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Contents

Introduction	1
Happiness is an inner light with no 'off' switch	2
You are what you seek!	6
There is nothing wrong with you	10
That which suffers is not you	14
You can have whatever you want	20
There is no separation	24
Detox your ego	28
Beware of 'I' strain	32
God does not believe in atheists!	36
Your world awaits you	40
The meaning of life is made, not found	44
What you believe will be how you live	49
There are no events, only perceptions	53
Choose the highest thought!	57
Keep smiling – unless you feel like crying	61
Be the goal!	65
Give up your fear of giving	69
There are no shortages, only a lack of willingness to receive	73
Stop improving your life – and start living!	77
Don't sweat it!	81
Struggle is a choice	85
Martyrdom always ends in tears	89
There are no problems, only opportunities	93
Fear is yesterday	97
The world has finished with your past... if you have	101
Heal it with your family	105
Your grievances hold you back	109

Forgiveness gives you wings	113
Commit to living ‘happily even after’	117
Shift happens – when you let go!	121
What you try to control, you can ruin	125
Trust can transform everything	129
Old defences block new success	133
When you take a step, a bridge appears	138
What are you waiting for?	142
There are no happy perfectionists!	146
Be unreasonable!	150
True assertiveness is a ‘Yes’	154
Commit to happiness NOW!	159
You are never stuck, just afraid	163
Think less, live more!	167
Worry blocks true creativity	171
Anger always hides a gift	175
Defences keep old wounds alive	180
Stress is an invitation to change something	184
Exhaustion means there is a better way	188
Illness is a call for love	192
If you are alive, you need help!	196
When you hide your spirituality, you lose yourself	200
Love is your true power	204
Laughter is a state of mind	208
Some of the best gifts come badly wrapped	212
Stay open all hours for miracles	216
Get off your ‘yeah, but’	221
Your happiness is a gift	225
Further information	230
<i>Shift Happens!</i> Library	231

Introduction

Two caterpillars were crawling along a tree branch one day when a butterfly flew overhead. One caterpillar said to the other, *'You will never get me up in one of those things.'*

Shift Happens! is about personal alchemy and inner transformation. *Some people 'go' through life; and other people 'grow' through life.* *Shift Happens!* celebrates your unlimited potential to grow, blossom and evolve – in spite of everything. It is a book of hope.

The term *personal alchemy* describes the ability to take a piece of dirt, roll it around a few times, and fashion it into a pearl. This is what an oyster does. Personal alchemy is what your grandmother called turning lemons into lemonade. It is what old wizards described as turning straw into gold.

Shift Happens! is about staying open all hours for miracles. Success, love and happiness are only ever one thought away at most. One new perception, one fresh thought, one act of surrender, one change of heart, one leap of faith, can change your life forever.

Happiness is an inner light with no ‘off’ switch

Dublin is a beautiful city. I am often invited to speak there. One year, I shared a platform with Dr Deepak Chopra, the renowned spiritual teacher and author. We had a thousand people packed into the hall that day. I began with a talk entitled *From Hell to Happiness: A One-way Ticket*. I think I was about twenty minutes into my talk when I first heard an odd gurgling sound. As I searched for where the sound was coming from, I noticed a young mother and her small baby sitting near the front. It was the baby who was gurgling, and quite musically too!

Now, I want you to know that I thought my talk was going quite well. I was espousing beautiful, sacred principles of truth that were undoubtedly insightful, enlightening, very wise and a joy to behold! However, it was soon clear to me that this little baby had an audience. The musical gurgling had grown louder and was now echoing all the way down the hall. I graciously gave way.

'Excuse me,' I said, addressing the young mother.
'How old is your child?'

'Ten weeks old,' she replied.

'Girl or boy?'

'Boy.'

He looked absolutely beautiful. Everyone was now straining their necks to take a look. 'Would you mind standing up so everyone can see your beautiful baby?' I asked. The young mother did so without hesitation. And one thousand people sang out 'Ahhh!' in perfect unison. We all melted. And then, guess what? One thousand people started clapping. And cheering!

When the ovation finally died down and the mother returned to her seat with her child, I was left to get on with my crummy old talk. A thought then occurred to me that I put to my audience. 'Do you realise,' I said, 'that if this young mother had held up a forty-year-old man or woman no one would have gone 'Ahhh!' and certainly no one would have clapped and cheered?' The laughter that followed made my point.

What exactly had this baby done to earn such a tumultuous ovation of love and positive regard? Surely it had to do with IQ, academic excellence, résumé, business acumen or financial status! He couldn't kick a football, he was no actor, and he was too young to have his own chat show. All he

did was sleep, gurgle, dribble and pass wind. Adults tend not to get ovations for that sort of stuff.

I believe this young baby reminded us of something about ourselves. He was a symbol for our Unconditioned Self. This Unconditioned Self is the real 'you'. It is the essential you that outlives the body. It is the 'real you' that promised to be the presence of love, the light of the world, and God's angel on earth.

Your Unconditioned Self is your original potential. It is the memory of God that you forget about as you grow up and *stuff happens*, i.e., bumps, bruises, school grades, puberty, heartbreaks, job interviews, rejections, parking tickets, the rat race, traffic, the mortgage, a pension, etc.

Since time began, the wise ones in every culture have carried a torch for the Unconditioned Self. This Self is like an inner light with no 'off' switch. You may lose sight of it, but it never goes out. Zen masters called this Unconditioned Self your *original face*; Taoists, the *uncarved block*; Christians, your *original innocence*; Hindus, *eternal bliss consciousness*; Alchemists, your *inner gold*; St Francis of Assisi, your *eternal loveliness*; Thomas Merton, your *secret beauty*. And so on.

It is your lack of faith in your Unconditioned Self, i.e., your inner light, that leads you into dark places and dark stories. Every time you betray your

original power and innocence you participate in illusions of separation, struggle, smallness, fear and unworthiness. Shift happens when you consciously reconnect to your wisdom and your light. This is what true healing is about.

Remember today that *happiness is not an it!* Happiness is not in things; it is in you. Happiness is your inner light that has no 'off' switch. Be still for a moment. Stop the world. Close your eyes. Sink into your heart. Let every in-breath be a symbol of your intention to connect unconditionally to love, life and joy. And let every out-breath be a symbol of your willingness to let go of separation and fear. Do this until you touch something infinite. Keep going until you make contact with your Unconditioned Self. Eventually you will discover the soul of who you really are. And all the angels will applaud. And guess what? They will cheer too!

You are what you seek!

I first met Susan in a mental health hospital in London. Susan was a lawyer, thirty-something, tall, with dark hair and olive skin, attractive, witty, intelligent, and very depressed. This was her fourth time as an inpatient. She was diagnosed with chronic resistant depression.

Susan was sitting in the patients' lounge. She was playing with a jigsaw puzzle. I said 'Hello' and asked her how she was getting on.

'Okay,' she said.

'It looks like you have nearly finished the puzzle,' I said.

'Yeah, but I probably won't get to finish it,' replied Susan.

'Why not?'

'Well, I suspect there may be a piece missing.'

I saw Susan again at the end of my visit. She was reading a magazine.

'Did you finish the puzzle?' I asked.

'Yeah,' she replied.

‘What about the missing piece?’ I asked.

‘Everything was here,’ she smiled.

‘Great!’

‘Yeah, I always think there must be a piece missing. It’s the story of my life,’ she said. We both smiled because we both knew what she was really talking about.

The fear that something is missing somewhere in you or in your life is the greatest illusion of all. It is a rogue thought that can wreak havoc with perception, creating much self-doubt, self-criticism and self-attack. It is a dastardly magician that conjures up mental tricks of lack, loss, isolation, neediness, dependency and much pain.

The fear that something is missing in you is what leads you to search *somewhere else* for happiness. You overlook what is already ‘here’ as you chase after ‘there’; you miss the ‘sacred now’ as you ponder your ‘next step’; you forget to be grateful for what ‘is’ as you prey after ‘more’. You search, struggle and strive, but you never arrive because you can’t get past the thought that something is missing.

Can you see that all your pain comes from the belief that your source of happiness is outside you? This single misperception – this little fear – is what feeds your mental junk, your learned unworthiness, and your ‘not good enough’ stuff. Notice how all

thoughts of fear and lack are reversed the moment you accept that every piece of universal joy rests already in your heart. Feel this, now.

Every culture has its sacred sites and holy meeting grounds. Thousands of people every day travel in pilgrimage to far off places like Lourdes, the Great Pyramids, Ayers Rock, the Grand Canyon, Mount Shasta, Stonehenge, Mount Athos, the Himalayas. These places hold sacred energy, they say. And yet, nowhere is more sacred than the human heart – home of your Unconditioned Self. *You are sacred ground.* Do you see this?

Your two physical eyes see bits of things. They see bits of the colour spectrum, bits of the landscape, bits of the ocean, bits of the sky. They see bits of you and bits of me. But they do not see the big picture. It is only when you look with the heart that you can begin to comprehend the possibility of true wholeness, true beauty and true oneness.

It is my experience that the most amazing people act as if everything is already here. Great artists tune in to something universal when they create. Great thinkers trust in a solution for every problem. Great leaders lend themselves to guidance and inspiration. Great healers see people's wholeness long before any cure arrives.

Imagine that! Imagine whatever you want is here right now. What do you want? Wisdom? It's

already here. Peace? It's already here. Inspiration? It's already here. It's all here, because you are. This is the big picture. This is what your Unconditioned Self sees.

You are what you seek. This means that whatever joy you hoped 'to get' after you found your true partner, got the dream job, bought the ideal home and earned the right money is *already in you!* When you search for love, joy, power, money, heaven and God, you are really searching for the experience of your Unconditioned Self that is unencumbered by fear, separation and lack.

You are not here to find happiness; you are here to extend it. You are inspiration-packed, wisdom-infused, made with love and blessed with joy. And so is everyone else. To be free all you have to do is make yourself wholly available to what is already inside you. Real healing is giving up your resistance to your Unconditioned Self.

Here is some *graffiti for the soul*. 'I am what I seek'. Write it up and stick it in your wallet. Truth is here, inspiration is here, love is here, peace is here, help is here, God is here, because you are here. Truth is a pathless land, and happiness is a *journey without distance*.

There is nothing wrong with you

The following story describes one of the most poignant and tender moments of my life.

I met Peter at a summer camp for The Royal National Institute for the Blind in Hampshire in England. Peter was in my class. I was teaching a day on self-esteem to fifty teenagers. They were like any large group of teenagers in school – creative, unruly, funny, boisterous, challenging and very energetic. They were normal... and blind.

Peter was one of the few quiet ones. He sat at the back of the class. He was half-Chinese, half-English, about fifteen years old, tall and slender. There were many jokes flying around, most of them at my expense. Peter laughed heartily but he never spoke. At the end of the class, he stayed behind. 'Mr Holden,' he said.

'Call me Robert,' I said.

'Can we talk?' he asked.

'Certainly,' I replied.

Peter looked troubled. He was pensive and pain-

fully shy. We talked smalltalk for a while as we lapped a large green sports field out behind the main college building. 'I feel I can trust you Robert, even though we have only just met,' he said.

'That's a real compliment,' I said.

'I need to ask you a question that I have been putting off my whole life,' Peter said.

I was in no way prepared for Peter's question when it finally came. 'I need to know,' he said, 'is there anything wrong with me?'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'I was born blind and I have never seen myself. I need to know from someone I trust if I am beautiful or not,' Peter said.

With all my heart, I told Peter that he was handsome, perfect and beautiful.

'You really mean it?' he asked.

'Yes – totally.'

Peter flung his arms around me.

'There's nothing wrong with me?'

'No!'

'Not even a little bit wrong?'

'Not one bit.'

'What about my breath – I had pizza for lunch,' he laughed.

'I love garlic,' I countered. We both laughed and cried. Rarely have I felt so moved. Peter's relief was a joy to watch.

For six years I trained in a profession that majors in finding things wrong with people. We take in 'ugly ducklings' and merrily pluck away for disorders, dysfunctions, neuroses, psychoses, syndromes and schemas. Psychology is obsessed with diagnosis. Every day we invent new labels, new diseases and new courses of treatment for the 'ugly ducklings'. We never see them as swans.

The fear that something is wrong with you is your greatest block to joy. In truth, there is no other block.

For as long as you judge there is something wrong, bad, lacking or not good enough about you, your life will reflect this belief. On the face of it, it will look as though others reject you, the world blocks you, fate is unkind, life is against you, and the heavens are punishing you. But in fact, it is you who are condemning yourself and sabotaging all that is good. Hence everything is a struggle, successes are hard-fought, happiness is short-lived, love always goes wrong, and there is no peace.

There is nothing wrong with you. Certainly, your perception can be sick. And your thinking can be off. And you can make poor choices. For instance, you can choose to see flaws in yourself that no one else sees. You can invent a story of how bad you are. You can try to convince the world how unlovable you are. Give these strange ideas all your power, if

you want, *but who you are* – your *Unconditioned Self* – remains whole, worthy and well.

True psychotherapy is a process of changing your mind about yourself. Shift happens whenever you practise *unconditional* self-acceptance. Shift happens whenever you give yourself a break. Shift happens whenever you choose kindness instead of judgement, forgiveness instead of self-attack, laughter instead of condemnation. Life always gets better when you treat yourself better.

Happiness is all about being willing to be innocent again. Remember that old bumper sticker, *God doesn't make junk!* It's true.

The final (and only) act of healing is to accept there is nothing wrong with you. Try this powerful exercise today. Make a point of looking for the good in everyone you meet. See the light in their eyes, their faces, their smile and their presence. Mentally bow to the light in everyone you meet today. Above all, teach no one that there is anything wrong with *who they are*. As you offer this light to others so will you strengthen it in yourself.