

***"Problems are to the mind are what exercise is to the muscles, they toughen and make strong."
-Norman Vincent Peale***

I spoke about 6 ways to help us choose happiness, especially in difficult times. Happiness may be happenstance, but we can choose what our happenstance is. We can look for the joy and gratitude in our lives; find the helpers and the things that we need to thrive. Our joy is dependent on us nurturing our soul gardens, and this is how we increase the empathy and love in our own lives. It is a beautiful cycle of reaping and sowing.

So how do we choose happiness?

Firstly, remember that we all feel pain. It is okay to address that pain but don't identify with it. Your brain listens to what you say, and your "I am" statements have immense control over the trajectory of your life. Listen to the subtle, yet important differences between these sentences:

I feel scared. This is tragic.

I am sad. I am depressed.

Do you see the difference? Your amygdala is the fear-center of your brain and your brain will look for evidence to support the things you say. Process the feeling, but don't let it define who you are. Keep your "I am" statements affirmative and uplifting.

Secondarily, make a decision to do right by yourself anyway. Too many people give themselves free passes to deal with their emotions, to the detriment of their goals.

This tub of ice cream will make me feel better.

I deserve [insert vice here] after the terrible week I've had.

Remember that you have the choice between two pains—the pain of regret or the pain of following through. There are so many coping mechanisms available to you. Connect with your community, for starters. You are not alone.

Take this with a pinch of salt, but stop saying "I am depressed," or "my cancer" or "my thyroid disease." I get it. I really do. But you are not a disease or an emotion.

Your identity is very dear to the one who made you, and you are sending the wrong message to your brain. Remember step 1?

You are so much bigger than this darkness. This is your home; your bodysuit. You don't have to live in perpetual darkness. You live in a place where you can make the decision to turn on the light. Do things that support the vibrancy you want, even when you don't feel like doing them.

The power to transform is in your mind. Your amygdala doesn't like it when things change, even when those things are abusive or traumatic. We need to shift our thinking from using the amygdala to using the prefrontal cortex. Move away from the fear center of your brain and towards the part that can process abstract ideas, strategize, and see things more clearly. I know this may seem easier said than done, but when you feel that fear rising, stop, analyze it, process it, extract the lesson, and stop reliving it over and over again in your head.

Lastly, practice gratitude in everything you do because this is going to fuel your appreciation for what you have in life. What matters most is what you're focused on, because what you dwell upon becomes your destiny.

From the Language of Letting Go, by Melody Beattie:

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, and confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. It turns problems into gifts, failures into successes, the unexpected into perfect timing, and mistakes into important events. It can turn an existence into a real life, and disconnected situations into important and beneficial lessons. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

Gratitude makes things right.

Gratitude turns negative energy into positive energy. There is no situation or circumstance so small or large that it is not susceptible to gratitude's power. We can start with who we are and what we have today, apply gratitude, and then let it work its magic.

Say thank you, until you mean it. If you say it long enough, you will believe it.