follow rules without questioning why we do it, which really isn't a good thing.

Rules are good because they protect us from hurting ourselves. However, when the rules become an end unto themselves, they encumber us. We need to think about and assess if we should be following them in the first place.

We must first acknowledge that we are following rules and working in a rule-based system. The best way to do this is to do something wrong.

For you rule-followers out there, this will be very uncomfortable. I am not suggesting you do something big like [fill in the blank]. Pick something small. If you typically do not drive more than [fill in the blank] miles over the limit, try driving [fill in the blank + 10]. If you always put your shopping cart where it belongs, leave it right in the middle of the parking lot. (But try not to hit my car, please.)

You get the idea.

By breaking rules, we come to recognize their place in our

lives. Only then can we decide if they are appropriate and how we want to use them (or not) to help us achieve our goals for success.



### *Exercise 3: Learn to be a real individual.*

When I was in college, everyone dressed the same. “Fitting in” with the crowd meant wearing the same clothing, in the same style, as everyone else. I didn’t want to conform, so I made sure never to wear the “accepted” garb. I never wanted to feel like a conformist.

One day, thinking about my actions, I realized the reason I didn’t want to conform was because I wanted people to see me as an individual. I wanted them to see that I was not constrained by society. Ironically, by using society as my benchmark for what not to do, I was allowing society to constrain me! I was stuck. How was it possible to be a true nonconformist?

I realized that as long as I cared what society dictated, I could never be a nonconformist. In fact, it’s impossible to try to be a nonconformist. You just are one, or you’re not.

Similarly, in my efforts to be an individual, I didn’t want people to say, “Look at Josh, he always does what society tells him to do.” Again ironically, in striving to be an individual, I was allowing society to dictate who I was. I was not doing this for my own benefit. I was doing it for society, for other people.

I learned that if you truly want to be an individual or nonconformist, you must stop trying to do anything for the sake of someone else. Once you’ve allowed someone else to enter the picture, you’ve lost your individuality. Rather, you must focus on yourself as the only person in



the world that matters. Ask yourself what you need to thrive, or what you should need to thrive, and make sure you fulfill those needs. Once you've answered that, you won't need to try to be an individual, because you already *are* an individual.



#### *Exercise 4: Fall in love with yourself.*

Once you recognize your own individuality, you just might find that you fall in love with yourself. I know; it happened to me.

One day, I felt very happy. Just excited and infatuated with life and with myself. I couldn't figure out why I was so happy, so I gave it some thought. Suddenly, I realized, "I'm in love with myself."

You might be wondering, "Is it really good to fall in love with yourself?" Usually, people who are in love with themselves are self-centered, so is it a good thing for me to be in love with me?

There are two types of loving yourself:

- **Narcissistic love** is the love of self that we frown upon. It comes from fear, not from recognizing your true greatness. We puff ourselves up to hide that fear. This is bad love.
- **Wholesome love** is true love. It happens when you get to know yourself, when you sense your true worth. It's impossible not to fall in love with yourself! This love enables us to love others, because we need to love ourselves before we can see and love anyone else.

In the story of Narcissus and Echo from Greek mythology,

Narcissus's mother asked if her child would grow old or die young. She was told, "If e'er he knows himself, he surely dies."

Narcissus possessed a false love of self. He awakened by looking in the mirror and learning who he really was. Once he learned that, he loved his true self. The "old Narcissus" essentially died once he "knew himself." He could then fall in love with his true self. (Pretty cool, eh?)



Now that we know we exist, we need to figure out and fulfill our other unfulfilled needs.



*Part 3:*  
*Achieving Happiness*

# Chapter 7

## *The Seven Beliefs of Highly Unhappy People*

*Common beliefs that we must reject to prime ourselves for happiness*

We know that our beliefs prevent true happiness. We understand how our mind works. We have the tools to listen to ourselves and pull out our underlying beliefs.

We are now ready to do the real internal work, to understand the beliefs we created, review them and fix them.

However, before we start looking at our personal beliefs, we must review and unlearn the beliefs and assumptions we have been making for years.

As we learned earlier, most of the messages and assumptions we carry around are not our own messages, but rather those the outside world imprinted on us. We never took the time to think about them, instead accepting them as our own personal truths.

Recognizing these common beliefs will prepare us to attack our internal beliefs, one by one. This will help us

think straight. If we don't do this exercise first, it will taint our own inner discovery about ourselves.

This chapter presents seven beliefs that we must change in order to find happiness. Holding onto these beliefs will make you unhappy on a daily basis.



*False Belief 1: I am in control.*

Being in control is great. There is nothing to fear when you are in control. However, this is the biggest fallacy we can tell ourselves. It is important to dispel the myth of “control” right away.

Besides the obvious you-can-get-hit-by-a-bus-tomorrow logic, we can in no way control anyone else, nor the general winds of the world. If we are honest, we often can't even control ourselves.

It is most important to give up control and accept lack of control as an unshakable truth.

This is the biggest difference between an optimist and a pessimist.

Contrary to what you may think, optimists always expect the worst. Not in a depressed, poor-me sort of way but because they have accepted that they are not in control. As they go through life, they hope for the best; when things work out, they are pleasantly surprised. When something doesn't work out, they accept it with minimal distress. Their acceptance of their own lack of control makes it easier for them to weather life's little bumps.

Pessimists, however, always expect the best, since they think that they can control the world. Over time, they

become discouraged and disappointed because life doesn't work out as planned. After all, they set things up right. So why didn't the plans work out?

This is not to say that we shouldn't think about the future. We most certainly should! However, accepting that you are not in control is actually freeing. When plans don't work out, it's not much of a surprise; certainly, it does not throw you for a loop. After all, you were never in control.

You must learn to accept. Accept that you can't control other people. Accept that you can't control your environment. Make this part of your personal belief system.

*Fixed Belief 1: I am not in control.*



*False Belief 2: When I am unhappy, it is the fault of someone or something else.*

When it comes to personal responsibility, we don't want to accept that we are the master of our own world. If we are the ones in charge, how did it get so messed up? Why aren't we happy? Why is life so damn *hard*? We don't want to admit that we are the masters of our destiny. We'd rather push our issues to others and place the blame elsewhere.

Most people like to place blame. But as we learned, we can't blame others or our environment. So whom can we blame?

The reality is that there is no one else to blame for your unhappiness, because *you* are actually the one who created it.

This is a hard rule for many of us to integrate; placing blame allows us to soothe our egos. At the extreme, this route creates a personal trap of constant frustration and disappointment. I am sure you know people like this. They are no fun to be around.

However, I will share a secret: Nothing can affect us if we don't let it. Remember this. If we *let* something affect us, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

The popular statement "Happiness is an attitude" reflects this idea. We have a choice to be happy or not. We can choose to accept our situation or bemoan it, but whatever our decision, it is totally up to us.

With this knowledge, you are now responsible for every thought, feeling and action that you have, say or do. Sorry!

*Fixed Belief 2: I am responsible for my own happiness.  
There is no one to blame.*



*False Belief 3: If I just had \_\_\_\_, I would be happy.*

We often feel that we can't achieve true happiness because we lack something. This stems from feeling that the reason for our unhappiness lies somewhere outside of us. We just need to do X or find Y, and then we will find happiness.

However, what we don't realize is that we already possess everything we need to be happy. We just need to extract that happiness.

The things we think we need to be happy are simply false beliefs we have created to satisfy some unknown need. By figuring out what that need is, we can internalize it and



keep our happiness internal.

*Fixed Belief 3: Everything I need to be happy, I already have.*



*False Belief 4: Life is supposed to be easy.*

This belief really screws with our happiness. It comes from watching other people's lives and only seeing the easy parts. We're not privy to their struggles, so what we see creates a false sense of how the world operates.

In truth, life is a mixed bag. Sometimes it's easy, and sometimes it's hard. It is very seldom only one way or the other. Overall, life is a fight against atrophy, and fighting takes work.

This belief also contains a hidden, nefarious belief about how things are *supposed* to be. We need to realize that there is no "supposed to be." Acknowledge that, and you won't feel bad when life doesn't turn out the way you expected.

*Fixed Belief 4: Life is not "supposed to" be anything. For some people, there are easy parts and hard parts. For others, life is easy; still others always find it difficult. It just depends on where you find yourself on the spectrum.*



*False Belief 5: It's not fair that my life is hard.*

Who told you that life should be fair? Life just is.

*Fixed Belief 5: Life is not fair. Life just is.*



*False Belief 6: Some of my feelings and desires are abnormal and weird.*

Life exists on a spectrum, whose two ends almost touch: From death comes rebirth. When you laugh until it hurts, you start to cry. When you cry bitterly, your body starts to laugh.

Our emotions, feelings and thoughts also exist somewhere on a spectrum. Unless you are seriously mentally impaired, you can assume that *everything you feel is perfectly normal*. There is a spectrum for each emotion, and you fall somewhere on the spectrum. Chances are your feelings fall within two standard deviations of the rest of the world. After, all, we are all made up of the same stuff, right?

The problem is that along the way, we learned that parts of us are not normal, and we believed it! In fact, we were and are perfectly normal.

In fact, even if your feelings seem to be on the fringe, chances are that over the course of history, there were people who thought similarly and integrated these feelings into their society as a normative belief. (You may have been born at the wrong time, but your feelings are not wrong!)

The belief that we are “not normal” often gets people depressed and down, but it is false! Accept yourself for who you are and remember:

*Fixed Belief 6: If I feel it, it is perfectly normal.*

This belief is key. We are so programmed to believe the opposite that I think I will repeat it.

*Fixed Belief 6: If I feel it, it is perfectly normal.*

Seriously, don't let anyone tell you differently.

(A word of caution: It is not always the best idea to act on all of your desires and beliefs that may go against what society dictates. Society's rules come along with punishments for those who break them. Unless you are willing to face the consequences, the pragmatic person doesn't necessarily act on those feelings. For example, I hate stupid rules and refuse to follow them. If I am driving at 3:00 a.m. on an empty street, I will treat a red light as a stop sign. I'm not going to wait for it to turn green. However, I am fully aware that if there is a cop around, I will get a ticket.)



The last belief is the most important one of all. It affects our entire outlook on life.

*False Belief 7: Lying to others and ourselves can make us happy.*

We want truth; we can't get enough of it in our lives. Yet we can't seem to find it anywhere. It is why we are so enamored with "real." Why the Coca-Cola ad touting "The Real Thing" was so effective, and it's why "reality TV" is so much more amusing than scripted TV.

Honesty with yourself is critical to happiness. There is no happiness without freedom. And there is no freedom without truth.

The trouble with honesty, though, is that it is so hard. Honesty means looking at yourself in the mirror and asking those scary questions you so want to avoid. It means dealing with the inner demons that those questions

(and answers) produce. It means being honest with those around you—your family, friends, coworkers and clients—and doing what is right for them. It means not taking advantage of situations where dishonesty might allow you to do what is best for yourself at the expense of others.

We know we need to be honest with others; it's a basic moral principle of most people. However, what we don't really learn is to be honest with ourselves. This is where we trip on the path to happiness.

As children, many times people were not honest with us. Our parents, teachers, friends and society, at some point, all lied to us. For example, I remember my parents telling me they closed my bedroom door at night because it was safer in case of a fire. I have a sneaking suspicion that they really closed it so they wouldn't wake me up! I am sure you can remember someone lying to you to protect specific interests. All this lying taught us that it is OK to lie to protect yourself. So we learned to lie as well.

It's amazing that we think that we can fool ourselves. We think lies will protect us from our fears. Specifically, we think lies will protect us from those inner parts of ourselves that we fear. We create false beliefs, which in turn create a shaky foundation for all beliefs that sit atop it. Further, these false beliefs knock us out of sync with ourselves. Hence, we are unable to know our true selves.

This foundation works to your disadvantage.

For example, I am a very anxious person. My mind is active and ruminates.

An event happens, and I start asking "what if" questions. For example, a friend doesn't answer the phone and I think, "What if they were kidnapped?" Now we both know that the likelihood of anyone we know being kidnapped is

very rare; nonetheless, I start getting anxious. And I stay anxious until I hear from my friend.

What benefit do I gain from this anxiety? It forces me to remember that there is something important out there that needs to be resolved, like a mental red string around my finger.

Let's go deeper. Why do I need this kidnapping issue to be resolved, and why do I create anxiety to remind myself? It's because of my belief that my life needs to be in order. This means no outstanding issues, such as unreachable friends. It means I need to be in control of my environment.

So in order to control my environment, I lied, telling myself there is something I can do to prevent my friend's harm—I can worry about it. But worrying didn't accomplish anything. It just made me anxious and restricted my happiness. A more productive line of thinking would be to simply accept that I am being anxious, which I tend to be, and then remind myself to look at the situation realistically. "Everything is OK, just like the last 100 times something similar happened, and it was OK." I need to first validate my normal reaction of anxiety in order to calm myself. Then I can tell myself not to worry, since there's nothing productive I can do about the situation.

Sometimes you tell yourself outright lies; other times they are denials; still other times you are simply fooling yourself. However, in all cases you are not being honest. And in all cases, these non-truths prevent your ultimate happiness.

When we are dishonest, what we really are doing is allowing the world to manipulate us. It's ironic: When we think we are manipulating the world, the opposite is actually happening.

We spend our lives building a house of lies, which ultimately boxes us in, suffocates us and makes us unhappy. We think we are helping ourselves with our lies, but we are really strangling ourselves. And we're doing it so subtly that we don't even realize it is happening.

Only by digging out of the pile of lies and being honest can we find freedom and happiness. As we look at life clearly and honestly, we are freeing ourselves. Freeing ourselves from the confines of the expectations of the world and the expectations of ourselves.

Now what?

We understand that truth is the first step to happiness, and truthfulness starts with ourselves. We are enslaved by our fallacies; the only way to get to the essential self is by shining the light of truth on yourself, no matter how difficult.

The next step is to apply this as much as possible in your life. Approaching life with the attitude of "the truth will set you free" can help you recognize and overcome your fears.

It all starts with an attitude—that everything you do will be truthful. Only by being truthful with yourself can you tease out which beliefs are yours and which were given to you by someone else.

I hope you now believe as strongly as I do that the only way to find freedom is through absolute honesty. After all, honesty is not just the best policy—it is the *only* policy.

*Fixed Belief 7: Honesty is the only policy.*



Take a few moments to integrate these new beliefs.

1. You are not in control.
2. There is no one to blame.
3. You already have everything you need.
4. Life isn't supposed to be easy.
5. Life isn't fair.
6. If you feel it, it is normal.
7. Honesty is the only policy.

Repeat them daily, until you have successfully replaced your old beliefs with these new improved ones. Soon, you will notice that they have become your personal mantras. A nice side effect is that by adopting all seven of these beliefs, you'll be a little happier already!

# Chapter 8

## *Identifying your Beliefs*

*Identifying the beliefs that create needs and actively changing them to desires*

Now we need to take what we learned about beliefs and apply it to ourselves. It is time to dig deep and figure out who we are. This chapter focuses on integrating some of the lessons from earlier chapters:

- *Emotions, beliefs, thoughts and actions provide the touch points that we use as we untangle and fully understand the beliefs underlying our feelings.*
- *We taught ourselves to be unhappy by instilling false and misunderstood beliefs into our thinking, resulting in unfulfilled needs and internal friction. To become truly happy, we must revisit the beliefs we created in our youth and correct them.*

This chapter will help you figure out your core beliefs. Once this exercise is complete, we will turn our attention to discarding and/or fixing some of those beliefs.

This chapter is full of hands-on exercises to help you discover your beliefs



I suggest that you do one lesson per day and record your exercises in your journal. Do the exercises in order, because they will build on each other. If you can, block out the same hour every day to work on your exercises. This is your time to find out more about you.



One of my core beliefs was that life had to be meaningful to be happy. I built an entire mountain of beliefs and values upon that assumption, which I later overturned. Our first task, then, is to figure out what are our core beliefs.

*Day 1: Figure out your core beliefs.*

Do you know what your core beliefs are? I certainly didn't. Even after sitting and thinking for a few hours, I only came up with a few.

They were fairly basic:

- Be good
- Be responsible
- Be honest
- Treat people like I want to be treated

I realized these beliefs were all about my interactions with other people. Where was I in there? So I added these beliefs:

- I control my own destiny and happiness in life.
- I choose how and with whom to spend my limited time on earth.
- I have equal rights as everyone else on earth, no more and no less.

I realized I had beliefs about the world, life and friends, so I started writing those down as well. Soon, I had an extensive list of beliefs sitting in front of me.

Still, my list felt incomplete, so out of curiosity I turned to a young woman sitting next to me at Starbucks and asked her, “What is a core belief of yours that I might not have on my list?” She answered, “That there are things worth dying for and killing for, like democracy.”

Later that day, while waiting in line at a store, I asked the same question to another stranger, a father of grown children. He told me, “Having honor of self [which he defined as acting honorably and being truthful] permeates everything I do to myself and to others and is what I expect from other people.”

These were both ideas that I didn’t have on my list, but upon reflection, they might have made the cut. It made me realize that we are often motivated by certain beliefs, and we can’t even articulate all of them. Scary, isn’t it?

*Exercise 1: Identify as many core beliefs as you can about yourself and the world. When you finish, identify who told you each belief.*



Now that you identified some of your beliefs, let’s extend outward to your family. We can learn about our own beliefs by examining the beliefs of those closest to us.

*Day 2: Listen to your parents.*

We know that many of our core messages and beliefs come from our parents. So let’s go to the source and ask our parents directly, if we have such an opportunity.

Your parents may be unaware of some of the beliefs they instilled in you, since we are often blind to our own base beliefs. Still, it is useful and worthwhile to talk to them about it. It can't hurt to ask! (Well, it can, but ask anyway!)

Even more effective, perhaps, is to listen to what they still tell us now as adults, since the messages probably haven't changed since we were younger! What is articulated (or not)? What is allowed (or not)? What is or was taboo?

*Exercise 2: Have a one-on-one conversation with your parents and ask them to do the exercise from Day 1. In the meantime, ask yourself what messages your parents gave you implicitly and explicitly.*



*Day 3: If you want to learn what messages you heard from your parents, listen to your kids.*

Years ago, someone I respected told me that I didn't trust myself, and it rang true. This is not usually something people say about me. Even my closest friends say I am confident and make decisions easily. They would certainly not describe me as indecisive or full of self-doubt.

However, for years I struggled with this statement. I felt it was true, but I couldn't quite put my finger on how.

Until one day when I found my son upset. When I asked him what was wrong, he said, "Dad, you are just going to tell me that the anger I am feeling is silly and not logical, so don't worry about it. I'm OK."

Wow, I thought. If he already knew what I was going to say, then I must have been giving him this message for years—the message that he should ignore his feelings

because they aren't logical.

Then it hit me. If this is what I told *him*, perhaps it's because I received that same message: to ignore my feelings when they weren't logical.

Now I was able to explain my feeling of not being able to trust myself. I had not been giving appropriate weight to my own inner feelings! Feelings and logic are both relevant when making decisions. I told this to my son the morning he was upset. Hearing the message helped him calm down and feel better.

Our children offer us a mirror into our own past. By listening to them, we can hear firsthand what our parents probably told us when we were children. We can learn more about those internal messages that we still tell ourselves.

*Exercise 3: Identify those messages your children tell you that you are constantly saying to them, as well as those areas where you say, "I sound just like my mother/father." Figure out the beliefs underlying those messages.*



*Day 4: If you want to understand yourself, get to know your family.*

I grew up in a close-knit family, so I never really understood families where a father doesn't talk to his son for 15 years or sisters don't speak following a fight that no one remembers.

Once, I had the opportunity to spend some time with a relative, one whom I didn't know particularly well. We spent a serious amount of time together, including hours in the car and a long weekend away. Soon, our friendship grew into an intimate relationship.

It was amazing to me how similar we were in so many ways. Talking to him provided insights into my own life, and many of his issues were mine as well. This makes sense if you consider we come from the same basic family unit and environment; typically, beliefs are passed down from generation to generation. This is also why family fights are often so extreme. The issues that arise during arguments often reflect issues we see in ourselves, making us feel defensive.

Parents, children, cousins—they can all provide important insights into who we are. During our journey of understanding ourselves and our beliefs, we need to get to know our family at a deeper level.

*Exercise 4: Go have a beer with your cousin or coffee with an aunt and do the Day 1 exercise in brief with them. At the same time, look for patterns within your immediate family— siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents—to uncover what beliefs your family holds dear.*



So far, we brainstormed a list of beliefs and used family insight to elicit more beliefs. There is one other major source of beliefs. It is insidious and affects us without us even realizing it: our culture.

*Day 5: Learn to recognize the subtle outside influences in your life.*

As I watched TV with my kids and listened to the messages that they were absorbing about self-image, success and coping, I thought about all the negative influences that affect us in very subtle ways. Yes, there are also positive messages that come through, but we must take the time to dissect the negative ones. Otherwise, we

do a huge disservice to our children (and ourselves). As they begin to form their own assumptions about life, we cannot continue to passively fortify negative beliefs.

In fact, movies, television, radio and even billboards bombard us with societal norms and beliefs that may or may not be in line with our own beliefs. If we don't take the time to think about and recognize them, we certainly won't have the opportunity to figure out what we really believe.

*Exercise 5: Make a list of all of the messages that we receive from the media and mass culture. Ask yourself how they influence you and what beliefs they have instilled in you.*



*Day 6: Think about those beliefs instilled by religion.*

Religion is a major part of modern life. It manifests itself both explicitly, when we go to services or hear a sermon, and implicitly, when we absorb the culture and traditions set forth by our religion and our ancestors. The problem is that we often don't fully embrace these beliefs, but they remain part of our belief system, thus creating inner conflict. We need to identify those beliefs and then weed them out.

*Exercise 6: List all the beliefs instilled by religion. Many of them may relate to moral issues. Ask yourself how they influence your actions and if you actually agree with them.*



We have now uncovered the low-hanging fruits of our beliefs—the ones sitting on the surface, just waiting for us to pick them. We will need to dig to uncover the rest

of our beliefs. We need to look deep within by turning to all of our belief touch points—emotions, thoughts and actions—and seeing what additional beliefs we can elicit.

We will start with emotions.

*Day 7: When you don't like something about someone else, look within yourself.*

When we are judgmental toward someone, it is usually because we are sensitive to that particular issue ourselves. Otherwise, we probably wouldn't have even noticed the issue in the first place. An old saying expresses this idea: "When you point your finger toward someone else, there are three fingers pointing back at you." (Try it!)

This has happened to me. There is a certain type of person that bothers me. This person is loud, outgoing, smiley. Don't get me wrong—some of my best friends are loud and outgoing, and in the past, a few of them have been quite smiley.

However, the loud-outgoing-smiley people that I meet simply rub me the wrong way. They trigger my "spidey sense." I can tell they are faking it, and I can't stand being around them.

I realized that my lack of tolerance for these people was because I, too, was faking it in certain areas of my life. Once I corrected my own actions, and I was living true to myself, the phoniness of others stopped bothering me.

The next time you don't like something about someone else, it's a sign to look within and identify what you don't like about yourself.

*Exercise 7: Make a list of five to 10 people you can't stand. List the top three things that annoy you about that person.*

*Look for patterns among the list of your annoyances. Now, turn inward and ask yourself, "Which of my beliefs are being provoked by these people?"*



*Day 8: If you want to improve yourself, you must examine the areas that make you sensitive or defensive.*

I find it hard to define those specific areas of my life that need fixing. It helps to try to articulate my sensitivities or think about times I have felt defensive. We feel sensitive or defensive when someone or something is challenging our beliefs. This exercise can help us identify those underlying beliefs. I noticed this in myself when someone said an idea of mine was "stupid." I initially felt defensive; it was only later that I realized what was truly bothering me was the implication that I was stupid. For me, this was a sensitive topic.

*Exercise 8: When do you find yourself getting defensive? Ask yourself why. What belief is being provoked?*



*Day 9: Ambivalence is your window to understanding underlying conflict.*

Humans like to take sides. It makes life so much easier. A couple that we are friendly with gets divorced, and we tend to stay friends with one or the other, even though we like them both. By choosing a side, you no longer need to think further about the subject. However, in reality, life is too complex to take sides. For most decisions, there are competing factors that we need to examine.

Ambivalence means you aren't so sure which way to go. Don't settle for the uncertainty. Examine the reasons



behind your ambivalence so you can better understand yourself. You can then make a mature decision about which path to take.

*Exercise 9: In what areas of your life do you feel ambivalence? When do you feel torn about what to do? What beliefs do you need to consider when making this decision?*



Let's turn to the beliefs we find as we examine our thoughts.

*Day 10: Identify the imaginary parts of your life.*

Do you understand the negative affect of projection? I didn't. But I do now.

We view the world through our eyes. While that may seem obvious, the scary part is that we don't realize how deeply ingrained that habit is. Often, our perspective is not in line with reality. The result is that we exist in a fog, overestimating and underestimating people or situations, without truly being in touch with the real world.

We project how much people like us or dislike us. We project how honest or dishonest, caring or heartless someone is. Our thoughts and beliefs all project outward from within us. While they might be rooted in reality, it is equally possible that they are baseless.

In fact, I am writing this book and projecting that you, too, have a deeply ingrained capacity to project. Perhaps I am wrong, but I'm betting it is a safe assumption!

This exercise helps you figure out your false projections. We often lie to ourselves to help keep a particular belief

alive. Judge people as an unbiased outsider might see them and see if they match your projection. Alternatively, perhaps, you will find the reality is different from what you thought. Do the facts justify your reality, or are you living in a world of illusion?

I hope that you can identify a few areas where you are living in an illusion. Look out for those areas where your instinct tells you one thing but you believe something different.

In my own life, I found this reflected with someone that I told I wasn't interested in pursuing a romantic relationship with, but offered to remain friends. She accepted my offer, but as time went on, my gut was that she really was just paying lip service to this idea, holding out hope for an eventual relationship. It was only when she got angry with me for something that would be expected in a relationship, but not a friendship, that I fully acknowledged that my gut was right. I had projected my ability to successfully walk the fine line between close friend and intimate relationship onto her.

*Exercise 10: Identify what you project about other people. Why are you projecting that? What beliefs they are helping support?*



*Day 11: Identify what roles you have outsourced to other people. What beliefs made you uncomfortable owning that role yourself?*

As adults, many of our needs are internal, yet there are still areas where we seek outside validation for our emotional needs. This started when we were children, and we relied on our parents, our providers, to give us wisdom, protection and self-worth. However, as adults, this reliance

on others undermines our own growth. We are leaving precious aspects of ourselves in other people's hands.

As long as we are dependent on others (people or things), we are at their mercy. Take away the person or the thing, and our need is exposed, and happiness is lost.

I was amazed to discover how many of my “key roles” I had outsourced to other people.

As children, we look to adults to show us “the way”—how to treat others, treat ourselves, make decisions, overcome challenges. The hope is that as we grow older, we internalize these “ways.” Sometimes, though, our adult role models never internalized *their* roles. We follow suit, unable to internalize our roles, our inner lives constantly dependent on others. We outsource important roles in our lives to people other than ourselves.

I mentioned previously that I had issues trusting myself in certain scenarios. I realized this was really about needing outside validation of my decisions. As a child, I had my father's validation. When I was in school, I transferred the validation to my teachers. Later, when I got married, I transferred the validation to my wife.

Only when I started living alone living alone did I realize I was outsourcing my internal life, and I brought it back in-house. Of course, I could have transferred it to my therapist, or back to my parents, or perhaps to a good friend, but luckily, I realized I needed to regain self-validation.

When we outsource aspects of our lives, we are not living our own lives. Rather, others are living for us. We need to be independent in order to be our true selves and find happiness. Understanding which roles we outsource to others is crucial.

Identify what roles you are outsourcing due to fear, learned helplessness, people taking from you or simple laziness and take them back! In my life, I noticed that I outsourced key decisions to people I deemed smarter than I was. I felt I was weak and unable to make important decisions about my own life. That was something I needed to take back under my control.

*Exercise 11: Identify what roles you have outsourced to other people. Then, identify the beliefs that made you uncomfortable owning that role yourself.*



Let's now turn our attention to your actions.

*Day 12: If you want to understand yourself better, point to your actions and ask yourself why.*

Life is a period of time, a series of decisions that result in actions. Ultimately, your beliefs drive these decisions.

To understand why we do what we do, we just need to ask! Ask yourself, "Why did I do that?" Asking and then answering that simple question forces you to reverse-engineer the thoughts, emotions and assumptions that brought you to that particular action. That process will bring you closer than you have ever been to your core self and the beliefs that drive you.

A while back, a friend misread what I had written in an e-mail, prompting me to send a defensive e-mail explaining what I had really meant. Reflecting on this action, I realized that there was a voice that insisted that I made sure people understood that I was in the right—and they were in the wrong.

I realized that this justification was a sign of my own insecurity. Had I been secure in myself, I would not have needed to justify anything! I would have just smiled and waved, not caring what the others thought.

*Exercise 12: If you want to understand yourself better, point to your actions and ask yourself why.*



*Day 13: Discover what fears inhibit your actions and identify the beliefs that created them.*

To change our beliefs, truly and effectively, we will need one important character trait: bravery. As always, we need to travel back to our childhood to understand why.

Children are wholly unprepared to deal with the realities of the pain and disappointment they will encounter. As children, we logically create a barrier to the pain, called fear, to prevent ourselves from even approaching those areas. Since pain and fear won't resolve until we deal with them, we end up dragging them around for our entire lives. Chances are these fears are still preventing you from finding pleasure today. To unlock the true issue (the pain), we must first identify the fear and then work backwards.

How do we identify our fears?

Here's what I did: I asked myself, "What am I afraid of doing?" I compiled a list, following up with, "What are the traumatic events from my childhood? How do they still impact me?" I wrote those down, too.

Once I had a list in front of me, I grouped them into categories. Soon, I noticed a pattern in my fears. With a little help from a good therapist, I realized that they all boiled down to two or three key issues: My beliefs, which

were my original pain points from childhood. For example, I believed that I was not strong enough to succeed on my own in life and therefore constantly needed to rely on others.

Once I identified the beliefs at the base of my fears, I could change them, or at least bravely stand up to them. (“I am **afraid** of making my own decisions because I **believe** I am not strong enough to make these decisions on my own.”)

The issue—the internal friction—will dissipate once we understand the root of the problem. In other words, once we understand ourselves. Once I realized I was clinging to this false belief that I lacked internal strength, I was able to address it and correct it. I stopped outsourcing decision making to others and took back control of my life.

Identify the actions, or non-actions, which you intuitively know are wrong. Think about the underlying insecurity and follow that up by asking, “What fear is that insecurity covering up?” Take that fear and insecurity and keep digging. Keep going down until you hit the bottom.

*Exercise 13: Discover what fears inhibit your actions and identify the beliefs about yourself that created them.*



If you have been doing your homework, you have compiled a long and comprehensive list of your core beliefs. The problem is that each belief creates a dependency, or need, that restricts your ultimate happiness. In the next chapter, we will focus on changing these beliefs and ridding ourselves of those fabricated needs that prevent our happiness.



# Chapter 9

## *Finding Happiness*

*Providing the skills needed to change your beliefs or perhaps discard them altogether*

We identified our beliefs; now it is time to modify them so that they no longer create pain and rid ourselves of false needs. As we mentioned:

- *By learning how to identify and **change** those beliefs that create pain, we can change our feelings and find happiness.*
- *Our goal in finding happiness is to figure out the smallest set of needs possible and make sure that we fulfill them.*

For now, let's define "needs" as anything necessary for our happiness. Our goal is to fulfill them. This most important chapter is also the shortest. However, it will also take you the longest to complete successfully.

There are only two steps to this chapter:

*Exercise 1: Take the list of beliefs you created during last chapter's exercises. For each belief, figure out what needs*



*you have created because of them.*

*Belief: I am weak.*

*Needs I created based on that belief:*

- 1. I need someone in my life to protect me from the world.*
- 2. I need to keep everything under control, because when life gets tough, I won't be able to make it.*
- 3. I need to be successful so people will continue to tell me how great I am.*



The process that we will now take is based on the teachings of Albert Ellis, PhD, the creator of cognitive-behavioral therapy. You can find more information about this process in his book, which I mention in the bibliography.

We will examine each of our needs carefully, thinking about each one and the underlying belief. Then, if necessary, we can rid ourselves of the belief and need in order to close the gap between our current state and true happiness.

Let's get to work!

Remember, we identified our needs and asked ourselves if they are true and if they are helpful.

As you are asking these questions, you may find that you think certain needs are true, but they really aren't. Rather they are needs *you created*.

For example, I needed people to like me, which I assumed was a core need of mine. It was only when my therapist

mentioned that I made up that need that I realized that I don't *need* people to like me. I just *like* it. I got rid of that need; now, if someone doesn't like me, it doesn't bother me.

Once you determine that your need is based on a false belief, you can discard it immediately.

For those *true* needs, you must also ask if it is helpful. Is this need is a prerequisite to our happiness? The need must both be true and helpful; otherwise, we toss it away like the poison that it is.

You may wonder why you would toss a belief just because it is doesn't lead to your happiness! The answer is that we choose our beliefs. We are in control. No one can tell you what to believe or not believe. If you can choose to believe something, you can also later choose not to believe it.

*Exercise 2: Examine each of the needs you identified. Ask yourself three questions:*

- *What belief is this based on?*
- *Is it true?*
- *Is it helpful?*

*If the answers to the second two questions are no, then it is a need you fabricated. Next time it comes up, tell yourself you don't need it!*



How did you do? How many needs do you actually have left? You probably still have quite a few.

There are only a few core needs that most of the human race shares. Any other need that you identify is a need that you created based on your personal beliefs. Since you

created it, you can also make that need go away.

What are these core needs? Self-recognition (which you now have!), food, shelter and friendship. We've made up all of our other needs, and they only serve to drag us down.

Food means that we need to be satiated. It doesn't mean that we have a need to *like* what we eat. If I serve you oatmeal day after day, your unhappiness after a few weeks of this diet stems from your made-up belief that you need, you *require*, good food. However, your core need for food was fulfilled. Focus on that, don't create other outside needs to distract you, and you can be perfectly happy.

Similarly, your need for shelter can be fulfilled with a tent, or, at worst, a small house. The need for more than that comes from a feeling that you created due to some belief.

Finally, friendship is a core need that you can fulfill through meaningful relationships with others.

Other than that, all your needs are fulfilled. Any need you identify is false and simply something that restricts your happiness.

Why is your list so long? Return to your list and apply the lessons you learned until you are left with these four core needs.

How do you know when you are done? When you rid yourself of unnecessary needs, you will find true contentment in life and gain the innate understanding that all is well. It's that simple. (But, of course, it isn't!)

Happiness is an attitude. You need to approach life with the attitude that all of your needs are fulfilled. However, you can't fake an attitude; you're too smart to fool

yourself like that. Rather, you need to do the hard work to believe that your core needs are fulfilled. Then, you can find true happiness.

## *Epilogue*

I found true happiness, but much to my chagrin, I soon lost it.

This took me by surprise.

I had thought that once I had achieved happiness, I would remain in a state of bliss. However, life is a balancing act. You cannot maintain true happiness without constant vigilance. If you are not careful, you will fall back on your mistaken thoughts of the past and create new needs that will impair your happiness.

The word “revelation” comes from the word reveal. When we experience a revelation, the veil obscuring our life—our beliefs, needs, motivations and actions—is lifted for a brief moment. It quickly closes again. However, in the brief instance that the veil is lifted, your worldview shifts. Those old, mistaken assumptions are changed forever. Think of “The Wizard of Oz.” Once you know there is a man behind the curtain, you can’t undo that knowledge.

The good news is that once you have found true happiness, you can get back there again. However, you must be vigilant and self-aware, dispelling new beliefs and needs as they come your way.

Thank you for joining me on this adventure. I hope we are able to find and maintain true happiness for the rest of our brief sojourn on this little ball of dirt we lovingly refer to as planet Earth.

With love,  
Josh

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*Below are ten books that had the most influence on my personal growth. I placed them in the order I would recommend reading them.*

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