

Praise for *Happiness Now!*

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HAPPINESS
NOW!



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HAPPINESS NOW!

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TIMELESS WISDOM
FOR FEELING GOOD

FAST

ROBERT HOLDEN PhD



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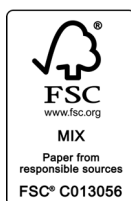
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*Dedicated to those
who dare to sprinkle kindness,
radiate love, and scatter joy.*

'No one who comes here but must still have hope, some lingering illusion, or some dream that there is something outside of himself that will bring happiness and peace to him. If everything is in him this cannot be so. And therefore by his coming, he denies the truth about himself, and seeks for something more than everything, as if a part of it were separated off and found where all the rest of it is not. This is the purpose he bestows upon the body; that it seek for what he lacks, and give him what would make himself complete. And thus he wanders aimlessly about, in search of something that he cannot find, believing that he is what he is not.'

– A Course in Miracles

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Author's Note:

Every case history in this book appears with the approval of the people involved. Names have been altered where requested.

Happy Already!

Picture the following scene:

I am at my friend Jane's house. It is mid-afternoon, and we are having tea. Jane and I are engaged in a deep and meaningful conversation when her two boys run into the room. They're young, full of energy, lively and noisy. Tom is four years old, and Ben is three. Ben follows Tom everywhere.

Jane and I continue to talk, but soon we can't hear each other speak because the boys are in a dispute.

'What's the problem?' Jane asks.

Tom throws Ben off him, takes a deep breath, and says, 'It's *my* turn to play on *my* bike, but Ben won't leave me alone, and he's already ridden *my* bike once today.' A few more things are said, but no agreement is reached.

'Go outside and sort this out. Robert and I are talking,' says Jane. The boys are dismissed.

Happiness NOW!

After only a minute or two, the boys run into the room again . . . with the bike! Before Jane can chastise the boys for bringing it into the house, Tom says, 'We've worked it all out.'

'Good,' we both say.

Tom continues, 'Today the bike belongs to me all day, and tomorrow the bike belongs to Ben all day.' Both boys nod their heads with great enthusiasm.

'Are you both agreed?' asks Jane, sounding quite surprised.

'Yes,' they both say.

'Good, now go along and play,' says Jane.

The boys turn around to leave, and just before they do so, Ben pipes up at the top of his voice, 'I know – let's pretend it's tomorrow!'

Tom and Ben's story illustrates perfectly how children use possibility thinking to enjoy happiness *now*! I believe that, contrary to popular opinion, a baby's favourite toy is not a thing, it's a moment – a moment called *now*. Children are born only with an awareness of *now* – past and future are meaningless at first. In the beginning, *now* is the whole world to children, their entire playground. This fascination and reverence for *now* is entirely natural; it is neither learned nor fabricated.

Kids like Tom and Ben are completely unimpressed by the idea of 'future happiness' – above all, they want happiness *now*! Those who are yet to be indoctrinated or conditioned fully by meaningless 'laws of time' don't know how to wait for happiness. Why wait for heaven when the possibility for heaven exists right here and now?

I believe that as a young child, you too were alive to the infinite possibilities of the present moment. Like other children, you were full of wonder, imagination, awe, and appreciation for the precious present. *You got so much from 'now' because you gave so much to 'now'* – and for the entire time you were engaged with the present, you were happy to leave the past and future exactly where they were. *Now* was your treasure island, and you believed

wholeheartedly that happiness was here and now, waiting to be seen. The more you believed this, the more you would look; and the more you looked, the more happiness you found. Here is an important key to happiness.

Milking the 'Sacred Now'

The world has changed greatly in recent times in an effort to accommodate our desire for happiness *now*. Everything has sped up. We live life fast – faster than ever. Fast technology, fast travel, fast careers, fast relationships, and fast results are all the rage in our 'I want it *now*' world. Indeed, the world is fast becoming a vast convenience store where you can get everything in an instant – instant coffee, microwave foods, minute-meals, half-hour film developing, 24-hour banking, drive-thru funerals, quickie divorces, television shopping, home delivery of everything and, of course, instant credit. We're sold on signs that read 'No queues', 'No need to wait', 'One stop', 'Open all hours', and 'Buy now – pay later'.¹

One way of looking at our 'I want it now' world is to see it as a highly egotistical and selfish pursuit of happiness that is fuelled by impatience, violence and greed, doomed from the very start to 'end in tears'. Indeed, many people are voicing their concerns at 'the way the world is going', believing that traditional values and morals are fast being corroded and obliterated by the chase for happiness now.

Another way of seeing our 'I want it now' world is that this clamour for happiness *now* reflects an instinctive wisdom and a great spiritual truth, which states that . . .

**everything – absolutely everything –
is available to you 'now'.**

There's a famous story from the Zen tradition that tells of an encounter between a young, eager student and a well-respected Zen master, noted especially for his perpetual grace and happiness:

Happiness NOW!

'Master, I dream of everlasting happiness. What is the highest wisdom you can teach me?' asked the student.

The master smiled. He took his brush and wrote, as if for the first time: 'Attention.'

'Wonderful,' said the student, 'and what comes next after attention?'

The master smiled. He took his brush and wrote, as if for the first time: 'Attention. Attention.'

'Yes,' nodded the student, utterly perplexed. 'Anything more?'

The master smiled. He took his brush and wrote, as if for the first time: 'Attention. Attention. Attention.'

'Okay, so what does "attention" mean?' asked the student, unable to see.

The master spoke: 'Attention means attention.'

'Is that all?' asked the student, obviously dispirited.

'Attention is all,' said the master. 'Without attention, happiness is nowhere; *with* attention, happiness is now here. Attention is freedom from all. Attention offers all.'

Every authentic school of wisdom and spirituality teaches you that *now* is the most abundant moment of your life. The bibles of the world, be it the Old Testament or the New, the Koran or the Bhagavad Gita, the Dhammapada or the Tao Te Ching – indeed, any true spiritual text – all agree that *now* is an eternal treasure chest dripping with beautiful, everlasting gifts of peace, happiness, love and joy freely available to all on a 24-hour 'Don't pay now – don't pay later' basis.²

Now is sacred! This is what the Zen master is trying to tell the eager young student in the story above. Indeed, talk to any spiritual teacher or guru worth their mantra, so to speak, and this person will tell you that *now* is always sacred. But why and how is *now* always sacred, you may ask? What if you've just been stood up on a date or you've just opened a bill or you've just chipped a tooth or your football team has lost again – how sacred is that?!

One approach to milking the *sacred now* is to place your attention on what is happening around you right at this minute and

aim to appreciate, respect, and value it as much as you believe possible. You can do this right now. Before you read on, look around you and appreciate fully for a moment what your senses pick up. When you do so, you'll experience first hand how pleasurable appreciation can be. Events sometimes seem to make this exercise hard, but willingness can overcome this.

In my workshops for The Happiness Project, I often show a slide that reads:

HAPPINESSISNOWHERE.

When I ask people to call out what they can see, I always get two distinct answers, one being *happiness is nowhere*, the other being *happiness is now here*. Often, then . . .

**the difference between 'happiness is nowhere'
and 'happiness is now here' has something to do
with the event, and everything to do with how
you see the event. Your perception is key.**

The real secret to milking the *sacred now is* to place your attention not out in the world about you, but within yourself – your inner, unconditioned *Self*. In truth, the *sacred now* is an inner potential. It is eternal and abundant; and its geography is spiritual, not physical. In other words, the *sacred now* represents a permanent potential within you to experience love, freedom and joy regardless of time, place, or circumstance.

The gift of happiness is wrapped in your heart, not the world. Thus, your happiness will never be posted to you! And it can never get lost in the mail! In truth, your happiness has already been delivered, sitting in your inner mailbox – your heart – waiting to be opened. This is what the *sacred now is* really all about. In essence, then, you *are the key to happiness*. More than what happens to you, it is your perceptions, your thoughts, your beliefs and your overall response that are essential; your *Self*, your original *Self*, is the real key.

Happiness NOW!

The real reason *now* is so naturally abundant is because when you allow yourself to be unrestrained by fear and uninhibited by worry, it is *you* who is so naturally, originally abundant. In truth, then . . .

*Now has enough wisdom to last you forever,
because within you, right now, there is all
the wisdom you listen for in others.*

*Now has enough love to last you a lifetime,
because within you, right now, there is the
love you continually cry out for.*

*Now has enough peace to last you an eternity,
because within you, right now, peace of mind
is one thought away at most.*

*And now has enough joy to outlast the world,
because within you, right now, the joy you
chase is not in things – it is in you.*

The problem with our 'I want it *now*' society isn't that we want happiness *now*, but that we've lost sight of how to experience it now. In particular, we say, 'I want it *now*', but we doubt and don't really believe that 'it is here *now*'. We've lost faith in *now* and have placed all of our faith in some imagined future. Similarly, we've lost faith in our *Self* and have placed all our attention on the world outside. Now it is the world, it seems, that must 'make us happy' – *and herein lies the source of all our misery.*

As long as you believe that it's the world that must make you happy, you leave yourself open to great disappointment and much sadness. Why? Because as long as you refuse to see your inner potential for happiness *now*, you will not see it in the world. *How can a mirror change the way you look?* Think about that, for the world is only a mirror. You will only see in the world what you're prepared to see in yourself – nothing more and nothing less.

Know, therefore, that the journey to true happiness and to happiness *now* is not a journey of physical distance or time; it is one of personal 'self-recovery', where we remember and reconnect consciously to an inner potential for joy – a paradise lost – waiting to be found. One moment we look within and we see *happiness nowhere*; the next moment we look within and this time we see *happiness now here*. This is a revelation. This is enlightenment. This is joy!

The faster we chase the world and the future, the quicker we appear to overlook the possibility that happiness is here already. Every morning as we wake up, the alarm clock sings '*now*', and from that moment on we do not give *now* another thought as we desperately chase our future. But are you so sure that happiness isn't already here with you *now*? Have you really looked? I mean, *really* looked?

Milking the *sacred now* is excavation work. It's about rediscovering an inner potential for original joy – a potential that already exists but has been buried beneath a pile of fears, doubts, guilt, conditioning and history. Think of this potential for original joy not as something to arrive at, but as something you bring with you wherever you go. Recultivating this potential is our task, and the task begins with the realisation that . . .

joy waits on welcome, not on time.³

Diving for Treasures of the Soul

Psychology school taught me a lot about our potential – in particular, our potential for unlimited amounts of misery, pain, weakness and despair! We studied every affliction, every neurosis, and every mental dis-ease available at the time. In a nutshell, my psychology training consisted of: *Year 1*, an introduction to basic suffering; *Year 2*, the study of advanced suffering; and *Year 3*, a qualification in inspired suffering.

The focus was entirely on our inner potential to mess life up. My curriculum was the A-Z of suffering, from anger to

Happiness NOW!

zoophilia – including stress, depression, anxiety, neurosis, psychosis, neurotic-psychosis and psychotic-neurosis, hysteria, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorders, phobias, inferiority complexes, kleptomania, suicide, insanity and delusion. At no time did we consider our potential for joy, love, or peace of mind. In effect, I was studying for a Ph.D. in misery!

Studying suffering full-time had a big impact on my way of thinking. I once read that history has no evidence that there ever lived a happy psychologist. I can see why now. After a while, I was able to work out just how low I was going to feel on any given day by looking at my lecture timetable. For instance, when we studied depression for a week, I remember that the entire class eventually felt totally depressed by the end. The same was true for any and all of the complexes, afflictions, disorders and fixations. Getting an unexpectedly low mark for my paranoia essay didn't help at all!

Do you remember when in nursery or primary school you were given a lecture on the importance of bodily hygiene and the dangers of head lice? And do you remember how, after 20 minutes of listening to this woman who showed you great big blown-up slides of head lice with six-inch teeth, you became absolutely convinced you had a nest of these things in your hair? Well, that's what it was like in my psychology lectures. Doctors-in-training will tell you that their experience was also the same.

I learned a very important lesson about perception and focus during those years, which is . . .

be careful what you look for because you *will* find it.

I immersed myself thoroughly in the study of misery. I received distinctions for the most part in every study I undertook. As I increased my focus, I soon realised that there was not *one* type of depression, but 100. Furthermore, there was not *one* sort of schizophrenia, but 30, 40, or more. Whatever you focus on, expands. Each day I hoped we might dive for pearls, but instead we merely collected crabs!

After a full six years of study, I still hadn't been given a single lecture on our potential for joy, peace, unity, wholeness and

success. Psychology, originally defined as *the study of the soul*, had been reduced to a study of illness and neurotic behaviour. Freud and Behaviourism, in particular, reduced human beings to no more than a pitiful bag of blood and bones housing a mind full of neurotic defences and endless psychotic potential for aggression and psychosexual hang-ups. Never was there any mention of the soul, of spirit, of divinity, of God, of love.

My training in psychology, with its almost exclusive focus on pain, is a very common story. It also reflects a tendency in our society to focus on negatives. Doctors, for instance, study illness, not health. Business leaders analyse failure, not success. Economists study cost, not value. Philosophers mostly debate original sin, not original blessing. Christians talk endlessly about crucifixion, not resurrection. Mental-health organisations publish books on ‘Understanding Depression’, ‘Understanding Stress’, and ‘Understanding Bereavement’, but not on ‘Understanding Joy’ and ‘Understanding Love’. The media is full of journalists suffering from an addictive, antisocial, obsessive-compulsive need to communicate and make up bad news. Literature and art is full of depressed poets and painters – can you name three joyful poets?

What you focus on most often becomes familiar, and what is familiar feels real to you. In our society, we focus on pain before joy, tears before laughter, and fear before love, so we gradually grow blind to our inner, ever-present potential for happiness. I remember well how my lecturers frowned on happiness. What they taught me essentially was: ‘If you find that you’re experiencing happiness – don’t worry – you’re just in denial and the pain will soon return!’

Happiness appeared to have no value, other than that it offered a temporary respite between periods of pain and trauma. It was defined simplistically as the absence of pain. Other messages I received included, ‘Happiness is superficial, pain is deep’, ‘Laughter is a common symptom of manic depression’, ‘Smiling a lot means you’re suppressing a hidden pain’, ‘Optimism is often unrealistic and delusional’, and ‘Talking to God is the first sign of a nervous breakdown’.

Happiness NOW!

Of greater concern to me, though, is the large body of thought within the psychology profession that suggests that happiness is in some way a dysfunctional behaviour in light of all the suffering in the world. The idea is: 'If you have normal blood pressure living in our troubled world, you're not taking it seriously enough.' There have been several recent studies that have tried to suggest that happiness is only an avoidance of real issues, a selfish coping strategy, or a superficial form of escape. This thinking doesn't take into account that your happiness is an inspiration, a gift to others and a way out of suffering.⁴

When I asked my lecturers why we didn't study happiness, they usually challenged me to look at my resistance to embracing my pain more fully! The most common explanation given, however, for why happiness, love, peace and God aren't studied by psychologists is that they cannot be measured as easily as fear and pain. In other words, they are inner potentials that don't show up on laboratory apparatus designed to measure externals.⁵

Just because psychologists choose not to focus on joy, however, doesn't mean to say that joy doesn't exist. We can refuse to look at the sun, for example, but that won't make it go away. One problem, though, with not focusing directly on happiness is that what has emerged in place of the truth is a myth of happiness where happiness has become *a potential time forgot*, clouded in misperception, superstition, doubt and cynicism.

The Oasis in the Desert

It was while studying communications that I met a man in my class who was to change my life forever. His name was Avanti Kumar. Avanti was an Asian gentleman, a mature student of about 24 years old, and the spitting image of the actor Danny DeVito – short build, stocky, no hair directly on top of his head but wild curly bushes of growth either side, big bronzed cheeks, a great smile, and a beautiful and radiant light in his eyes.

Avanti always sat at the back of the class, and in the early weeks he was always last in and first out. 'Who is he?' we all

wondered. All we knew about him was that he was quiet and that he was always smiling. In fact, he was never *not* smiling. It was as if he had a private joke running in his head all the time.

I was deeply intrigued by Avanti from the very first moment I laid eyes on him. It was as if I somehow knew him already. There was a familiarity I felt but couldn't explain. I remember wanting to talk to him but feeling, unusually for me, too nervous to approach.

I'll never forget our first conversation. I asked him why he'd chosen this course to study. His answer was, 'To meet you, of course.' His smile really was infectious.

After that, I made sure we drank coffee together most days. I asked questions, and he gave me cryptic clues. I remember asking him one day, 'What are you?'

'A yogi,' he replied.

'A what?' I asked.

'A student of yoga,' he said.

'Oh! You mean like Jane Fonda!' Fortunately, we enjoyed each other's humour. Soon, another student, Phil, joined our coffee sessions. We became inseparable. We were one.

It was as if Avanti were fresh out of some Himalayan cave or esoteric monastery, where, I imagined, he'd been sitting for centuries in blissful meditation. He was my first direct experience of someone consciously connected to, and aware of, the inner potential for joy – anywhere, anytime. Over the next few months, he carefully and lovingly reacquainted Phil and me with this inner awareness as we talked about yoga, metaphysics, spiritual wisdom, and the more enlightened schools of psychology.

'So far all you've learned about is a psychology of the ego, or lower self,' Avanti explained, 'which is immersed in separation, fear and suffering. If you'd like, I will teach you about another psychology, a psychology of wholeness and of the Higher Self, which teaches you how to allow your inner joy to shine on the world once more.'

It was with Avanti, then, that I first began to focus directly on happiness. It was Avanti who first taught me that happiness is not just the absence of pain, but that . . .

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**true happiness is an inner power –
natural, healing, abundant, and always available.**

Like all great teachers, Avanti loved to tell stories. One day he introduced me to the story of two birds, first written in an ancient Hindu text called the *Mundaya Upanishad*.⁶ It reads:

*Two birds
inseparable companions
perched on the same tree.*

*One eats fruit,
the other looks on.*

*The first bird is our individual self,
feeding on the pleasures and
pains of this world;*

*The other is the universal Self,
silently witnessing all.*

‘Think of the two birds as two thoughts flying about in the sky of your mind,’ said Avanti. ‘The first bird, *the individual self*, is your ego. It “desires” happiness, and it tells you that you must search the world to find it. The second bird, *the universal Self*, is your spirit. It “knows” happiness, and it tells you that you are happy already, that you were created happy, that all the happiness you have ever dreamed of rests in the centre of your real *Self* right now.

‘Like an oasis in the desert, the *universal Self* is wholly joyous, wholly abundant, and wholly peaceful,’ said Avanti. ‘It is home to the *sacred now*, your inner potential for immediate peace and joy anywhere, anytime.’

With Avanti’s guidance, I immersed myself in Eastern and Western literature in an effort to understand further the concept of the *individual self* and the *universal Self*. There are many names for these two selves, some of which I’ve listed in Table A.

conditioned self	Unconditioned Self
learned self	original Self
false self	real Self
fearful self	loving Self
critical self	creative Self
lower self	higher Self
dissociated self	unified Self
ego	holy spirit
split self	whole Self
body/mind	spirit/soul
persona	atman
flesh	christos
nothing	'I am'
sin	source
hell	heaven
fallen self	divine Self

Table A

Today, many years later, I now think of the universal Self as your unconditioned Self – the Self that exists behind the mask of your personal history, your conditioning, your learned limitations, the roles you play, your persona, your defences, your doubts and your fears. This unconditioned Self is the original you, untouched by the world, completely safe and whole. It is who you really are, and not who you have been taught you are by parents, teachers, friends, lovers, anybody else, and most of all, yourself.

Your unconditioned Self is the presence of peace. Three words, in particular, describe the unconditioned Self, and they are: (1) *wholeness*; (2) *love*; and (3) *joy*. The oriental mystics called the unconditioned Self the 'un-carved block'. Other names for it include the Zen term 'the original face', the Buddhist phrase 'the sacred happiness', the North American name 'free spirit', the Taoists' 'inner smile', and the Christian mystics' 'inner Eden'.

E.G.O. – Everything Good is Outside

The following story helps to describe the plight of the ego, or conditioned self:

Each morning at 4 A.M., Brother Daniel would be the first to rise in the monastery. He got up early by choice, and he was proud to do so. While his teacher and all of his brothers slept peacefully, Brother Daniel busily exerted great effort in his prayer, study, and meditation practices. Enlightenment was his goal.

Every day, Brother Daniel would pray longer and louder for enlightenment. He worked hard at improving his physical posture for meditation, and, above all, he would labour to memorise all of the ancient spiritual texts at the monastery. Rarely, if ever, did Brother Daniel rest, eat, or sleep, for he wanted to get to enlightenment and he wanted to get there fast. Brother Daniel liked to meditate and pray, but most of all, he immersed himself in scriptures. He liked to be quiet and still, but he rarely had time, for he found that there was always so much to do. He liked the silence, but he would rather hear his teacher talk of the silence.

Brother Daniel's teacher, a gentle, peaceful man who was always smiling, would encourage Brother Daniel to slow down, enjoy the sun and watch the grass grow. But he was too keen and in too much of a hurry to heed the advice.

'Why do you rush, speed, and hurry so?' his teacher asked.

'I am after enlightenment,' said Brother Daniel.

His teacher smiled. 'When will you get there?'

'Oh, one more prayer perhaps, my next meditation hopefully, or an act of service maybe,' replied Brother Daniel.

'Why are you so sure enlightenment is running on ahead of you?' asked his teacher. 'Perhaps if you stood still

awhile, you would find that enlightenment is here right now – but you are too busy running away from it!’

In this story, the monastery is a symbol for your mind; the teacher is a symbol for your unconditioned Self, or spirit, which is always smiling; and Brother Daniel is a symbol of your conditioned self, or ego. The unconditioned Self experiences wholeness, while the conditioned self searches for wholeness.

Much has been written about the ego, or conditioned self. The term *the ego* can be misleading, for when we say it, it sounds as if we’re talking about a person, a child, or something real. Essentially put, the ego is a ‘small idea’ about your individual self. And the idea *is*: Everything Good is Outside. So conditioned and convinced are we by this frightening thought that we chase the world, just like Brother Daniel, searching for success, happiness, love and peace of mind. And we dare not look within ourselves, for what if all we find is nothing, or, worse still, something rotten?

I remember once reading, although I’m not sure where now, that the word *ego* also stands for Edging God Out. This is a similar idea to Everything Good is Outside. Your conditioned self is acting on information that something is missing inside you, and that you have to search outside of yourself to find it. This thought of lack, of *not being enough*, is very frightening; and it leaves us needy, disoriented, and chasing shadows.

The ego is fear. It is also the denial of inner happiness. The ego’s prayer, therefore, is always *Look out!*

‘Look out, look out!’ cries the ego, but the ego is blind because it doesn’t believe. It looks but never finds; it asks but doesn’t receive. In effect . . .

the ego is like a thirsty fish – it is confused!

Imagine a thirsty fish – a fish dying of thirst that is born in water, made of water, and surrounded by water! Just because the fish refuses to drink doesn’t mean there *isn’t* any water. Another analogy is to think of the ego as a bird flying high, trying to reach the sky, while all the time being *in* the sky. And a final analogy

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would be to think of the ego as a sparkle in a diamond while insisting there *is* no diamond.

The ego is a doubt that you are whole – that is, your conditioned self doubts that there even *is* an unconditioned Self. The unconditioned Self declares: ‘I am whole’, but the conditioned self asks, ‘Am I whole?’ as I’ve shown in Figure 1. This doubt in your essential goodness, your essential beauty, and essential wholeness is where all your pain and suffering stems from.

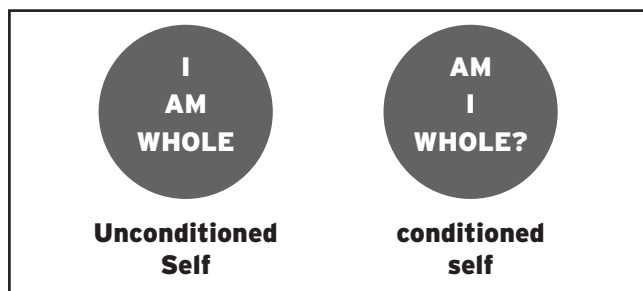


Figure 1

Our unconditioned Self is forgotten but not entirely lost as we roam the world. Every now and then we catch its fragrance, its melody, its taste. In childhood we’re told stories, the significance of which hits us much later on.⁷ For instance, Hans Christian Andersen’s tale of ‘The Ugly Duckling’ is a wonderful description of the ego (the duckling) and the spirit (the swan). What is the ego other than a mistaken identity?

**Just like the ugly duckling, we’re afraid we’re
not good enough, wrong, bad, and nothing; and
just like the ugly duckling, we’ll eventually
learn that this isn’t true.**

‘Sleeping Beauty’ is a tale that encourages us to wake up to our inner beauty – that is, our unconditioned Self. ‘Beauty and the Beast’ shows us how love (beauty) can help us transform our ego-thinking (beast). ‘Peter Pan’ beckons us to remember, to imagine, and to fly free again. Pick any children’s tale – ‘Aladdin’, ‘The Lion

King,' and 'Pinocchio', for instance; and we're told of a spiritual journey that moves from ego to Self, fear to love, pain to joy.

One final thought about our conditioning: *It's all made up!* It has been made up, and it isn't true. What you think about yourself and what other people have told you about you is just an opinion, not a fact. It is helpful, therefore, to remember that the ego is just a thought, a thought of limitation, *that is not true*. The final verdict of the ego is that it's a mistake. It offers a small, poor, dull, limited likeness – a bad snapshot that doesn't capture the real you. In other words, *the ego is not real*.

Michelangelo, God, and Miracles

When the renowned Italian artist Michelangelo was asked by a great admirer, 'How do you create your beautiful sculptures?' he gave a reply that became famous and is still told around the world to this day. He said, 'The beauty is already there, my friend. I do not create beauty; God creates beauty. I merely chip away the surrounding marble so as to reveal the beauty. The beauty is already within. It is already perfectly in place.'

The surrounding marble Michelangelo refers to is like our conditioning; and the beauty already within the marble is like our true, unconditioned Self.

My friend Avanti encouraged me to read poetry whenever I could, particularly the metaphysical poets such as William Wordsworth, William Blake, and Robert Browning; and also the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore and the Sufi bard Rumi, to name just a few.⁸ In one of Robert Browning's works, he refers to our 'imprisoned splendour' in much the same way that Michelangelo talks of the beauty already within the marble. He writes:

*Truth is within ourselves, it takes no rise
From outward things, whatever you may believe.
There is an inner centre in us all
Where truth abides in fullness; and around
Wall upon wall the gross flesh hems it in*

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*That perfect, clear perception which is Truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds all and makes all error, but to know
Rather consists in finding out a way
For the imprisoned splendour to escape
Than in achieving entry for a light
Supposed to be without.⁹*

Alongside Avanti's tutoring, I also began to investigate schools of psychology and psychotherapy that aren't so well covered in university syllabi. My research showed me that since the end of World War II, in particular, many new schools have emerged that go way beyond Freud and Behaviourism in their definition of what it means to be human. Freud, particularly, maintained that humans have two basic drives, *sex* and *aggression*, and that our goal in life is to be as sexy and as aggressive as politely possible. There was no higher Self, according to Freud.

The idea of a higher, spiritual, unconditioned Self is now re-emerging. More and more schools of psychology now see that healing is about outgrowing your limited self-concept of the ego to embrace your true Self, one that is not conditioned or altered in any way by the world (see Table B). The terminology varies from school to school, but the basic principles and understanding are very similar.

Psychologist	School	Ego	Spirit
Alfred Adler	Individual Psychology	Guiding Fiction	Creative Self
Carl Jung	Analytical Psychology	Persona	Self
Fritz Perls	Gestalt Therapy	Self-image	Self
Roberto Assagioli	Psychosynthesis	Sub-personalities	I
R. D. Laing	Primal Integration Therapy	False Self	Real Self
Arthur Janov	Primal Integration Therapy	Unreal Self	Real Self
Eric Berne	Transactional Analysis	Adapted Child	Free Child
Dr. J. L. Moreno	Psychodrama	Conserved Roles	Spontaneity

Table B

An increasing number of psychologists are changing their minds about the limited models and concepts that have so governed human understanding. It is of interest to note that even Sigmund Freud changed his mind about many of his ideas towards the end of his life. In one of my books, *Stress Busters*, I quote from Freud, who just before he died wrote: ‘In the final analysis, we must love in order not to fall ill.’¹⁰ Psychology is finding its soul once more. And now all that remains, it seems, is for us to change our minds about ourselves.

I also became absorbed in Eastern philosophy, with its rich, vibrant, and poetic vision. Although many of these authors describe the unconditioned Self using mystical images and deeply spiritual metaphors, they are at pains to point out that an experience of this whole Self is a natural, normal, commonplace, everyday possibility. The Buddhist term *satori*, for instance, refers to instant enlightenment, *available for all and to all*.

I found the works of Sri Ramakrishna, a 19th-century mystic, to be particularly fascinating. Every word seemed strangely familiar to me. He wrote extensively about the unconditioned Self, which he referred to as the Divine Self. In one passage, he explains:

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Know thyself, and thou shalt then know the non-self and the Lord of All. What is my ego? Is it my hand, or foot, or flesh, or blood, or muscle, or tendon? Ponder deep, and thou shalt know that there is no such thing as I. As by continually peeling off the skin of the onion, so by analysing the ego it will be found that there is not any real entity corresponding to the ego. The ultimate result of all such analysis is God. When egoism drops away, Divinity manifests Itself.¹¹

Over and over during my search for greater understanding, I felt I was being pulled along by a golden thread of teaching that made a connection between the unconditioned Self and God within: 'Search not in distant skies; in man's own heart God lies', said one Japanese text. In the Sikh bible, The Granth, it is written: 'God is in thy heart, yet thou searchest for him in the wilderness.' In the Psalms, it is written: 'You too are gods, sons of the most High, all of you.' Jesus tells us in the Bible: 'Ye are Gods.' Islam purports: 'Those who know themselves know their God.' And in Buddhism, it is written: 'Look within, you are the Buddha.'¹²

The god I first learned about as a child was like a huge inflated ego, living in the sky. He was very jealous, sported a long beard, was middle-aged, had an anger problem, and was very aloof. This god blessed bombs, fixed football games, found you parking spaces and helped you win the lottery. It was a special god that loved and hated some people more than others.

This ego-sized god apparently needs and enjoys sacrifices of live animals and young babies; and has a penchant for tobacco, drugs and beer. It is obviously a god of fear; and therefore, a god of punishment, attack, vengeance and judgment. Clearly . . .

**great unhappiness is caused by our
misperceptions of our Self and God.**

Slowly but surely, with the help of Avanti and many other teachers and mentors I met along my spiritual path, I began to heal my misperceptions of my Self and of God.¹³ Layer by layer I let go of my conditioning. It's enough to say here that I now relate

to God as pure, unconditional love; and that I now see no difference between unconditional love and the unconditioned Self.

It was approximately nine years after meeting Avanti that I sat down together with my first wife, Miranda, to read a book called *A Course in Miracles*, which changed my life forever. It is a remarkable work that offers spiritual psychology training as it transforms our fearful thoughts into loving thoughts, and in giving up our ego for our real unconditional Self.¹⁴

I didn't really appreciate this book at first. It was so big – bigger than *War and Peace* – more than 1,200 pages long, and full of religious metaphor. If truth be known, Miranda and I had both bought this book long before we met each other, and it had sat on both our shelves idle for five years! Every time I'd tried to read it, my eyes would glaze over and I'd soon be asleep, no matter what the time of day.

Other than being a great remedy for insomnia, I discovered that the *Course* had other uses, too. It made an excellent doorstop, for instance, a great paperweight, and, most important, it looked very impressive on the bookshelf. Finally, one day, Miranda and I returned to the *Course*, opened a page at random, and began to read.

The words we read were: 'The self you made [the ego] is not the Son of God [your unconditioned Self].' This message is repeated many, many times throughout the entire book. Later, there is a meditation that reads:

*My true Identity is so secure, so lofty, sinless, glorious
and great, wholly beneficent and free from guilt,
that Heaven looks to It to give it light. It lights
the world as well. It is the gift my Father gave to me;
the one as well I give the world. There is no gift
but This that can be either given or received. This
is reality, and only This. This is illusion's end. It is
the truth.*

*My Name, O Father, still is known to You. I have
forgotten it, and do not know where I am going, who
I am, or what it is I do. Remind me, Father, now,
for I am weary of the world I see. Reveal what You
would have me see instead.*

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A Course in Miracles is a constant affirmation that you are created by an unconditional thought of love that appears to have lost itself in a world of fear. Freedom, joy, and peace of mind are yours again when you remember and reconnect to your unconditioned Self. As the book says: 'Salvation requires the acceptance of but one thought; you are as God created you, not what you made of yourself.'

Choosing to Remember or to Forget

You are, in any given moment, either remembering or forgetting about your unconditioned Self, your true spiritual identity. Nothing else is really happening. When you remember that you're free, you feel happy, hopeful, trusting, generous, loving and, above all, safe. When you doubt, however, and you forget the truth about yourself, you become afraid, isolated, and desperate; you go it alone; you protect and defend; you strive and you attack.

Perhaps you know this famous passage by William Wordsworth:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest*

*and by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.¹⁵*

Unhappiness is a symptom of forgetfulness, as much as joy is a symptom of remembering. When we're unhappy, balance gives way, perspective collapses, faith falters, communication often breaks down, doubt doubles, panic ensues and a thousand different symptoms spill all around us. The disharmony we feel is ultimately a disharmony with our self. We've stepped out of our centre; and we 'lose heart', 'lose spirit', and lose our Self.

Healing is remembering. It is what author Marianne Williamson calls 'a return to love.'¹⁶ Much of my therapeutic work with clients is, therefore, about helping people to rediscover the *trailing clouds of glory* within. We talk, we meditate, we laugh, we cry, we pray, we sing, we dance . . . we do whatever is necessary to help us remember the truth and let go of the pain.

At my seminars hosted by The Happiness Project, I occasionally share a poem of mine that helps me remember what my own healing and my own work is all about. It reads:

*There once was a moment,
a mad, forgetful moment, that slipped
past eternity into time.
And in that moment, mad and
forgetful as it was, out of nowhere
an entire world, separate from God,
was dreamed up.
And although it was only a moment,
it felt like forever.
And although it was only a dream,
it felt so real.
In this mad, forgetful world, the
Ocean prayed to God,
'Give me water. I want water.'
The Sun, brilliant and bright, would*

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*pray, 'Dear God, fill me with light.'
And the mighty, powerful, roaming Wind
would plea, 'Set me free, set me free.'
One time, all of sudden, and I don't quite
know why, the Silence began to speak,
'God grant me peace, grant me peace.'
Then, Peace Itself, fell to its knees,
'Dear God, please, what can I do to be
more peaceful?'
Now, looking quite perplexed, prayed,
'Dear God, what next?'
Even Eternity began to pray,
'I want to last forever and ever and ever.'
Infinity felt small,
'Dear God, help me to grow.'
And Life itself, began to cry,
'I don't ever want to die!'
And You and I, who are the essence of Love,
we cried out for love,
'God please love me,' we prayed.
'God, fill me with love,' we prayed.
'God, grant me love.'
Mad and forgetful as it was, that moment
in time soon slipped, tripped, and fell
away back into eternity.
It's all over now, save the memory –
a mad, forgetful memory, it too ready
for eternity.*

In the Buddhist scripture, The Dhammapada, there is the famous 'Eight Fold Path', which refers to eight spiritual freedoms, one of which is *right remembrance*, or right mindfulness.¹⁷ Disciples of Buddhism are called upon to 'Arise! Watch. Remember and forget not.' In a similar way, Jesus asked us to 'watch and pray'.

To be happy, it's good to make a point of knowing what it is in your life that helps you remember truth. What is it that helps you to love, to be real, to be free? What is it that helps you wake

up from the slumber of your conditioning? As for myself, I love the sounds of laughter and friendship. I love to look at the stars, to walk in nature, to listen to the river's song, to smell the heavenly scent of stargazer lilies, to watch a roaring fire, to feel its warmth and see its light. I love to be still, to smile, to meditate and to pray. How about you?

It's important to remember what helps you to remember! For I guarantee that the next time you're ill or unhappy, you will move away from everything that supports you, strengthens you and inspires you. Indeed, you must have already moved away or you wouldn't be so unhappy. How curious it is that we abandon our greatest sources of strength when we're stressed or challenged in some way. We tell ourselves, 'First I must work my problems out', and only then will we ask for help.

Remembering to remember *now* is the key!

For four years I worked with the BBC as a counsellor and executive coach. There was a church opposite the main building that had a prominent sign outside that never changed in all the time I was there. The sign read: O GOD, SHOW ME WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME. This was, I imagine, a call to worship. It often struck me that this church needed a new marketing manager!

I was once introduced to a truly beautiful prayer, the exact opposite of this church sign, which I believe offers a perfect example of how to remember and reconnect to our true, unconditioned Self. It's a prayer by a woman named Macrina Wiederkehr, and it reads:

*'O God, help me to believe the truth about myself,
no matter how beautiful it is.
Amen.'*¹⁸

This is real prayer. Try it. Give yourself seven days. Say this prayer each day, first thing in the morning, and then sit and listen for guidance. This prayer offers a wonderful frame of mind for remembering and reconnecting to your unconditioned Self. As

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you take hope into your silence, you will surely draw hope from that silence. Try this prayer for a week and you'll see what I mean.

Seeing the Light!

First, you believe, and then you see the Light.

Next, you go towards the Light. Soon, you are *in* the Light. Now you *are* the Light.

Paul was a self-made multimillionaire. He told me so the first time we met. He talked and I listened. He told me about his wife, his life, his work, and, most of all, his children. 'I have three children I love more than anything,' he said. 'I want to give them everything I didn't have when I grew up. I tell them constantly that they can be what they want. I encourage them to strive, to work hard, to give everything every effort, to be the best they can. I always remind them they can do better, they can give more, they can be more – there are no limits.'

I listened to Paul talk about his children for almost 30 minutes. Eventually, I asked, 'Paul, what are you trying to tell me?'

He paused for a moment and bowed his head. His bullish confidence and upbeat mood vanished. I think I even saw a tear. 'The problem is,' he said, 'my children hate me. I've given them everything, and they hate me.'

'Have you ever told your children that they are wonderful, right now, just the way they are?' I asked him. He obviously had not. 'Paul, your children don't need to be told how great they're *going* to be; what they really need is to be told how loved and how wonderful they are *now*,' I said. I also suggested that by telling his children how wonderful he thinks they are *now* he was also investing wisely in their future.

Paul had only one hesitation: 'What if I tell them

they're complete and whole as you say and then they get complacent?!' We explored this common fear for a while.

'Would you have become complacent if your father had ever once told you he loved you?' I asked.

'Certainly not,' said Paul.

'Well, you have your answer then. See the Light in your children now, Paul. See the Light in them, for their sake and yours. Trust in their Light, for their sake and yours. *See the Light,*' I said.

As a psychologist, I had originally been trained to be a problem spotter. In fact, initially, I prided myself on how good I was at being able to spot people's weaknesses, neuroses, fears and hang-ups. You see, I wanted to be a really good psychologist; and, as you probably know, a really good psychologist is someone who can always find more wrong with you than an average psychologist can!

My original training, therefore, involved: (1) spotting the problem you had that you were going to tell me about; (2) spotting the problem you had that you were *not* going to tell me about; and (3) spotting the problem you had that you didn't even know about yet! That's how creative psychology can be – you come in with a few minor problems and you leave with some major ones!

Over time, I began to have a change of heart. I started to realise that the greatest psychotherapy of all is not in pointing out people's problems and failures, but rather, in pointing people toward their Light. You see, I really do believe now that . . .

**a true healer helps you to remember and
reconnect consciously with your inner Light.**

By 'Light', I mean your innate unconditional potential to be happy, to be loving, to be free of fear and to be creative beyond your greatest imagination. You can never really lose your Light because your Light is *you* – your unconditioned Self – but you can forget about it. This Light feels so real when you're happy, and so unreal when you're unhappy. Hence, the pain, the fear, the loneliness, and the grief of unhappiness. When in darkness, we wonder

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if we will ever see the Light again.

I can remember the exact day when I first realised the absolute necessity of being able to see the Light of the unconditioned Self in healing. I was at my Stress Busters Clinic, a clinic I'd been running through the National Health Service in West Birmingham for a couple of years.¹⁹ I looked out on a sea of people who'd gathered for another two-hour session. This time I didn't actually see people, though. All I saw was a group of alcoholics, depressives, heart-attack victims, cancer sufferers, drug addicts, AIDS victims, people suffering phobias, and one schizophrenic.

At first I felt a wave of absolute hopelessness. I remember thinking, *How can I help all these people – their problems are so huge and so completely different from one another?!* It occurred to me that what I really needed to do was set up an individual clinic for each illness – a clinic for depression, for anxiety, and so on. Before I could really panic, I instinctively said a quick prayer: *'Dear God, help me to see this differently.'* Then, in true British fashion, I had a sip of tea. As I opened my mouth to speak, I quickly shut it again before any words could spill out. My mind was on to something. A new idea was formulating, coming through like a fax or e-mail. I had another sip of tea while the downloading continued.

It dawned on me that although these people's illnesses certainly appeared very different, they were in fact all symptoms of one single illness. Essentially put, these people were ill because they were unhappy. Each of them had somehow become unhinged from the happiness of their *unconditioned Self*. I realised, therefore, that they had come to the clinic not just to de-stress, but to remember and reconnect to happiness. They had come to see the Light.

Years earlier I'd read the works of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, who had said: *'There is no illness, only ignorance.'*²⁰ Now, at last, I was beginning to see that maybe the ignorance he was referring to was the forgetting and separating from the Light of our unconditioned Self. I also began to see that my work at Stress Busters was probably, like the Tower of Pisa, slightly off-centre.

Until that time, the emphasis of my work had been, like my

psychology training, problem-oriented. I had spent days studying every illness, dis-ease, and stress-related problem I could find. And, although I'd mentioned happiness many times, I had never given a workshop specifically on that topic. The same was true for love, for peace of mind, for success, and for joy. Now it occurred to me that if these people could remember how to be happy again, maybe they would experience less dis-ease, and they would also handle their challenges in a much more healthy and wise way.

Sometime later, I wrote in my daily journal some words that I still call upon to this day for inspiration. They read:

Know Love; no fear
Know Joy; no pain
Know Light; no darkness
Know Wholeness; no dis-ease
Know Now; no past
Know Truth; no lies
Know God; no separation
Know Self; no other

True healers take into account any type of darkness, but their real task is to see the Light in their clients so as to help them remember and consciously reconnect to their own inner Light. In this way, both healer and client are healed together. Parenting is the same. The ultimate gift of a parent to a child is to care for the inner Light of children until they can care for it themselves. True friends are those who believe in you through thick and thin. They still see the Light in you even when your moods and behaviour are dark and low. Mentors, managers, leaders, visionaries, peace-makers, and everyone who truly serves . . . they all see the Light.

