

## **Finding Peace in Troubled Times**

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### **Workshop Objectives:**

- 1) to understand some of the basic differences between "happiness" and "peacefulness".
- 2) to have a greater awareness of how you were socialized in your family of origin to think and feel about happiness and peace and to understand more deeply the impact of those experiences.
- 3) to gain a broader perspective about strategies for increased happiness
- 4) to be able to articulate and practice thought processes and behaviors that can increase a sense of peace in daily life.

### **Workshop Format:**

Today we will spend most of the learning time in small work groups. My suggestion is to extend and participate at both a content level with the information and also a process level with emotional investment in the interaction with your group members. Between the group exercises we will have short discussions with the whole group that will lead to the next exercise. Please feel free to ask questions and offer suggestions.

### **Theme:**

In my 35 years of counseling in Washington County, I've never seen as much discouragement, depression and suicidal ideation, attempts and completions as I have the past 5 years. When I read that for the first time in U.S. history suicides surpassed automobile deaths (National Center for Health Statistics, published in The American Journal For Public Health, November 2012), I became aware that what I was sensing wasn't just an isolated trend for Southern Utah. Between 2000-2009 suicide rates increased 15%. To be fair in the comparison, automobile deaths during that same period decreased 25%. It got me thinking about what are we actively doing to empower individuals to have a better quality in living, to have meaning in how we live, not just what we do. We focus on vehicle safety and spend millions of dollars on that, which is obviously important, but it feels like we lag in teaching ways to empower ourselves in responding to daily difficulties. This presentation is, in part, a reflection of those concerns. I hope that you find your experience today helpful and lasting. The focus of "Finding Peace in Troubled Times" is a reflection of my hope for us today.



## Concept #1

### **Peace and Happiness are NOT the same thing.**

Basic differences between experiencing peace and happiness center around the concept that happiness is usually a result of a sense of **control and predictability**. Peace usually forms when we choose to **practice acceptance**.

Happiness is most often a function of an external locus of control, where "things are going well", or "it's working out the way that we want", "we have money", "we have health", "they like me", "I did that well", etc. The common denominator for happiness is often (not always) linked to external conditions, which will always change. Most of us spend a lot of time and energy trying to change those external variables, to increase the "good" and try to ensure some level of permanence. Think of how often you have tried to change a spouse, a friend, a parent, a student, so you can be more comfortable. Most all of us seek to exert this type of influence with mixed agendas of honestly trying to help someone find a "better" path, doing our "job", and trying to maneuver others so we can be more comfortable with how they fit into our blueprint for life.

Happiness as a condition or circumstance can be enhanced through strategies that contribute to a sense of control and predictability, but will be in consistent need of maintaining, due to external factors changing.

Paradoxically, if an individual practices peace, they will usually self report high levels of happiness due to the fact that acceptance, and sometimes "radical acceptance" ensures a sense of control and predictability by giving up the need for control and predictability. Peace is a function of an internal locus of control and is always available to an individual who understands this concept.

This is the awareness that Buddhists and some primal cultures teach and understand while in Western thought we typically embrace ideas about overcoming, forcing and changing the world (and others) to fit our perspective. In Jamake Highwater's 1982 classic documentary "The Primal Mind", the concept of acceptance versus forcing is explored by comparison of Native American attitudes and behaviors toward architecture, dance, music and art versus Western European/American approaches. You may find reviewing that DVD helpful.

## Exercise #2

*“One of the greatest forces in the life of Warriors is fear, because it spurs them to learn.”*  
Carlos Castaneda

### **Where do my fears originate?**

Discuss with your group what you believe about the concept of fear.

1. When have you been very fearful in your life? (Talk and write briefly about a situation that comes to mind.)
2. What are your thoughts about fear being a "good thing" or a "bad thing"? Do you differentiate between useful fears and destructive fears?
3. What did your parents model for you about how to respond to fear(s)? Think about how your father taught you about what fear is, what to do with it, etc. Then go through the same process about your mother. How were those beliefs about fear reinforced by your parents or other family members?
3. When have you most recently felt fear? How was your response reflective of what you learned in childhood about fear? How did you feel this in your body?
4. List your general, recurring fears. Please be as open and honest as you can.

## Concept #2

### **Fear is only an emotional response to a story we make up about the future.**

*“When you accept the survival signal as a **welcome message** and quickly evaluate the environment or situation, **fear stops in an instant**. Thus, trusting intuition is the exact opposite of living in fear... While few would argue that extended, unanswered fear is destructive, millions choose to stay there. They may have forgotten or never learned that fear is not an emotion like sadness or happiness, either of which might last a long while. It is not a state, like anxiety. True fear is a survival signal that sounds only in the presence of danger, yet unwarranted fear has assumed a power over us that it holds over no other creature on earth.”*

Gavin de Becker (The Gift of Fear)

De Becker lists two rules about fear and that if you accept them, they can improve your use of fear, reduce its frequency and transform your experience of life in general.

- **Rule #1.** The **very fact you fear something is solid evidence that it is not happening**.
- **Rule #2.** What you fear is rarely what you think you fear, it is **what you link to fear, or the meaning that you attach to the story**.

If your fear is irrational and you tend to stay stuck in the thoughts you are most likely immersed in the story that you are telling yourself. An effective strategy to move past this is to question the story itself and look for cognitive distortions inherent within the story line. Usually once the story is cleaned up the fear will either dwindle or morph into rational fear.

If your fear is rational and you use it as a "welcome message", then you will most likely quickly use the fear as a springboard to do something about the situation. That will usually entail a specific action or strategy to meet the needs of the fear message. This is the primary survival need intention of fear and can be useful if you do indeed welcome it and then respond with a strategy for dealing with the circumstances.

### Exercise #3

#### **Surrendering/Accepting Part One**

*“You are still seeking outside, and you cannot get out of the seeking mode. Maybe the next workshop will have the answer, maybe that new technique. To you I would say: Don't look for peace. Don't look for any other state than the one you are in now; otherwise, you will set up inner conflict and unconscious resistance. Forgive yourself for not being at peace. The moment you COMPLETELY accept your nonpeace, your nonpeace becomes transmuted into peace. **Anything that you accept fully will get you there, will take you into peace. This is the miracle of surrender.**”*

Eckhart Tolle

Discuss with your group what you believe that Tolle is saying in this quote. Think about the idea that fear is focused on the future, it is anticipatory in nature. Fear is based on what you think will happen. Terror occurs when the fear is escalated to the point that it interferes with your ability to function well. **Both are firmly rooted in your thoughts about the future.** Distress is when something is happening currently to hurt you, but fear is about the future, it is not about the NOW.

#### Work Group Questions

1. If fear is about things that we believe are going to happen then why isn't it good to feel the fear and rehearse and prepare for the “bad things”?
2. How would your life change if you were able to reduce the negative impact of your fears by 50%?
3. How can you use your fears more effectively to enrich your life? What stands in your way of doing that right now, today? List your obstacles to changing this.
4. How does it serve you to allow your fears too much power? (what benefits do you get from being fearful?)

5. How would your life change if you surrendered, in the way that Tolle speaks of?

### Concept #3

#### Yes / Surrender

It is only Consciousness that can accept – there is no separate “I” that does the accepting – acceptance occurs - and you feel a different energy arising when acceptance occurs. (You can notice the Non Surrender by the physical contraction, the emotion and the mental judgment – all aspects of the separate identity. The separate identity is motivated totally by self interest)

- Accept the simplicity of the moment – do not let your mind add a story to it (personalize it)
- Ask – “Am I surrendered totally to the form that this moment takes – in the field of Now?” “Am I welcoming whatever form arises in the Now?”
- Make a Practice of accepting completely (surrendering to) small irritations. Allow them to be as they are.
- Surrender completely to the form that this moment takes (in the field of Now), welcoming whatever appears in the Field of Now. YES. Embrace the form of that moment, as if you had chosen it.
- When you notice that you have resistance to something specific, (or generally) then just let the resistance drop.
- Acknowledge the "Isness" of the occasions without judgment or comment when you cannot feel the Inner Body, or notice the aliveness and stillness of a huge tree, or there is heavy mind noise, etc. **It is as it is.** Accept that
- If you observe in yourself a Non-Surrender state – Allow it to be. Allow the Non-Surrender to be! Do Not fight it.. You cannot fight it – it just adds another Non Surrender to it!
- When a “No” arises in you – notice it and Accept it completely. Surrender fully to it. It is as it is, and there is nothing personal in it.
- If you are having difficulties saying “yes” to what is - then feel the Inner Body first, and maintain it while you Accept what is.

**Practices** should occur completely in the Now, without an agenda, without a final objective, without trying to “achieve” something, or get rid of something.. They are just interesting things to do.

Increasingly bring Presence (self aware consciousness) into normal everyday life. This is what the Teaching is all about, and it directly breaks Human conditioning. This means Honor this moment, and every form that this moment takes – this can be done by giving clear Still Awareness to the “little doings” of life. Most of life is a series of the “little things”.

Each “doing” should be done not as a means to an end – in other words Totally in the Now. “Action without cause”, as Krishnamurti would say. And the mind is still.....

### Exercise # 4

#### Surrendering/Accepting Part Two

### **Radical Acceptance**

Think of a distressing, fearful situation that you experienced recently. Then discuss and answer the following questions designed to help you radically accept the situation in a new way.

1. What happened in this distressing, fearful situation?
2. What past events lead up to this situation?
3. What role did you play in creating this situation?
4. What role did others play in creating this situation?
5. What DO you have control of in this situation?
6. What DON'T you have control of in this situation?
7. What was your response to this situation?
8. How did your response affect your own thoughts and feelings?
9. How did your response affect the thoughts and feelings of others?
10. How could you have changed your response to this situation so that it led to less suffering for yourself and others?
11. How could the situation have occurred differently if you had decided to radically accept the situation?

Concept #4

**Radical Acceptance Can Change Your Life**

from The Dialectical Behavior Skills Workbook by  
McKay, Wood & Brantley  
and from Dr. Marsha Linehan's DBT work

In DBT (Dialectical Behavior Therapy) the balance is between change and acceptance. You need to change the behaviors in your life that are creating more suffering for yourself and others while simultaneously also accepting yourself the way you are. This might sound contradictory, but it's a key part of this treatment. DBT depends on acceptance and change, not acceptance *or* change.

Radical acceptance means that you accept something completely, without judging it. For example, radically accepting the present moment means that you don't fight it, get angry at it, or try to change it into something that it's not. To radically accept the present moment means that you must acknowledge that the present moment is what it is due to a long chain of events and decisions made by you and other people in the past. The present moment never spontaneously leaps into existence without being caused by events that have already taken place. But remember, radically accepting something doesn't mean that you just give up and simply accept every bad situation that happens to you. Some situations in life are unjust, such as when someone abuses or assaults you. But for other situations in life, you share at least some responsibility.

There may be an infinite number of really painful things that can happen to you. But there are not an infinite number of responses you can make to pain. In fact, if you sit back and think about it, there are only four. **There are only four things you can do when painful problems come into your life.**

What do you think they are? Think for a minute. A problem is in your life, pain, suffering, something you don't want in it. How can you respond?

Well the **first thing you could do is you could do is you could solve the problem.** You can figure out a way to either end the painful event or you could figure out a way to leave the situation that's so painful. That's the first thing you could do. Solve the problem.

What's the second thing you could do? **You could try to change how you feel about the problem;** to figure out a way to take a negative in your life and make it into a positive. Alright, so that's the second thing you could do.

What's your other option? **You could accept it.** So that's the third thing you can do. You could just accept the problem.

Ok. That's not everything you could do. There is a fourth alternative. What do you think it is? **You could stay miserable.** That's the only other option you've got.

So you've got to either solve it, change how you feel about it, accept it, or stay miserable.

Radically accepting the present moment opens up the opportunity for you to recognize the role that you have played in creating your current situation. And as a result, it also creates an opportunity to respond to that situation in a new way that's less painful for yourself and others.

There are three parts to radical acceptance. The first part is accepting that reality is what it is. The second part is accepting that the event or situation causing you pain has a cause. The third part is accepting life can be worth living even with painful events in it.

#### Exercise #5

### **Steps to a More Peaceful Heart, Putting it All Together**

*“Accept whatever comes to you woven in the pattern of your destiny, for what could more aptly fit your needs?”*

Marcus Aurelius

*“It’s possible to choose inner peace and emotional well-being even when life isn’t what we would like it to be.”*

Richard Carlson

Discuss in your work group the following steps to staying aware and talking about how they might help change how you experience fear. These steps come from the Kadampa masters of 11<sup>th</sup> century Tibet. Notice how closely these parallel what you have been working with.

- Step 1: “Not setting up the target for the arrow” (Diminish your target area, don’t personalize or assume, clean up your cognitive distortions.)
- Step 2: “Connecting with the heart” (Being consistently kind to self and others)
- Step 3: “Seeing all obstacles as teachers” (Reframing, being grateful for opportunities to grow)
- Step 4: “Regarding all that occurs as a dream” (being able to see the situation from an outside position, it’s only a story that we tell ourselves.)

As you discuss the steps, talk about how you might formalize these steps in your daily life right now. Or if you are already doing them to some degree, discuss how you might deepen the intensity and effectiveness of each step. Please be specific, concrete and detailed in HOW you can translate these ideas into proactive behaviors in your life now.

Step 1:

Step 2:

Step 3:

Step 4:

## Quotes & Other Resources

*“Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul  
And sings the tune without the words  
And NEVER stops - at all”*  
Emily Dickinson

“The movement of descent and discovery begins at the moment you consciously become dissatisfied with life. Contrary to most professional opinion, this gnawing dissatisfaction with life is not a sign of “mental illness” nor an indication of poor social adjustment, nor a character disorder. For concealed within this basic unhappiness with life and existence is the embryo of a growing intelligence, a special intelligence usually buried under the immense weight of social shams. A person who is beginning to sense the suffering of life, is at the same time beginning to awaken to deeper realities, truer realities. For suffering smashes to pieces the complacency of our normal fictions about reality, and forces us to become alive in a special sense – to see carefully, to feel deeply to touch ourselves and our worlds in ways we have heretofore avoided. It has been said, and truly I think, that suffering is the first grace. In a special sense, suffering is almost a time of rejoicing, for it marks the birth of creative insight.”

Ken Wilbur

*“What are the things that you MUST do and have so that you can feel that you have lived your life and not wasted it?”*

**1. Belong to people.** *We need to belong intimately to a few people who are permanent elements in our lives - people with whom we share our lives - not just a fraction of our time and ourselves. Just as our bodies have a need for food and air, our souls have a need to be connected to other people.*

**2. Accept Pain.** *To be fully and authentically human, we have to take off the armor we usually wear to keep the world from hurting us. Without the readiness to feel, which must include feeling pain, we will NEVER know hope, or joy or love.*

**3. Make a Contribution.** *Our human nature is that we need to be helpful, thoughtful and generous as much as we need to eat, sleep and exercise. It matters that we share our lives with others rather than try to hoard life for ourselves”.*

Rabbi Harold Kushner

“The Warrior as a teacher teaches three techniques: losing self importance, assuming responsibility for one’s acts, and using death as an advisor.”

“A Warrior lives by acting, not by thinking about acting, nor by thinking about what he will think when he has finished acting.”

Carlos Castaneda

## Happiness Review

Foster and Hicks

1. **Intention** is not simply the desire, but the conscious decision to choose happiness over unhappiness. As you go through your day, to what extent do you actively intend to be happy?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
2. **Accountability** is the choice to take responsibility for your actions, thoughts, and feelings and not blame others for your unhappiness – the refusal to be a victim. To what extent do you take a proactive stance in the face of the sad or difficult in your life?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
3. **Identification** is the ongoing process of identifying for yourself what makes you truly, deeply happy. To what extent each day do you ask yourself “Which choice or direction will make me happiest?”  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
4. **Centrality** is the non-negotiable insistence on doing now those things that make you happiest, regardless of the complexities of your circumstances. To what extent do you insist on not putting off that which gives you greatest joy?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
5. **Recasting or Reframing** is the choice to turn problems into opportunities – to convert trauma into meaning. To what extent do you recast deeply unhappy emotions into purposeful meaning?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
6. **Creation of opportunity and possibilities** is the decision to be open to new possibilities. Are you aware of opportunities? Do you try new things or jump into the unknown for the experience of something important or new?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
7. **Appreciation** means expressing gratitude to others. Happy people relish each moment rather than focusing on the past or worrying about the future. To what extent are you aware of the moment and are grateful for your life and those around you?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
8. **Giving** means sharing your talents, resources and hospitality with neighbors, in community work, or with friends and family without the expectation of a “return on investment”. To what extent do you give richly of yourself to others?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always
9. **Truthfulness**. Happy people are accountable. They enforce personal boundaries and will not conform to society or family if it violates their values. Their truthfulness is a self-contract by which they gauge their thoughts and actions against their internal, personal code. How truthful are you with yourself and others?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always

***Self-Meditation: 3,299 Mantras, Tips, Quotes and Koans for Peace and Serenity*** ,

Barbara Ann Kipfer

Here are 20 of my favorite suggestions from her book.

1. Let small chores act as a stop sign to “breathe, relax and experience peace.”
2. Sit down and “become a human still life.” Don’t do anything. Just breathe.
3. When you’re driving, focus solely on that experience. “Feel the steering wheel, the pedals, the seat.”
4. “Listen for the quietest sound.”
5. Focus on your sense of smell. Take something you’d like to smell, such as a flower or food, and put it up close to your nose. Notice the changes in the aroma. Focus on the sensations in your body as you inhale and exhale. Then try to focus on other fragrances around you throughout the day.
6. Focus on your sense of touch. Focus on the sensation of your hands touching each other, “your clothes brushing against your skin, and the air moving across your face.”
7. In the beginning of the week, pick an activity you normally do on autopilot, such as washing your hands, applying makeup or getting into your car. Pause for several seconds before starting the activity. Then perform it with your full attention.
8. “Imagine that you are a kite soaring in the sky. Surrender to the wind, but be aware of the string that anchors you to the ground and keeps you safe.”
9. When you’re performing a chore, focus your full attention on your hands. “Note all the sensations in your fingers, your palms, and your wrists.”
10. Send yourself some loving-kindness (or “metta”). Focus your attention on an aspect of your mind or body that you feel separated from. Acknowledge this. You might say something like: “May I accept this. May I be filled with loving-kindness toward this. May I use the pain of this experience for the welfare of all.”
11. As you’re trying to fall asleep, “imagine that with each breath you are melting into an ocean of light and space.”
12. When you turn on the faucet, focus on the bigger picture. “See the water flowing down from the glaciers and mountains, running deep into the earth, sustaining you and all life.”
13. When you wake up, feel your feet touch the floor. “Be aware of their weight, the floor supporting your body, and the motion of your feet and legs as you begin to walk.”
14. When you get home from work, every day, stand in front of your door and appreciate the moment. Rejoice in it. “Breathe in and out three times.”
15. Set an alarm to ring every hour to remind yourself to “wake up and appreciate the miracle of every moment. Say, ‘[Your name], wake up!’”
16. Picture your thoughts as balloons floating by.
17. Visualize a mountain lake with a smooth, glassy surface. A breeze sends ripples across the water. As the breeze quiets down, so do the ripples, and the water returns to being smooth. When something ruffles you, return to this visualization. “Feel the ripples and then let them settle.”
18. Think of your mind as a swinging door. “Thoughts and feelings come in and out, like people. Be the door, not the doorman.”

## 10 Keys to a Happier Life

Traci Pedersen

Spirituality & Health

March 14, 2014

What are the daily habits of truly happy people? And how can we incorporate these habits into our daily lives?

Action for Happiness—a movement dedicated to helping people experience more fulfilling lives—has developed a list of 10 habits, or keys, based on the latest scientific research of happy people.

You may have already guessed that these habits have nothing to do with striving to be smarter, richer, or better looking than our neighbors. In fact, these ten keys are based on being less competitive and taking time to really love yourself, love others, and enjoy the world around you.

To make the habits easier to remember, the Ten Keys spell the acronym GREAT DREAM:

**Giving:** Be generous. Whether it's a smile, a kind word, or a helping hand, give freely to others.

**Relating:** Connect with people. Close relationships provide love, support, and meaning in our lives.

**Exercising:** Stay active. Your body and mind are connected—the health of your physical body affects your mood.

**Appreciating:** Be mindful. Notice the world around you, and take time to enjoy it.

**Trying out:** Keep learning new things. Be curious and engage with life.

**Direction:** Set goals to feel motivated and challenged.

**Resilience:** Find ways to bounce back. Practice the art of letting go.

**Emotion:** Take a positive approach to life. Try to focus on the good in every situation.

**Acceptance:** Be comfortable with who you are. Don't compare your insides to another person's outsides.

**Meaning:** Be part of something bigger than yourself. People who have meaning in their lives experience less stress, anxiety, and depression.

So which habit comes most easily for people? And which one not so easily?

Action for Happiness, along with another charity called Do Something Different, gave out another survey asking 5,000 people to rate themselves (on a scale of 1-10) on how well they practiced the Ten Keys. Here are the top and bottom ranking habits:

- *Giving* was the top-rated habit. When asked *How often do you make an effort to help or be kind to others?* people gave themselves an average of 7.41 out of 10. One in six people gave themselves a 10 out of 10.
- *Acceptance* came out as the least practiced habit. When asked *How often are you kind to yourself and think you're fine as you are?* people's average rating was just 5.56 out of 10. Almost half (46%) rated themselves at a 5 or lower.

**Ironically, researchers found that it is the habit of *Acceptance*—the habit rated as most difficult for people—that was most associated with overall happiness levels.**

So, this week, let's work on all ten habits, but perhaps spend a little extra time thinking about self acceptance. Be comfortable with who you are first, and the other nine habits will come more easily.

### **A Basic Human Approach to Happiness**

Bro. David Steindl-Rast (Gratefulness.org)

By digging for the roots of happiness, of religion, and of spiritual practice we have arrived at answers to our three initial questions:

- 1) The one basic condition of the human psyche that accounts for genuine happiness is living in the now.
- 2) The one seminal experience that gives rise to the great variety of religions is the mystic experience.
- 3) The one characteristic mental attitude shared by all successful approaches to happiness is gratefulness.

Our answers can be tested by the reader's own experience, as we have shown. They hinge on awareness of the now: Only lasting happiness can be called genuine, and only the now lasts beyond time. In our mystic moments we experience this now and find in it both supreme happiness and the seeds from which religions develop. By bringing us again and again into the now, spiritual practices (epitomized by grateful living) provide access to lasting happiness.

By drawing life and strength from this shared root system we shall find joy -- the happiness that does not depend on what happens -- and we shall find that deep understanding of religions that sees them as different doors to a shared happiness.