

Joy on Demand by Chade-Meng Tan

This book abstract is intended to provide just a glimpse of this wonderful book with the hope that you may like to read the original book at leisure and enjoy its real beauty.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Happiness was a skill I had to learn.

I learned that the ability to access joy is highly trainable.

Each of us have a relatively stable level of happiness that we eventually return to after major positive/negative life events. However, you can improve this average level of happiness gradually by mind training.

Physical Exercise Analogy: Every time you move a dumb-bell up and down, you strengthen your muscles a little more. With weight lifting exercises you develop strength. With these exercises you also develop physical health and fitness. With this every single aspect of your life improves. You have more energy, suffer fewer sick days, more success at work because of more energy and less sick days. You look better, you are more confident, and you feel great.

Meditation is mind training. With this, we can improve every single aspect of our lives. Mindful meditation is one of the forms of meditation. It is defined as “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally”.

Earlier, my baseline happiness used to be misery, that is, if nothing good was happening, I was miserable. After a couple of years of mind training, my baselines had shifted to jolly, that is if nothing negative was happening, I was jolly. Hence, baseline happiness is can be changed from highly negative to highly positive. Several great monks have done similar things.

A study has shown that just eight weeks of mindfulness training is enough to cause significant changes in the happiness.

Joy Independent of Sensual and Ego Pleasures:

We can train mind to access joy even when it is free from stimulation. We need to understand how such a joy arises and then cultivate those skills. They are three: easing, inclining and uplifting.

Easing Into Joy:

The first skill we need is resting the mind to put it into a state of ease. Then joy becomes more accessible. Being joyful at rest allows us access it anyplace, anytime.

Inclining the Mind toward Joy:

Next, we learn to notice joy and give it our full attention. We learn where to look in order to see and appreciate joy that is already available to us, in moments that we had not noticed before. There is joy in calming the breath and in the pleasure of ordinary activities. We invite this joy in. Inviting and noticing joy become part of our meditation practice as well as habits in everyday life. In time, with practice, the mind starts to get to know joy like a close family member we can count on. The more the mind becomes familiar with joy, the more it perceives joy, inclines toward joy, and effortlessly creates conditions conducive to joy.

Uplifting the Mind:

Here, we learn to uplift the mind with wholesome joy arising from goodness, generosity, loving-kindness, and compassion. This joy also helps mental health, makes mind stable, collected because it doesn't have to fight with anything like regret or envy. It establishes a virtuous cycle.

With these three we increase our ability to access joy on demand in most normal life circumstances.

Google Director Jonanthan Berent learned these skills which had a profound impact on his life. He says “I have found that I can at any moment take a conscious breath and access joy. In fact, it is so helpful that I use my watch’s chronometer to remind me to take at least one breath per hour when I am fully present to it.”

By practising loving-kindness daily people have been able to sleep better. **This training also gives us the strength and skills we need to deal with difficulties and emotional pain. With this, what appears to be painful will be less painful, what is neutral will become more joyful, and what is joyful will become even more joyful.**

If it is so good why people haven't found it? One reason is that they aren't aware that such a thing is possible. Even if they have heard about it, they think it's unattainable, so they don't even try.

The joy from this training is independent of the circumstances. Even if we accidentally lose our joy due to something bad, there is still joy in knowing that we can get it back. We all have an infinite resource at our disposal, no matter how constrained or difficult our circumstances, and that resource is joy.

Joy Leads to Success:

Life is weird. Sometimes you find something only when you stop looking for it. By the above training, you are naturally happier, and desperation for success begins to wane. However, with this training you become even more successful. This is because joy leads to happiness and happiness leads to success.

Mathew Ricard (the happiest man in the world) defines happiness as “a deep sense of flourishing that arises from an exceptionally healthy mind—not a mere pleasurable feeling, a fleeting emotion, or a mood, but an optimal state of being”. Joy in contrast, is a pleasurable feeling, an emotion. It is in the moment, while happiness is more of a net effect, over time.

Success does not lead to happiness; instead, happiness leads to success. Research has proved that happiness raises productivity by 31 %, accuracy on task by 19 %. Happier people are more popular and better at their jobs (including student life). It makes you healthier, too. It even increases creativity. If these things were out of control and just a matter of luck, it wouldn't be great news. However, the good news is that joy and happiness are trainable.

If you want to be successful, be happy first. You can be successful without being happy, but you will be more unhappy after being successful. Wealth is a personality multiplier. If you are cruel and unkind, then being wealthy makes you even more so. If you are kind and generous, being wealthy makes you more so. Wealth provides more opportunities for both for doing what they like. Wealth is also an experience multiplier (good or bad both).

A Virtuous cycle:

Joy and meditation form a virtuous cycle. Joy becomes highly accessible in a trained mind. With training, the mind learns to access inner joy with increasing ease and frequency. At the same time, the

joyful mind is at peace, a peaceful mind is easily focussed, and a focussed mind becomes more trainable, thereby making meditation practice even more effective.

The Wondrous Benefits:

With practice, you will have extended periods of joy. Not every moment will be joyful, but knowing that you can count on joy to happen again, and in increasing amounts, tends to improve your overall mood.

Inner joy relies on inner peace, so that is our practical starting point. Compassion and kindness arise from inner peace and joy. Compassion is both the fruition and multiplier of joy. With all these you get more confidence and charisma, creativity and innovation, self awareness, well-being and emotional resilience, happiness, humour, popularity, courage, and success in every arena. Joy is a well spring of all good things.

Joy and pain can coexist. Just because you are in pain does not mean you can't access joy.

CHAPTER 2: JOY BECOMES YOU

How Joy Can Begin With the First Breath

If mind training is so good, why isn't everybody doing it daily? One difficulty is that it can be very hard to start. Another difficulty is, even when successfully initiated, it can be very hard to sustain. Fortunately, these problems are solvable.

For getting wonderful benefits of physical fitness, we need twenty minutes of exercise three times a week. Sadly, even that is hard for many people. Even after a good beginning, exercise regimen tapers off because, there is "no time", "it's boring", "it's tedious", "it's hard work", they are too busy, or tired or something.

There are two obvious solutions. The first is have exercise buddies who motivate each other. The second is to have exercise in daily life by walking/biking to work as much as you can, or take stairs instead of lift wherever possible.

There is however, a third, less obvious but most important solution: joy.

Bringing joy in exercise has two parts. The first part is a skilful ramp-up. At this stage, the key is **easing into it, skilfully**. It is easy and effective at the beginning. The second part is **making it fun**. When you do it for fun, you will continue, and have exercise as a bonus.

Similar things apply for the mind training. In modern life, finding buddies for meditation for 20 minutes is difficult. **Incorporating it in daily life like walking mindfully, taking mindful breaths whenever you can, complement but not substitute the sitting meditation. Hence, finding joy in it is the only solution.**

For this we must frontload joy from the beginning, rather than waiting to reach 'Joy point'. The first step is easing into meditation. It must appear easy. This starts a virtuous cycle.

Studies have shown that 100 minutes of meditation training is sufficient to effect measurable changes. In one study, students who practised 10 minutes of mindfulness meditation for two weeks, had measurably improved GRE scores. Life changing benefits are possible with 50-100 hours of training.

Another study shows that mere fifteen minutes of mindfulness meditation can measurably improve your decision making by reducing your vulnerability to “stupid mistakes”.

Another study shows genetic changes after 8 hours of intensive mindfulness practice, which results in faster physical recovery from stressful situations.

A key point is, meditation is very easy to learn, but takes a long time to master.

You gain some benefit even with the very first mindful breath. The reasons are both physiological and psychological. The former is because a breath taken mindfully tends to be deep and slow, which lowers stress, reduces heart rate, blood pressure, and calms you down. The psychological reason is that you in the present moment during mindful breath, away from regret (of the past) and worry (about the future). Regret and worry are heavy burden we carry. Putting these down even for a short duration provides mind precious moments of rest and recovery. This has game changing consequences, literally. Tennis players use that to calm mind in 10-15 seconds between two points. Novak Djokovic confirmed this to be true.

Gentle and Intense:

The benefits of a mindful breath gets amplified by two key ingredients: **gentleness in attitude, and intensity of attention.** It is like gazing at your baby, or like holding a small bird in hand (gentle enough not to harm the bird, but firm enough to prevent it from flying away).

There are three qualities which can help in this. The first one is **Physical relaxation.** Do whatever to make you feel relaxed. Notice that relaxed feeling, then gentleness automatically follows. The second quality is **Mental Ease.** Remember that there is no goal, nothing to do, nowhere to go. When mind understands this message, it relaxes. The third quality is **Loving Kindness.** Gazing at baby is easy because loving kindness is involved. Try to bring that to the experience of breath or the present moment. Alternatively, bring up some memory of loving kindness.

Intensity is very important because the feeling of rest from regret and worry is better, and longer lasting.

One BBC Documentary “The Truth About Exercise”, compared two subjects for exercise. One biked every day, for 30 minutes at a speed he could sustain. The other just biked for one minute a day, going flat out for 20 seconds, and then resting for a few minutes. He repeated this three times. After a month, both were evaluated for improvements in VO2max and insulin activity. The improvements were found to be similar (One minute Vs Thirty minutes). We can apply that for our daily meditation.

Intensity and gentleness are both required, without feeling stressed. Otherwise, lower intensity a bit. **Always choose gentleness over intensity.** First, gentle attention on breath is a priority. When this becomes natural, increase intensity.

Make Breathing a Habit:

One of the best things about the One Mindful Breath practice is that it is so easy and takes so little time, you can practice that anytime, anywhere. The good news is that it can be turned into a habit very easily. Habit is a loop that consists of 3 parts: a cue, a routine, and a reward. The cue is one which activates the habit-it leads to a routine. The routine is the behaviour itself-it leads to the reward. The reward is the perceived benefit from the behaviour, and it reinforces the habit, making it automatic.

In the case of one mindful breath, the cue could be any one of the following: First moment of the day. Or, moment you lie down on your bed for the night sleep. **You can also use hourly chime to take a mindful breath every hour. The most useful one, however, is: every time you have to wait, take a mindful breath. You have to wait every day at so many places. So these are many such opportunities. The routine is mindful breath. The reward is the sense of calmness.**

The practice has multiple benefits. First, I never waste any time anymore, because I spend it productively. Secondly, instead of agitation due to waste of time, you calm down. The best of all, it becomes a good habit. You will never become bored, because boredom itself is a cue to take a mindful breath. With this meditation becomes a habit. The benefits are here and now, with greater benefits in future.

After practicing this for a few days, you may experience joy from any of four sources, two of which are short lived and. The other two are very important and highly durable.

The two short lived ones are: the joy of novelty which fades of quickly, and the joy of doing something which you thought was very difficult.

The first source of sustainable joy is the joy of momentary relief from affliction. The debilitating affliction such as despair, depression, or hatred are also common. Some other potent afflictions are greed, worry, remorse, fear, envy, or anger. Other subtle afflictions are restlessness and agitation. With mindful breath there is some temporary relief from these afflictions. Joy arises with this relief. With practice, relief and joy can increase in power to counter stronger afflictions for longer durations.

The second source of sustainable joy is the joy of ease. This happens when the mind is alert and yet relaxed at the same time. With more practice this joy can grow in strength and envelop one's entire domain of experience.

The intention to do one mindful breath is itself a meditation, because of the mind inclination. Since, one breath is so easy that there is no excuse to not to begin. The moment you do one, you realize you can do a few more. Very quickly, the momentum builds up.

Never underestimate the power of one breath. The entire journey of 'Joy on Demand' starts here.

CHAPTER 3: From One Breath to One Googol- Settling into Sustainable Joy

Sometimes, you get lucky, when the most important thing you need to do is also the simplest. Breathing is the most important, and yet the easiest thing in life.

The simplest, most fundamental, most basic, and most important meditative skill of all is the ability to settle the mind. It means resting the mind so that it approaches some degree of stillness. The following three methods help in this. These are easy and highly effective.

The first method is Anchoring. This means bringing attention gently on a chosen object like breath (or mantra), and if the attention wanders away, gently bringing it back. An anchored ship stays close to the site despite the wind and water movement.

The second method is Resting. Just sit down and allow the mind to relax. Let the mind rest on the breath or mantra. Resting is an extinct- we all know how to do it. We want to turn it from instinct to a skill.

The third method is Being. This means not doing anything in particular, just sitting and enjoying the present moment. Sitting without agenda, but fully attentive to all that is happening in the present moment.

You can choose any method that suits you. All have some degree of mental stillness and attention to the present moment, as common factors.

FORMAL PRACTICE: WAYS TO SETTLE THE MIND

The exercise is for 5 minutes. First, 3 one minute sessions on anchoring, resting and being, and the last two minutes on any one of the three you like.

Setup: Sit in a posture that allows you to be alert and relaxed at the same time. Eyes can be open or closed.

Anchoring (1 minute)

For 1 minute bring attention to the breath. If attention wanders, gently bring it back.

Resting (1 Minute)

For the next minute, rest the mind by telling yourself “there is nowhere to go and nothing to do, except rest.”

Being (1 Minute)

For the next minute, sit without agenda and experience the present moment.

Freestyle (2 Minutes)

For the next two minutes, practice any of the three methods you like.

After doing this for few days you would know what suits you best. Don't worry, there is no “wrong choice”. Moreover, you can change your method any time. Do this exercise at least once a day, for at least one minute a day. However, you can do it longer if you can enjoy doing it.

Don't settle the Mind- The mind Settles Itself

We do not have any control over whether the mind is settled or not, but what we can do is create the conditions conducive to the mind being settled and then allow the mind to take its own time to settle itself.

This is an important lesson, put in effort to create right conditions for what you want to happen, and then let go and allow things to happen or not happen on their own. It is like farming. He farmer does his best and leaves it to nature. A key aspect of meditation is the skilful combination of wise effort and letting go.

Familiarization is the other key aspect of meditation.

Meditation Is Not About Not Thinking

One of the biggest misconceptions about meditation is that it involves “emptying your mind of all thought. “ **Meditation is about allowing the mind to settle on its own terms, in its own time.** It is

true that over time, with practice, as mind becomes more deeply settled, the stream of thoughts slows down and goes down from being like a raging waterfall, to being like a fast flowing river, then more like a slow moving stream, and finally, the mind is like a placid lake.

In meditation we need to balance three mental factors: mental relaxation, mental energy, and equanimous watching. The key is to practice equanimous watching, basically just watching yourself while you meditate. If there is too much tension, then apply mental relaxation, if you are sleepy, then use mental energy.

Formal Practice:

Setup: Sit in any position that allows you to be relaxed and alert at the same time.

Relax (2 minutes): Relax and allow your mind to wander, but if it goes too far away, gently and lovingly bring it back to the breath.

Rejoice (2 minutes): When the mind is settled on breath, rejoice. If the attention wanders away, rejoice, thinking “I have breath, I am happy.” Then gently bring back attention to breath.

Resolve (2 minutes): You train mind and resolve for your attention to stay on the breath. Whenever attention wanders away, firmly but gently and lovingly bring it back.

Refine (2 minutes): Attend to the subtle nature of your breath.

Release (2 minutes): Let go of all effort and allow the mind to just be

CHAPTER 4: What, Me Happy? Inclining the Mind Toward Joy

When the mind is inclined in a certain way, thoughts and emotions happen effortlessly according to the nature of its inclination. The skilful way to train the mind is not to exert forceful control over the mind itself, but to change its inclination so that thoughts and emotions occur effortlessly in the direction that one intends.

Inclining depends on ‘familiarization with joy’.

What, I was happy? I didn’t Notice

For the mind to get familiar with joy, first it has to notice it. So we have to train it to perceive thin slices of joy. In life, many moments of joy abound, but they are easy to miss because they are usually fleeting and not super intense. They come in thin slices both in time and space.

The training is simple. It is simply to notice joy. For example, notice the pleasant feeling of warm water on the skin in winter. Taste of good food, aroma of soap, taste of 1st sip of water when thirsty, etc. Just notice these simple things.

Attending To Joy: Pay intense attention to joy.

Joy on Demand:

Short Experiment: Take 3 breaths. In the 1st, bring full attention to the process of breathing. In the 2nd, calm the body. In the 3rd, bring up joy by using the simple tool of smiling. Pay full attention to it. You can repeat this a few more times, if you like.

Our facial expressions reflect our emotional state. However, the effect is both ways. Facial expressions can also affect emotional states. Psychologist Paul Ekman has proved that emotions are encoded in facial muscles. He noticed that while working on expressions of anger and distress all day, he felt terrible at the end of the day. When he created expression of anger, his heart rate was raised by 10-12 beats, and hands got hot.

We can effectively invite joy by smiling a genuine smile. Smile as if you are really happy. Even a half smile works. And it works every time.

The above process just takes about 30 seconds. You can easily extend it to 3 minutes by doing each step for 1 minute instead of just one breath.

With this practice, you can bring up joy on demand in most ordinary circumstances.

The Joyful mind Rocks at Meditation

One of the most important things I ever learned is the central role joy plays in meditation. Joy is the condition most immediately responsible for (meditative) concentration.

Samadhi is a state of mind that is calm, serene, and relaxed, and one pointedly concentrated.

Attending to Joy in Real Life:

There are 3 sources of wholesome joy in daily activities that we can tap. One source is the type of behaviour involving generosity, loving kindness, and compassion.

Ethical behaviour is another one. “Doing the right thing” contributes incrementally to a clear conscience, and consequently a joy that is easy to miss called the joy of blamelessness. It is like clearing the ground of weeds before planting crops. This joy clears the mind of significant percentage of shame, guilt, worry, and regret. All this is conducive to meditation. In addition, this joy further reinforces ethical behaviour. Every time you make an ethical decision or engage in ethical behaviour, take a moment to think to yourself, “I have done an ethical thing. I am happy.” If joy arises, bring attention to the joy of blamelessness, at least for a moment.

Another source of wholesome joy is attending to pleasant experiences in your normal everyday activities. When you do something that involves a pleasant experience, take at least one moment to attend fully to the joy that pleasantness invokes. For example, at lunch, bring full attention to the enjoyment of the 1st bite. You are most hungry at that time, so the 1st bite is the most delicious bite. This is a thin but very satisfying slice of joy. Don’t miss it. Another example is when you first enter into a shower, attend to the joy of the moment the water touches your skin. When you are with someone you love, take one moment to attend fully to the joy of his/her presence. When holding the hand of a loved one, take one moment to attend to the joy of that contact. When relieving in toilet, attend to the joy of relief. When out on a nice day, take one moment to attend fully to the enjoyment of the weather.

The 1st compelling benefit is that relationships become more fulfilling.

The next compelling benefit is a significant increase in happiness. Many of us have many joyful moments that we totally miss. With this practice, we notice them and revel in them. Moreover, more importantly, it leads to gratefulness. Very soon, as you begin to enjoy all these little pleasures in life, you take them less and less for granted. You become more and more grateful. **A lot of research has shown gratefulness to be an important cause of overall happiness in life. Regularly noting things you are grateful for in a gratitude journal can significantly increase happiness. Shawn Achor, author of The Happiness Advantage, suggests that spending two minutes a day scanning the world for three things you are grateful for, and doing it for a mere twenty one days, is the fastest way to learn optimism. Shawn also suggests a nice daily practice he calls the “doubler,” which is to recall one positive experience of the day in detail, because the brain can’t tell the difference between visualization and actual experience, so by doing this, you double the experience.**

Keeping a gratitude journal, finding new things to be grateful for, and recalling a joyful experience every day are all great ideas. However, taking one moment to fully attend to every joyful experience has the advantage of taking no time and effort. You can do it many times a day, in real time, with zero delay in gratification.

This practice also benefits meditation practice by improving attention which is at the core of meditation. Moreover, your mind gets more attuned to joy during sitting meditation.

“Someday, I will Die, and Other Happy Thoughts.”

Perhaps the biggest hindrance to perceiving many moments of joy in daily life is **habituation**. It means taking things for granted.

There are three ways to overcome habituation. The first is mindfulness. The second is gratefulness. It helps us see that everything is precious. **The third and most powerful way is a strong awareness of mortality. Be aware of this at least once a day. This awareness changes everything. Puts things in proper perspective, helping us to prioritize things.**

Remembering that I will be dead soon helps me making big choices in life. Because almost everything—all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. It is the best way to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.

One study shows that when you think you have less time on earth, the more likely you derive happiness from ordinary experience. BBC story titled “Bhutan’s Dark Secret of Happiness” suggests that people in Bhutan are so happy because they think of death 5 times a day.

This mortality awareness makes it very hard for me to stay angry at loved one very long.

The Joy of Not Being in Pain:

To not be in pain is one of the greatest joys of life. This is true most of the time, but we miss it completely, because we take it for granted. Noticing that frequently gives us plenty of joyful moments without any effort. However, it is important to note that noticing absence of a phenomena doesn’t naturally come to us. We need stimulus to notice something. However, our mind can be notice absence of pain by simply checking from time to time, if we are in pain. If not, just remind yourself of that, and if joy arises, just attend to that. Even if you are having back pain, you can remind yourself that you don’t have other problems.

Even more powerful than noticing the absence of physical pain, is to notice the absence of mental and emotional pain. For example, you can say “I am not suffering from the pain of hatred right now.” And again, attend to the joy from that thought.

Informal Practice: Periodically, perhaps once a day at least, bring awareness to the body to see if there is any pain. If not, remind yourself of that. If joy arises, attend to it.

Similarly, at least once a day, bring awareness to the mind to see if there is mental or emotional pain. If not, remind yourself of that. If joy arises, attend to it.

Just Note Gone:

There is a simple practice that can greatly enhance your ability to notice the absence of pain. With this we train the mind to notice that something previously experienced is no more.

Informal Practice: Sit in an alert, relaxed position. While doing meditation, apply intense attention to the end of every breath, clearly seeing when it ends. You may say “Gone.”

If any thought or sensation arises, see if you can watch it until it fades away.

While ending meditation, note the ending.

This practice changes our perception about the way we perceive phenomena in three important ways. First, it brings balance to our perception of sensory and mental events. Every event has three parts: arising, presence, ceasing. Most of us are aware of the first two, but not the last one.

Second, it helps us clearly see the impermanence in all phenomena. Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation. It then stops clinging to sense pleasures.

Third, and perhaps most important, is the ability to see that self is a process, not an object.

Do Not Expect Every Moment, Meditation, or Day to Be Joyful

The first reason is normal day-to-day variance of life conditions. You may be tired, you might remember a fight, too much food or drink. Sometimes, you feel down without a reason. So bringing up joy may not be easy every day.

The second reason is that sometimes terrible things happen. The emotional pain can last for months. However, you can still bounce back to happiness.

Chapter 5: Uplift the Mind in Seconds

Can you turn another potentially miserable day at work into your happiest day in years? Let us see how it can be done.

Here, we uplift mind by giving it a healthy shot of wholesome joy, a cocktail of three sublime states: loving kindness, compassion, and altruistic joy.

Ten second exercise: Identify two human beings in the room and just think, “I wish this person to be happy, and I wish for this person to be happy.” You don’t say or do anything, just think.

Everybody emerges from this exercise smiling, happier than ten seconds before. **This is the joy of loving kindness. To simply to simply think that I wish for one other person to be happy makes me happy.**

One of the most important secrets of happiness can be derived from the above. All other things being equal, to increase your happiness, all you have to do is randomly wish for somebody else to be happy. It doesn't take time and effort.

Another Exercise: Once an hour, ever hour, randomly identify two people walking past your office/home and secretly wish for each of them to be happy. Don't say or do anything. Just think, "I wish for this person to be happy." Just do it once and go back to work.

You can do the above exercise any time, at any place. If there is no one around, bring someone to mind for this exercise.

Formal Practice: Sit in alert and relaxed position. Repeat the cycle once per minute. Bring to mind someone for whom you can feel loving kindness. Wish for him/her to be happy. The joy of loving kindness may arise. If it does, pay full attention to it until it fades away. Do this for 3 minutes.

Loving Kindness is the "Gateway Drug" to Compassion

In loving kindness we wish for others to be happy. **In compassion, we wish them to be free from suffering. Compassion is the happiest mental state ever measured in the history of neuroscience.**

When I experience sadness with equanimity, courage, confidence and selfless love arise. When a mind that is clear and fearless meets suffering, it takes the quality of a loving parent/grandparent cradling a sick child.

Formal Practice: Cultivating Compassion Through Peace, Joy, and Kindness

Setup: Sit in an alert, relaxed position.

Settle the Mind (2-5 minutes): Settle the mind with either anchoring, resting, or being.

Attend to Joy (2-5 minutes): If any joy arises, bring full attention to it. If necessary, bring up a full smile, or half a smile.

Loving Kindness (2-5 minutes): Wish for someone to be happy. If joy arises, bring full attention to it until it fades away. Repeat it as many times you like. You can rest in between.

Compassion (2-5 minutes): Bring to mind anybody who you know is suffering. Feel his pain. Sadness may arise. If you can experience sadness with equanimity, do so. Even if there is no equanimity it is OK. If it is uncomfortable, you can shift attention to the sensations in body. If that is also uncomfortable, you can stop.

Selfless Love (If Any)

If at any stage during compassion exercise, selfless love arises, bring full attention to it. If any joy arises, pay full attention to it.

Closing (2 minutes):

End the session by settling the mind for 2 minutes.

Rejoicing in All that (Juicy) Goodness

Loving kindness leads to altruistic joy which uplifts the mind. It is a joy derived from the success and good fortune of others. However, it is hard to cultivate.

There is a subset of altruistic joy that is easy and uplifting, and that is rejoicing in the inner goodness and altruistic behaviour of the others. Bring to mind somebody who is very kind and generous, and you feel awed, inspired, and uplifted. Rejoice!

You can even apply this to your own altruistic acts. Rejoice in your own good acts for others. It has three benefits. First, it is reward signal for more of such work. Second, it uplifts the mind. Third, it counters self-inadequacy and self loving.

At the beginning of every meditation session, uplift the mind with altruistic joy as explained above. With this all three meditative joys will begin to arise: gladness, energetic joy, and gentle joy.

Formal Practice:

Setup: Sit in an alert and relaxed position.

Uplift the Mind (2-5 minutes)

Bring to mind one or more people whom you have brought joy or benefit out of purely altruistic intent. Reflect on these deed and the good intentions behind them. Or think of similar things done by those whom you admire.

Settle the Mind (5-10 Minutes)

Settle the mind with anchoring, resting, or being. Allow mind to settle on its own.

Closing (1-2 Minutes)

Close by noticing any joy present, and if so attend to it for one or two minutes.

Informal Practice:

Whenever you make a donation of time or labour, take a moment to think, “I am doing this out of altruistic intention. It makes me so happy.”

Whenever you meet or bring to mind an admirable, inspiring person, take a moment to think, “We have such wonderful persons in this world, I am so happy.”

Whenever you see somebody performing an altruistic or heroic act, take a moment to think, “More good is being done in this world, I am so happy.”

So Much Goodness, So Little Time

Out of the three qualities: loving kindness, compassion, and altruistic joy, which one should be practiced first? We should definitely begin with loving kindness, because it is easiest and most user friendly.

Loving kindness has many powerful benefits. The 1st is that it is highly conducive to joy. A scientific study proved that, “Participants who invested an hour or so each week practicing loving kindness, enhanced a wide range of positive emotions in a wide range of situations, especially when interacting with others.” The practice led to shifts in people’s daily experiences of a wide range of positive emotions, including love, joy, gratitude, contentment, hope, pride, interest, amusement and awe. Another benefit is that people tend to like you, and even animals tend to like you.

Loving kindness is highly conducive to meditative concentration. Perhaps the most important, it paves way for other three sublime states.

If you do one thing in addition to loving kindness, rejoice in inner goodness and altruistic deeds of yourself and others. It is very easy, and yields compellingly large benefit in proportion to the tiny effort required.

If you do one more thing after that, it should be compassion. It is the most potent of the three sublime states. It is the one which directly addresses suffering right in its face. Brings about selfless love. This is highest virtue in Buddhism, and a hard core stuff.

Enemies Near and Far:

While searching for edible mushrooms in the wild, the biggest danger is in picking toxic ones which look alike. In the same way, every sublime state has one or more look-alikes, or near enemies.

The near enemy of loving kindness is affection that compulsively keeps you thirsting for more. The absence causes pain. This does not happen in loving kindness. The second enemy is conditional love. Loving kindness is always unconditional.

The near enemies of compassion are: 1st, grief born of despair. This is unhealthy sadness, compared to healthy one in compassion. The second one is pity. This always creates ego. In compassion there is none.

The near enemies of altruistic joy are: 1st, the joy for others tinged with identification of “I”, “me”, and “mine”. The second one is rejoicing in unwholesome joy of others or self.

The near enemies of equanimity are: 1st: Disengagement, when we simply ignore what we don’t see. The second one is apathy. In this we don’t care. In equanimity, we both see and care.

CHAPTER 6: Happiness Is Full of Crap- Working with Emotional Pain

Masters describe the original state of the soul and the actual condition of the mind with an analogy of gold being covered by cow dung. Gold represents the mind in its perfect, happy state, while the dung represents mental conditions (suffering) that hinder the former. We merely have to remove the latter.

When we step into dung/poop, our shoes get dirty. These are bad things happening to us causing suffering. We can step into the house with dirty shoes and spread stink, or wash our shoes into the back yard, fertilizing the soil, and walk into the house with clean shoes.

In life, painful emotions are unavoidable. We grow old, we get sick, experience physical pain, face death (our own or that of a loved one). Also, life forces us to do things we dislike, or lose what is dear to us. In every case, some emotional pain is unavoidable. Hence, while we train ourselves in the art of joy, it is equally important to also learn suffering.

In this chapter, we will use inner peace, inner joy, inner clarity, and loving kindness to work with suffering. There are three steps in doing that: an **attentional step**, an **affective step**, and a **cognitive step**.

These three steps are useful in all situations involving emotional pain, whether you feel sad, angry, humiliated, betrayed, or hateful. Sometimes, however, our difficulties are so intense and emotional pain is so severe that even these three steps fail. In times like those, we practice the art of suffering.

Step 1 in Working with Emotional Pain: The Attentional Step

This step can be summarized in 3 words: **calm the mind**. It can be done by simply bringing gentle but intense attention to the breath. It may take a few seconds or few minutes to take attention away from the thoughts that are fuelling my pain. This helps both physiologically as well as psychologically. Under normal conditions, it is easy to clam the mind, but not under stressful conditions when you need it most. However, if you practice it a lot under normal conditions, then in times of need, in the midst of emotional pain, you will be able to activate it instinctively.

Step 2: The Affective Step

This step deals with the feeling of the emotionally painful experience. The previous attentional step is necessary, but often insufficient. Calming mind is essential to cope up with emotional pain. But pain may come back if calming effort is stopped. Then, this step is required.

There are two parts in this step. First is to be willing to experience joy in the midst of emotional pain. The second is to be willing to experience the emotional pain itself.

Willingness to Experience Joy:

It may appear surprising that this is possible during emotional pain. It is even possible, to some degree, even under very painful circumstances. This is because peace and joy are default states of mind. They just have to be accessed. The state is like a moon clouded by emotions. Painful emotions obscure joyful state, not destroy it. However, accessing them may not always be easy, and sometimes impossible. One just has to be patient enough for the weather to change.

When we develop the skills to ease the mind into joy, attend to joy, and uplift the mind, then even in the middle of a great difficulty, we can see oasis of of peace and joy in the vast desert of pain. This way we can cross the vast desert.

Just Because You are in pain Doesn't Mean You can't Be Joyful

Rigoberta (92 Nobel Peace Prize Winner) had her father burnt alive, mother raped, tortured before death, brother murdered, lost youngest son, had seen thousands oppressed, tortured and murdered. She is wise, kind and joyful. She is friendly to everyone and treats everyone with

kindness. Gives people huge smile and warm hugs. She is bursting with joy. She holds a large amount of pain, but with courage, equanimity, kindness, compassion and joy. She says that she could achieve it only through deep spiritual practice.

Joy and pain can coexist. Depending on which one is strong, the other can be displaced. Rigoberta demonstrated that joy can become a skilful container of pain, limiting its damage and allowing the healing process to work. It is like a cast around a body part with fracture.

Willingness to Experience Emotional Pain

Emotional pain has two components: the feelings experienced in the body and the thoughts that spark and then fuel the continuation of those feelings. We experience emotion in the body, so we must work with them in the body. Difficult emotions always involve following unpleasant sensations in the body: face tenses up, urge to shed tears, extremely unpleasant feeling in the chest and stomach, pounding heart, body tenses, sickness in stomach, uncomfortable constriction in chest. We must be willing to experience all these.

There are four steps to working with painful emotions in the body.

The first is to clearly perceive that these emotions are just unpleasant sensations in the body. The sensation leads to perception which leads to aversion, which in turn leads to suffering. This is the most important insight. Therefore, to reduce suffering, we must attack aversion. By reducing aversion, we reduce suffering, although, sensation and perception of emotional pain may remain. The third step is apply the first antidote to aversion: loving kindness. By seeing painful emotion as bodily sensation and then applying loving kindness both to the emotion and the self, one begins to soothe the pain.

If it is too hard to bring up loving kindness toward yourself or your situation, try doing it for somebody for whom it is easy to have unconditional love. This feeling alone goes some way in reducing pain.

The fourth and final step is to apply equanimity. Just watching the sensations in the body, every now and then, I remind myself, they are simply sensations in my body-these emotions are not me. In addition, these thoughts that come with the sensations are simply thoughts-these thoughts are not me. The mind is like sky, and thoughts are like clouds. I allow the body feeling and thoughts to stay as long as they want, cause as much pain as they want. I watch them with equanimity. This is called "sitting in fire."

Jonathan Berent's (Google Director) wife had to undergo 3 separate surgeries, requiring a couple of months care. He says, "When I let my mind identify with emotions of stress, frustration, fear, I was not present for my wife. However, when I simply witnessed as clouds in the sky of mind, I found deeper reality behind them. When I let go of my fear, my thoughts of "God, why all this? Why all at once?" I found I could love my wife with a level of depth and empathy she had not experienced before. After all the surgery and recovery, wife recently said, "I think this year of marriage has been the best." Holy shit. And I hundred percent agree with her.

Step 3: The Cognitive Step

This step involves rethinking the situation that brought the emotional pain. It is about taking a skilful perspective, seeing the big picture without our objectivity being clouded by afflictive emotions. It very often involves reframing or reinterpreting the meaning of the situation with objectivity and compassion. This step is often necessary because with the previous two steps, the underlying, unresolved issues may strike back again.

Cognitive reappraisal is often required because our perception of reality is often seriously flawed. First, the information we have is incomplete. What is even worse is that we often fill in the missing information through imagination. Our brain can't differentiate between imagination and facts. Even worse, our brains have a strong negative bias. If we have 75 good things, and two bad things, we will remember the two bad ones.

One major consequence of our seriously flawed perception is that it creates a lot of unnecessary suffering. It does it in three ways. First, it damages relationships. We often judge others by jumping to conclusions about their intentions based on effects of their actions on us, which often are more negative than their actual intentions. For example, our feelings are hurt and we assume that the person meant to hurt our feelings. That hurts our feelings even more, and we form very bad opinion of other person.

Second, the way we judge ourselves tends to be far more negative than facts justify. Some people are convinced that when they are doing something important, they will mess it up. When our friends challenge us to show data to prove it, we have no answer.

Third, our seriously flawed perception of reality leads us to be far less happy than our life circumstances justify because we tend to downplay the positives and overplay the negatives in our lives.

We need to cognitively reappraise situation in following six ways.

- 1. With kindness and compassion to others. If your emotional pain is caused by actions of another person, reminding yourself that this person is like me in three ways: she is human, just like me; she wants to be happy, just like me; she wants to be free from suffering, just like me. Keep that in mind and give her the benefit of doubt.**
- 2. With kindness and compassion for yourself. See yourself in the eyes of your caring best friend. She will tell you, you are not as bad as you think, and objectively, she is likely to be more accurate than you. Keep that in mind and give ourselves the benefit of doubt.**
- 3. By not believing everything that you think. Brain doesn't distinguish between imagination and fact. Keep this in mind, and be always willing to be wrong.**
- 4. By seeing long term and the big picture. In the long term, every mistake is an opportunity for learning and growth. It is also good to be aware that someday we will die- it puts things in proper perspective.**
- 5. By seeing everything for the miracle that it is. "The real miracle is not walking on water or air, but walk on earth.**
- 6. With joy and humour.**

Failure Is Not an Option, It Comes Preinstalled

The three step formula may not always work because your practice is not good enough to handle the magnitude of suffering you face. There is always a delay between developing awareness of affliction and developing ability to resolve it. The following parable illustrates the process.

Day 1: I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in a sidewalk. I do not see the hole. I walk right in.

Day 2: I walk down the same street. I see the hole in the sidewalk. I walk right in.

Day 3: I walk down the same street. I see the hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

First day was an accident. The hardest day is day 2. You are knowing the hole, but could not prevent walking into it. But it is a prerequisite for day 3. When you clearly see how you fail, then only you can improve.

Analogy of juggling balls: At every step of your growth, expect failure. Lots of failure. When you are learning to juggle 3 balls, you expect to drop lots of balls all the time until you learn to keep them in air. Then you want to juggle 4 balls. Again, you drop lots of balls before you learn this as well.

When you are growing, it often feels like you are failing all the time, but if you look at the journey, you will see the progress. Failure is an integral part of the growth process. Do not just see failure-also see the growth. When you do, you will experience the joy of growing.

The Art of Suffering Is Love

Thich Nhat Hanh's method of suffering skilfully involves following 3 steps.

1. Don't think, just feel. As much as possible, just feel the present moment sensations in the body. "Come home to yourself, come home to the present moment."
2. Cradle with tenderness. Cradle the self in pain, like a mother cradles her crying baby. The mother doesn't know why the baby is crying, but she cradles the baby anyway, and by just doing that, the baby feels better.
3. Cultivate compassion from this suffering. Compassion arises from understanding suffering. Suffering is like mud, compassion is like lotus, and you need mud to grow the lotus. With compassion, suffering weakens, and sometimes, fades away.

One word Love summarizes all three steps. Love yourself enough to allow yourself the space to suffer, without shame or judgment. As long as we possess human body and live human life, there will be pain. Love yourself enough to allow space and time to heal. Love yourself enough to cradle yourself in pain, tenderly with kindness. And love all sentient beings enough to want to cultivate compassion.

CHAPTER 7 : The Great Mind Is Better Than Sex- An Exploration Beyond worldly Pleasures

Meditation offers far more than just stress relief, mental concentration, or creativity and world success.

Joy Is Not the Only Path to meditation. You have to use one that suits you.

At some stage in meditation, we have to abandon effort. To acquire wisdom is very hard, but to abandon it is even harder. Effort is a gross mental activity which hinders meditation.

Buddha told : There are four kinds of teachings. Truthful and useful. Untruthful but useful. Truthful but not useful. Untruthful and not useful. Obviously, only the 1st one is important.

My thoughts are not me- they are merely thoughts, my emotions are not me-they are merely emotions.

Maturity in meditation leads to equanimity in the face of pain, especially mental and emotional pain. One can then remain calm, even, and free in the face of worldly conditions: gain and loss, honour or dishonour, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

A large percentage of our suffering comes from the sense of I, myself, and mine, all of which originate from the sense of a solid, substantial self, so once the sense of self is realized to be a process that is completely mind generated, then a lot of suffering goes away or is greatly reduced.

“How dare they treat me like this? Who do they take me for? Why I am not lovable? Identity is entirely mind made.

In daily life, in normal setting where nobody is shouting at you or treating you badly, you can feel loving kindness toward 95-100 % of every human being you see. Even in a difficult situation, when someone is hurting you badly, you can see this person with some kindness and compassion. You can see his suffering resulting in such a behaviour. Hence, some meaningfully large % of time, you are able to use loving kindness and compassion to resolve difficult situations. However, it does not guarantee 100 % success. It just increases the probability of successful resolution.

Strive Hard to Let Go

Meditation is entirely about letting go. When I let go of dependence on sensory pleasure, I experienced the joy of ease. When I let go of some meaningful amount of anger and resentment, I experienced joy of goodwill. When I let go of my compulsion to feel the unpleasant feeling related to my failure, I experienced the joy of confidence. This is joy of freedom- from want, anxiety, ego, resentment. Clinging and aversion which enslave us go away.

Letting go is not easy because of the perquisite abilities required for the same. In case of a person holding a burning coal in his hand, she needs the ability to open her hand. If it is paralysed by some disorder, she won't be able to let go despite the extreme pain.

Practice a principle that applies to the whole life: Don't stop and don't strain.