

Anatomy of Happiness: Whole-Hearted Living December 2018

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George Bernard Shaw, who was a writer, a vegetarian, and a mystical atheist, wrote that "the secret of being miserable is to have the leisure to bother about whether you are happy or not". Today we will take some time to explore the anatomy of happiness or unpack whole-hearted living. Brene Brown, a writer, a researcher, and a TED Talk speaker, describes whole-hearted living as comprising 10 dimensions in which we cultivate one essence of our humanity and we let go of another quality or activity, which reduces or interferes with the initial essence. We will focus on four of the ten: 1) Self-Compassion, 2) Intuition and Faith, 3) Calm and Stillness, and 4) Laughter, Song, and Dance. Their counterparts, or what we release, are: 1) perfectionism, 2) the need for certainty, 3) anxiety as a lifestyle, and 4) being cool and in control. These are all from her book, "Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead". To find out the other six dimensions or guideposts, please google or read her book or listen to her TED Talks.

In my ministry with family members, whose loved one is or has struggled with addiction issues, the work of Brene Brown looms large. People contact Rideauwood while they are dealing with the fear of losing their loved one, the confusion of loving someone in active addiction, and the stigma that comes along with substance and/or behavioural dependence. Sometimes people cry in my office, not just out of sadness as they grieve the losses that accompany addiction, but also out of relief that they are finding

support, answers to their questions and tools to make healthy changes. When people complete any three of Rideauwood's programs for family members, whether it is the four-hour Family Spiral, the six-week ARCK, or the 13-week Intensive Program, they begin to access their feelings, change their relationships, and approach happiness.

Happiness is in the American Declaration of Independence, which declares that all citizens deserve the right to pursue happiness. For Canadians, the pursuit of happiness is not enshrined in our Settler founding documents, rather we emphasize good government and good order. So together both countries give us the micro and the macro of happiness. For me, happiness is that sense of well-being that exists on an individual level and a social or societal level. For example, I am not happy about the lack of affordable housing in our world, yet I am happy to be here this morning with everyone. Henry James, a social scientist, wrote that "we are told true happiness consists in getting out of one's self, but the point is not only to get out you must stay out; and to stay out you must have some absorbing errand." In order to practice whole-hearted living, we need to approach happiness as an individual goal and also as a goal to achieve for the world around us. Another way to put this is:

- If you want to be happy for an hour, take a nap.
- If you want to be happy for a day, going fishing.
- If you want to be happy for a month, go on a honeymoon.
- If you want to be happy for a year, inherit a fortune.
- If you want to be happy for a lifetime, help other people.

Let us begin our anatomy of happiness by cultivating self compassion and releasing perfectionism. According to Brene Brown, her research shows that shame is the birthplace of

perfectionism. Unlike guilt which is the sense of having done something wrong, shame is the sense of being wrong. For the family clients with whom I work, the stigma of addiction contributes to the sense of being the wrong parent, failed partner, or the inadequate adult child. Brene Brown says that perfectionism is not about having such high standards that we are doing things perfectly; rather it is a form of addiction for when we do things in a less than perfect manner we can get hooked into an unhealthy cycle of "must do and/or be better". Perfectionism is not healthy striving, rather it becomes the place we can get stuck. An example of this is procrastination, when we cannot complete a task because we have a core belief about ourself not being good enough. Self Compassion can help us release our perfectionism.

In educating myself about White Supremacy Culture, through the book, "Dismantling Racism" by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, I discovered perfectionism is a norm. Before I detail how perfectionism is a characteristic of oppression, let's talk about self compassion. When we are kind to ourselves, when we treat ourselves the gentle and caring way we treat others, we are practising self compassion. Here are the signs of perfectionism [on individual and a systemic level] in White Supremacy Culture:

- little appreciation is expressed among people for the work that others are doing;
- it is more common is to point out how either the person or the work is inadequate;
- when we talk to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work without ever talking directly to them;
- mistakes are seen as personal, in that they reflect badly on the person instead of being seen as mistakes;
- making a mistake is confused with being a mistake, doing wrong with being wrong;

- little time, energy, or money is put into reflection or identifying lessons that can improve results [no learning from mistakes];
 - a tendency to identify what is wrong; little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what is right or going well;
- You may recognize some of these patterns in your own internal dialogue or in a workplace or in this community.

Cheryl Strayed, who wrote the book "Wild", says this about compassion: "[it] isn't about solutions. [Compassion] is about giving all the love that you've got." Kristen Neff, who is the guru of self compassion, describes it as having three components: 1) self-kindness [or being supportive and gentle with oneself]; 2) understanding common humanity [or all humans are imperfect and make mistakes]; and 3) mindfulness [or being aware of one's suffering with clarity]. This ties in quite nicely with the antidotes to perfectionism, when we choose to dismantle racism or other forms of oppression. We can release ourselves from perfectionism by: developing a culture of appreciation in taking the time to appreciate our own and other's actions and efforts; develop a culture of learning, where it is expected we will all make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning; separate the person from the mistake; when offering feedback to self and/or others, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism; recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results; and ask for specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering criticism. So many of these antidotes relate to the way we communicate with ourselves and each other.

At Rideauwood, we offer a variety of suggestions for shifting our self-talk and our dialogue with loved ones: assertiveness, emotion coaching, and recovery support. I have been told by clients of

having hostile, verbally abusive, and physically dangerous encounters with their loved one; then through the changing of communication and setting healthy boundaries to have the relationship transform into an openly affectionate connection.

Part of that transformation comes from another part of whole-hearted living: letting go of being cool and in control. Parents of teenagers wrestle with this one, so I give them permission to make mistakes, which is a significant part of emotion coaching. In dealing with their own perfectionism, parents and other family members grow their self compassion and compassion. Laughing about our foibles in an individual counselling session or in group can lighten the stress of loving someone with chemical or behavioral dependence.

We sang and danced the hokey pokey today as part of our anatomy of happiness: letting go of being cool and in control. Here is some advice from kids about family relations: "When your dad is mad and asks you, 'Do I look stupid?', don't answer, says Hannah, age 9; When your mom is mad at your dad, don't let her brush your hair, says Taylia, age 11; If you want a kitten, start out by asking for a horse, says Naomi, age 15; Don't pick on your sister when she is holding a hockey stick, says Joel, age 10; Puppies still have bad breath even after eating a Tic-Tac, says Andrew, age 9; Never trust a dog to watch your food, says Patrick, age 10; and Never hold a dust buster and a cat at the same time, says Kyoyo, age 9. The wisdom of children reminding us that being in cool and in control can be situation-specific. Or as Victor Borge said, "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people."

After these chuckles, now would be a good time for

acknowledging that laughter can be a way of reducing anxiety. Another way can be meditation. So here is a short meditation that I share with my family groups: Close your eyes or lower your gaze to the ground, and focus on your breathing; now imagine a mountain; There is a mountain inside each of us; It keeps us solid and calm. We each have a mountain within. We each are capable of being solid and stable. As you breathe in, say silently to yourself, I see myself as a mountain; as you breathe out, say I feel solid. Breathe in Mountain; Breathe out Solid.

As we continue breathing, we will imagine calm water. If you have seen the surface of a lake or river when it's very still, you may have noticed that it reflects the mountains, clouds, and trees around it perfectly. When you are calm, when you are still, you can see things as they truly are. You don't distort things. When you are not calm, it's easy to get confused and angry. All of us make mistakes and create suffering when we are not calm. Each human being needs tranquility to be happy. With this second image, we cultivate stillness and calm. Still water is within you. You are calm, clear, and serene. As you breathe in, say silently, I see myself as still water; Breathing out, I reflect thing as they truly are. Breathe in Calm; Breathe out Reflect.

This calm and still meditation is adapted from a book by Thich Nhat Hanh, "A Handful of Quiet".

The last part of whole-hearted living that we will address is cultivating faith and intuition and letting go of certainty. At Rideauwood, my colleagues and I do not offer certainty: we cannot guarantee that every loved one will build a life of recovery from addiction. Instead what we offer is the chance to believe in themselves, in the power of love, and to trust that when they change, people around them can change.

During this year's Open Doors Ottawa, I learned about a non-violent resistance event that occurred in the Baltics on August 23, 1989. Two million people held hands in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania covering a distance of 600 kilometers equivalent to the space between Ottawa, Canada and New York City, USA. This was organized in a time before the internet, using radio to coordinate this massive event. Their intent was to promote independence from the Soviet Union after 50 years of an illegal occupation. How is this whole-hearted living? The Baltic people developed the Singing Revolution, reasserting their honour, strength, and culture through protest songs and other forms of non-violent resistance. In other words, they cultivated laughter, song, and dance, were calm and still with all ages together, having faith that things would work out, and in their peaceful Baltic Way, they showed the world that holding hands changed history.

May we also find ways to live whole-heartedly. As Anonymous once wrote, "Don't worry if your job is small and your rewards are few. Remember that the mighty oak, was once a nut like you."