



February, 2006

EVERYDAY JOY? WHAT A RADICAL IDEA!

Signe Nestingen, PsyD, LP

What a wonderful time of year to explore joy, to reclaim happiness. The winter season challenges us to dig deeply into our inner reserves. Taking advantage of the quiet and the cold, reaching and opening to the joy available in us all.

*This edition of **East West Connections** explores just that. Susan Bourgerie does this in our feature article on Naikan, a practice of self reflection rooted in Shin Buddhism. Cheri Desmond May and Sandra Kosse interview Henry Emmons, MD about his recently published book, **The Chemistry of Joy**. And finally, Jil Leverone reviews two recent publications on happiness, **Authentic Happiness** and **The Positive Psychology of Buddhism and Yoga**.*

What do joy and happiness look like in your everyday life? And what would it take for that joy and happiness to be present? Each writer offers thoughts on living a joy filled life - one that embraces happiness each day.

What if we were activists for joy? To be an activist for joy means to live with great vulnerability – to live with compassion and fearlessness at the same time. This is both a simple idea and radical action. This means holding ourselves and others with deep compassion while at the same time recognizing fear as our companion, even when grabbed around the neck by fear and thrown to the ground until the count of ten.

Responding with compassion to our own and others' difficulties takes practice. We learn to weave the voice of compassion into our internal dialogues, patiently and persistently offering another, non-

critical voice. Even when pain, suffering, or fear is present, compassion speaks to us with an abiding love, kindness, and thoughtfulness. To live joyfully does not mean that experiences of pain and suffering disappear – it simply means we experience suffering at the same time as we hold joy.

Living fearlessly is as radical an idea as living consistently with compassion. Living fearlessly means taking the time to truthfully and thoughtfully reflect. *How do I feel? What do I think? How will others be affected by my actions?*

Living compassionately is to live with kindness and generosity in spite of imperfections. Living fearlessly simply means acting (taking risks, stepping out) at the same time we are feeling vulnerable.

Are these ideas recipes for instant joy or ready made happiness? No.

Everyday joy grows over time, as we cultivate compassion. Everyday joy flourishes in a culture of fearless living – fearlessly examining our thoughts, feelings, actions, and lives while actively embracing it all.

To be awake is to live joy, fully, everyday. We are awake to the joy and suffering we experience, the suffering and joy of others, and we are awake to the marvelous interconnectedness of all beings.

*Enjoy this issue of **East West Connections**. ☺*

As an activist for joy Signe compassionately lives as fearlessly as she can.

book

review

Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment. Martin Seligman, Free Press, 2002.

The Positive Psychology of Buddhism and Yoga: Paths to Mature Happiness. Marvin Levine, Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 2000.

Jil Leverone, PhD, LP

Two outstanding books. Both about joy. Both about transforming your life into authentic (Seligman) and mature (Levine) happiness. Both about positive psychology. With these thematic similarities, the two authors pursue very different, and yet complementary, paths. Seligman organizes Positive Psychology into researchable questions, references relevant Western empirical research, and provides a multitude of ideas about authentic happiness all within a Western framework. Since he approaches the study of happiness in human behavior from a Western scientific framework, he is able to bridge the chasm between the Western medical model and this 21st century positive psychology model. His work opens the door for many readers into what may seem like a foreign language – talk of a “meaningful life” and “signature strengths”.

Levine takes the reader one step further. He provides a thoughtful analysis of two spiritual worlds, Buddhism and Yoga, and the ways in which these worlds lay the foundation for much of what Seligman is describing in his positive psychology. Levine spends his time in *The Positive Psychology of Buddhism* referencing Buddhist stories, laying out the basic foundations of Buddhist and Yogic thought, and demonstrating how aspects of Western psychology (in the form of Positive Psychology) complement Eastern thought.

Seligman begins his exploration into happiness with a personal story that captures that moment when he knew his ideas needed to change.

Father is focused on his task of weeding. Daughter is dancing as she tosses weeds in the air. Father yells. Daughter says, “Daddy, I want to talk to you. Do you remember before my fifth birthday? From when I was three until when I was five, I was a whiner. I whined every day. On my fifth birthday, I decided I wasn’t going to whine anymore. That was

the hardest thing I’ve ever done. And if I can stop whining, you can stop being such a grouch.”

“This was an epiphany for me,” Seligman adds. In addition to resolving to change his outlook on life, Seligman maintains that “Nicki found me my mission.” Now he is asking questions about positive emotions, virtues and strengths, and living a life that is “larger than yourself”.

Seligman defines the premise of Positive Psychology as a cognitive behavioral one, which states that thoughts (positive and negative) can change the way you feel and act. Seligman reviewed previous and current research as it relates to the questions of positive emotion and behavior change. He surveyed universal traits of happiness and goodness throughout the history of the world. From this study, Seligman identified 24 signature strengths which can be grouped into six clusters: courage, wisdom and knowledge, justice, temperance, humanity and love, and transcendence. Using the Signature Strength Survey to identify an individual’s most used strengths, Seligman suggests that it is by living to manifest these traits that you increase your experience of happiness.

What is noticeably absent from Seligman’s work, though, is a thoughtful description of the role that Eastern thought and practice has had on the development of Positive Psychology. This is where Levine comes in. He begins his work by asking “*What is maturity? What is happiness? What is serenity?*” He uses two stories about the Dalai Lama and his experience of the Chinese takeover of his country to illuminate the Eastern approach to these age-old questions.

In a television interview, a reporter asked the Dalai Lama; “Aren’t you ever angry at the Chinese?” The Dalai Lama replied, “They stole my country. Why

should I let them steal my mind?" During another interview about Tibet the Dalai Lama said, "The enemy can be very important. The enemy teaches you patience."

Levine suggests that these stories highlight the essential questions of Eastern thought and practices for attaining "this maturity, this in-the-world serenity". Levine suggests that the practice of Buddhism and Yoga is essentially spiritual practice, which uses the method of meditation as its primary tool to elicit psychological change.

Levine provides both the initiate and the experienced practitioner of Buddhism and Yoga with a thoughtful and clear description of Eastern practices. In addition, Levine insightfully compares and contrasts western psychotherapeutic practices with Eastern meditative practices. His analysis reflects the bridge between the two worlds as he states, "Within Western psychology a movement has appeared recently by the name positive psychology. It focuses on transforming ordinary living into a richer, more enhanced, more mature happiness. Buddhism and yoga are the quintessential positive psychologies. Indeed, they provide the intellectual framework for such a psychology."

Levine allocates the final third of his book to specific topics, such as mindfulness, compassionate action, empathic assertion, and the nature and expression of anger. In all of these, Levine shows the "congeniality" of Eastern and Western thought in informing a "right path of action".

Both Seligman's and Levine's works advocate techniques that will alleviate suffering and produce happiness. Seligman's focus on the western field itself proves to be unsatisfying, though, for those readers who desire a more in-depth, contextual analysis of the two. Levine provides that analysis with clarity and depth, contributing much to an increased awareness of the contributions that both the East and West make to the psychological and spiritual world of happiness. ☺

Jil is happy to know that the East and West are finally listening to each other.

AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS WEBSITE

Seligman's website (www.authentic happiness.org) displays relevant research, links, and scales for the reader's interest, study, and participation, including the VIA (Values In Action) Signature Strengths Survey.

SO MUCH HAPPINESS

**It is difficult to know what to do with so much happiness.
With sadness there is something to rub against,
a wound to tend with lotion and cloth.
When the world falls in around you, you have pieces to pick up,
something to hold in your hands, like ticket stubs or change.**

**But happiness floats.
It doesn't need you to hold it down.
Happiness lands on the roof of the next house, singing,
and disappears when it wants to.
You are happy either way.
Even the fact that you once lived in a peaceful tree house
and now live over a quarry of dust and noise
cannot make you unhappy.
Everything has a life of its own,
it too could wake up filled with responsibilities
of coffee cake and ripe peaches,
and love even the floor which needs to be swept,
the soiled linens and scratched records.**

**Since there is no place large enough
to contain so much happiness,
you shrug, you raise your hands, and it flows out of you
into everything you touch. You are not responsible.
You take no credit, as the night sky takes no credit
for the moon, but continues to hold it, and share it,
and in that way, be known.**

- Naomi Shihab Nye

Opening to Happiness

Susan Bourgerie, MA, LP

There's a burgeoning "happiness industry" in the American marketplace. Hundreds of self-help books and no less than 1,630 items for sale on eBay appear if you search the web for "happiness". And the field of psychology has entered into the quest. There's now a "World Database of Happiness" in which scientific research on the topic is stockpiled, and the "Journal of Happiness Studies", a social psychology journal filled with studies of the phenomenon. It seems to be the American Way to define, quantify, produce, and market even something as intangible and fleeting as happiness.

"Happiness is a unicorn," said Zen teacher John Tarrant in the January 2004 issue of *Shambala Sun*. "Everyone wants to find it, yet just when you are hoping for its company, it has a way of disappearing into the leafy shade of its forest."

Isn't that just the way it is? The direct, acquisitive approach to happiness seems doomed to fail. The new car gets its first ding, the gourmet meal is over all too soon, the romance of the new relationship gives way to predictable conflict and challenge. We can learn to savor these pleasures, to experience them fully, and they do bring moments of great joy. But, as our experience tells us, they fail to satisfy our seemingly insatiable desire for more. Even happiness found through our gratifying efforts to make the world a better place or develop intimate connections with friends and family is vulnerable to the inevitable life process of change and loss. Unless we wake up to the fact that seeking happiness through possessions or experiences is inherently unsatisfying we're caught in a cycle of endlessly seeking what eludes us. Perhaps happiness, like the unicorn, isn't found in direct pursuit.

The ancient wisdom of Buddhist teachings is the antithesis of looking outside of ourselves for some kind of lasting happiness. The Buddha taught that the essence of human existence is "dukkha", best translated as "unsatisfactoriness". He realized the tendency of our human minds avoid feeling this

by grasping for what pleases and avoiding what displeases, seeing ourselves alone in this search. He advocated seeing reality as it is – an Indra's net of interconnection, but characterized by impermanence and general dissatisfaction.

Such an understanding of human life is not a fatalistic, grim resignation, or a suggestion that life holds no joy. On the contrary, acknowledging and accepting the truth of impermanence and the inevitable unsatisfactoriness of life can be the beginning of opening to joy. It's all a matter of attention. When we stop focusing attention on the futile effort to change the way things are and turn our attention to the full range of our experience, the field of perception opens wider, and the unicorn just might pass into view!

Can we somehow increase the likelihood that the unicorn will appear? We can. We can examine and dismantle the self-protective tendencies and habitual patterns of our own minds, and open our eyes to a the bigger picture. The practice of Naikan reflection, which is rooted in the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist meditation practice of *mishirabe*, is one such way to expand the view, to move beyond the "I, me, mine" of self-centered seeking .

Naikan is a deceptively simple sounding practice. Developed by Yoshimoto Ishin, a devout Jodo Shinshu Buddhist practitioner in the early decades of the 20th century in Japan, it is now used in mental health counseling, addiction treatment, rehabilitation of prisoners, schools, and business in Japan, Europe, and the United States. Naikan means "inward looking", or "looking with the mind's eye". The practice of Naikan requires fearless honesty and the willingness to look deeply at our experience and our actions. The practice consists of answering three penetrating questions in specific detail.

"What have I received?"

"What have I given?"

"What troubles have I caused?"



The practice of Naikan takes multiple forms, including a thorough Life Review, in which one spends a week or more in intensive retreat reviewing all key life relationships in depth. The practice of Daily Naikan, in which we reflect on these three questions at the end of each day, is more common and simpler to begin with. Instructions are to answer each of the three questions with as much specific detail as possible, including people known and unknown, objects, and the natural world.

What have I received? In today's Naikan review I'll be noting that I brewed a pot of rich Brazilian coffee thanks to a generous traveler who brought it back from her latest trip to Brazil, her homeland. On reflecting, I realize this coffee is also brought to me by those who planted, tended, harvested, ground and packaged the beans, and by the the soil, the sun, the rain, the plane that flew the traveler home from Brazil. An infinite web of connections comes into view as reflect more deeply on the experience of my day. Multiply this small example exponentially in the course of examining a lifetime of experience and imagine the numbers of gifts and givers!

What have I given? Today I happily shared the gift of coffee with my friend Sandy, and with Rick, who was tending to my computer back up system - a simple act compared with all those that brought the coffee to me. The list of what I have given is always and inevitably shorter than the list of what I have received. Shifting attention from what I want to what I have given is radical. The endless quest for satisfying my desires fades from view; the joy of giving takes its place.

What troubles have I caused? This is the most difficult, and possibly most important, question in the Naikan review. The troubles I caused today were small ones, including spilling coffee grounds on the carpet, creating extra work for Juan, who cleans our building. However, on other days, and definitely in reviewing a lifetime of relationships, my picture of myself has to shift to include the many ways in which I have harmed others, intentionally or not. Noting the troubles I've caused for others in the context of this web of giving and receiving helps balance the view so that I can allow myself to open non-defensively, to notice and accept these harmful

actions from a place of no shame, only healthy accountability. In doing this I may see ways to make amends or change my behaviors.

Although this kind of an exercise may seem to be an unlikely path to happiness, my own experience and that of many others attests to the profound sense of joy and gratitude that is an unexpected outcome of doing this work. Naikan practice is a radical sifting of attention. It's an example of *indirect pursuit* of the unicorn, of looking away from the bright, shiny objects we think will make us happy and opening our eyes to the incredibly complex web of gifts and support we receive daily, whether we deserve it or not. Training our attention in this way, over a prolonged period of time, will reorient us. Looking inward with "Naikan eyes" will actually result in more and more awareness of what's going on outside our private world of getting and spending. We have to forget our personal projects for acquiring, forget what we think will bring us happiness, and open to fresh possibilities. And the unicorn lives in that larger world of possibilities.

John Tarrant says it this way in his most recent book, *Bring Me the Rhinoceros*. "You have to give up your idea of happiness in order to discover what happiness is. Another way to say this is that happiness might be right under your nose at this minute... You have to forget who you are in order to be happy, or to do anything wholeheartedly... When you are not afraid to forget who you are, life in the kitchen, or life in the office, might contain huge and overwhelming happiness. Other people might not be who you thought they were... And you, whom you have only apparently known all your life, might be fresh and surprising to yourself too." 🐾

Susan trained in Naikan at the ToDo Institute in 2003, and will be returning in March for a week long Life Review Naikan Retreat as part of her certification in Japanese Psychology.

RESOURCES

Naikan: Gratitude, Grace, and the Japanese Art of Self Reflection, by Gregg Krech

ToDo Institute website at www.todoinstitute.org



East West Connections is a collaborative effort to publish information of interest to our colleagues, clients, and others on the integration of Eastern wisdom and practices, and Western approaches to psychotherapy. Please contact any one of us if you have comments, questions, or wish to have your name added to or removed from this list.

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ANNOUNCING . . .

Cheri Desmond May will be speaking on "Mindfulness in Intimate Relationships" at the May 4, 2006 meeting of the East-West Mental Health Professionals Network. The meeting is 6:30-8:30 pm at the Minneapolis Shambhala Center, 2931 Grand Street NE, Minneapolis. All mental health professionals welcome.

Susan Bourgerie will be offering an 8 session class "Settling the Mind" beginning April 4. This class combines mindfulness and meditation practice with the Japanese approaches of Morita Therapy and Naikan. For more information, brochures, or registration, contact Susan at 612.874.8608 or sbourgerie@qwest.net.