
Bonus Reading – Session Eleven

**Yesterday was history
Tomorrow is a mystery
Today is a gift
That's why it's called "the present"
- ANON**

Gratefulness

"Gratefulness is UNIVERSAL: it is the spontaneous response of every human heart to life, goodness, truth, and beauty; it is at the heart of every religion and spiritual tradition."¹

**"The great ones in the realm of Spirit are so intensely alive
because they are so deeply grateful."**

- Br. David Steindl-Rast

In his book, Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth, Matthew Fox revisits the ancient tradition of creation spirituality. He describes the Four Paths of the tradition that tell us what matters. Path One, *Via Positiva*, imparts the wisdom that awe and delight matter. The wonder and mystery of nature and of all beings, each of whom is a "word of God" is the *Via Positiva*, the positive way. In each day it is important to recognize, to note and to give thanks for all that is awesome, wondrous and divine.

The authors of HeartMath describe the attributes of the heart, the core heart feelings as appreciation, care, compassion, non-judgment, and forgiveness. "These qualities come from the depth of our being - from the core of our heart."² They point out that by activating these core heart feelings we increase our energy assets and reduce or eliminate energy deficits. What these scientists are now documenting in their laboratories is the age-old innate wisdom of mindbodyspirit to create an atmosphere of healing and well-being through purposeful attitude shifts. Taking on an attitude of gratefulness opens the door for appreciation, compassion, non-judgment and forgiveness.

By consciously evoking the core heart feelings, you nourish your body at every level. You unleash a cascade of nurturing biochemistry that balances mindbody and releases energy to be applied to cellular regeneration. When you consciously experience being grateful, expressing gratitude and appreciation is a practical and powerful tool that taps into the heart's magnanimous capacity to nurture and heal. All you need to do is to apply this practice on a

¹ Br. David Steindl-Rast, www.gratefulness.org

² Doc Childre, Howard Martin, with Donna Beech, *The HeartMath Solution*, p 103.

daily basis. Express gratitude for any and every small event that is awesome or delightful, or that reflects the wonder and mystery of nature, of all beings.

More on the health benefits of gratitude comes from the famous "Nun Study" conducted by researchers at the University of Kentucky who analyzed the autobiographies from 180 nuns at age 22. Six decades later, the nuns most likely to still be alive were the ones who expressed the most positive emotions (gratitude, contentment, hope etc.). In fact, they found nearly a seven year difference in longevity between the most optimistic and the least optimistic nuns.

About Gratitude and Poetry

A few weeks after the suicide airplane attacks in the US, Billy Collins, the new poet laureate of the country related in a radio interview, "we don't need poems dealing directly with the tragedy because 'all poems stand against the wholesale murders that took place on September 11.' Asked how he felt following the aftermath, Collins replied, 'This is something only a saint could sustain, but I try to maintain a feeling of gratitude....for existence, for daily experience, for being alive. Poetry - so much of it - reiterates the simple joy, the blunt fact of actually existing.'"³

Dr. Judith Petry on Illness

Dr. Judith Petry, in her 1999 address to the International Network for Attitudinal Healing in Hartford Connecticut, provided the following definition for illness:

"Any imbalance in our consciousness that disrupts our lives enough to get our attention. It can be a disease, an injury, a loss of a job, loss of a loved one, a divorce: anything that gets our attention."

Judith refers also to the effects of illness on the individual provided by Kat Duff in her book Alchemy of Illness:

"Illness constructs us, alienates us, narrows our world to four walls, and redefines our relationship with ourselves and others. We fall into the underworld of illness and it invites death to be a constant companion."

It is important to acknowledge that this quote may have been the reality for many people prior to their experience with the *COHMI Program*. You may have been told there is nothing that can be done for the condition from which you are suffering and that you'll just have to learn to live with it.

This can be an isolating and depressing experience. You can begin to understand that much of the curative approach to chronic illness may embody these feelings.

³ Robert Owens Scott, "So Grateful to Be Here", *Spirituality and Health*, Winter 2002, p. 1

However as you embody and live from *COHMI Program* process, you can experience companionship on a healing journey, an expansion of your world and possibilities, a rising up out of the syndrome of despair and the opportunity to embrace death as a part of life. You can experience 'healing into dying.'

In returning to Dr. Petry's article, it is easy to realize that she provides the viewpoint of Eric Cassel, a primary care physician, who in his book, Doctoring, states, "patients become disconnected from others and their environment, lose a sense of their own indestructibility, find reason and their system of beliefs inadequate to fully comprehend their illness, and feel themselves unable to control events."

Perhaps the most profound definition of illness Dr. Petry provides is the following quote:

Illness is always a crisis, and the purpose of every crisis is development...any attempt to regain the state of affairs that existed before the illness struck us is either naïve or stupid. The aim of illness is to lead us to new, unknown and untrodden pastures. Only if we follow this summons consciously and of our own free will do we lend true meaning to the crisis.

- Thorvald Dethlefsen from "Healing Power of Illness"

Dr. Petry suggests that illness is a catalyst for healing and not something to be discarded as quickly as possible. Her experience has been that people who have healed from their illness or injury, did so only after they found meaning in their illness. She also says that this has not always been the case and that there are those who do not wish to find the meaning behind the illness or injury. It is your choice.

In Richard Moss's words "...it is moments of crisis, health crisis in particular, that the door for transformation may be opened to us."

Judith cautions that even though health crises may open the door to transformation, there has to be the conscious decision to walk through it. You can choose to battle your illnesses or to learn from them. It is your choice.

As you deepen your experience with *COHMI Program* the Daily Link Breaking Skills Practice, and read more from the Bonus Reading sections, you will find the information, the tools and the inner strength to explore the meaning of the illness, injury, or life-changing event that brought you to this place.

As you are learning to trust the healer within to lead you to a place of wholeness for yourself, you will discover and explore a place where you will find inner peace and joy and inspiration to move forward in your healing journey.

**The difference between hope and despair is the difference
between what's possible and what we feel is impossible.**

- **Thomas Aquinas**

Learned Optimism – How to Change Your Mind and Your Life

There are two predominant views of looking at the world. One is the pessimistic point of view and the other is the optimistic point of view. These are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Most people range somewhere between these two ends and can move between them in any given circumstance. One of the easiest ways to tell whether or not one is an optimist is the time and the manner of characterizing negative or 'bad' events in their lives.

Pessimists allow one bad event to drive the structure or tone of the rest of their days – or even their lives. They tend to have a martyr complex and blame themselves for every bad thing that has happened to them and can't think of anything good that has happened. There is an attitude of permanence to all bad events and a temporary nature to the good events.

Optimists, on the other end of the spectrum, when confronted with the same types of events view them entirely differently. They have the skill and practice to see any event as temporary and confined to just this one instance.

They don't use the words, "This always happens to me!" They don't necessarily even look for a cause, rather they view it as isolated and not their fault. They have a deep understanding that circumstances, bad luck or other people lend a hand to the event that has occurred. They are undeterred by defeat or setbacks, in fact they perceive it as a challenge and try harder. In *COHMI Program* terms, optimists tend to be in the present moment, which allows for each event to be viewed in a perspective that doesn't generalize and catastrophize.

Pessimistic and optimistic thinking are both learned habits. Pessimism is changeable and escapable. Pessimists usually don't enjoy good health or longevity; they can lose races or contests more often to optimists, and may not know that they are pessimists. A close look at the speech and thought patterns can help a person to discover pessimistic tendencies that are well hidden. Learning a new set of cognitive skills can help a person change their views from those of pessimistic tendencies to optimistic ones.

"Learned optimism is not a rediscovery of the 'power of positive thinking.'"⁴ It is not a "Pollyanna" view of the world or life's events, but rather a skill that can be developed with intention and understanding, deliberately moving from a "learned helplessness attitude" by using the power of "non-negative thinking." "

⁴ Ibid, p. 15

Learned helplessness is the giving up reaction to events, a quitting response resulting from a belief that what I do doesn't matter. *Explanatory style* is the manner in which you habitually explain to yourself why events happen. It is the great modulator of learned helplessness."⁵

Seligman suggests there is a style of explanation that you use to describe life's events. It isn't confirmed with just one incidence of explanation, rather a pattern of explanation that occurs with many events. He uses permanence, personalization, and pervasiveness as different styles of seeing causes. He discusses the concept of how we have habituated our explanatory style. It is more than just what we say and how we say it.

It is more than just the words coming out of your mouth and the tone of voice. It is the thought pattern(s) behind the language you speak and relates to how you view yourself and your place in the world.

It comes back to childhood beliefs that were reinforced about whether you are were told you were good or bad, deserving or undeserving, valuable or undervalued, and many other 'opposites.' These learned characteristics of yourself, through which you view and filter the world and yourself, determine your proclivity toward optimism or pessimism. Since they were learned, they can be changed.

Permanence:

It is about time. Using words like *always* and *never* indicates there is an underlying belief that this bad or negative situation will last forever. *Forever* is a pessimistic attribute when it is attributed to a negative situation. Words like *sometimes* or *recently*, or even *today* indicates a short term or soon to be ended bad situation or event.

If the event or situation is a "good" or positive event, the pessimist will not believe it is permanent. In this case, they will use the temporary words such as "Today, I am lucky." The optimist will view the good situation as permanent with such phrases as "I'm always lucky."

Pervasiveness:

It is about space. Seligman describes pervasiveness as specific or universal. "Some people can put their troubles neatly into a box and go about their lives even when one important aspect of it – their job, for example, or their love life – is suffering.

Others bleed all over everything. They catastrophize. When one thread of their lives snaps, the whole fabric unravels. It comes down to this: People who make *universal* explanations for their failures give up on everything when a failure strikes in one area.

People who make *specific* explanations may become helpless in that one part of their lives, yet march stalwartly on in the others."⁶

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism, How to Change your Mind and your Life*, p. 46

The optimistic explanatory style for good events is the opposite for bad events. This means that the optimist views good events as pervading all aspects of their lives. The pessimist will tend to view positive events as limited to just one aspect of their lives.

Personalization:

This final aspect of explanatory style and personalization can be either internal or external. When bad events happen, you can either blame yourself (internal) or others (external). Blaming oneself can lead to low self-esteem, worthlessness, sense of little talent, and feeling the sense of being unlovable.

It is easy to overrate this dimension. This explanatory style controls how you *feel* about yourself. The other explanatory styles determine what you *do*. This style doesn't mean you don't own up to the responsibility you have in the control over what you do. This means there has to be an internal style when assessing blame. And this must be balanced with the other two explanatory styles so that responsibility isn't overdone. There is no need to take on the whole, negative world over just one situation.

Seligman mentions learned helplessness. He discusses it as a very real situation for anyone, especially in times of failure. It is the length of time it takes for someone to overcome the helpless feeling that indicates pessimism or optimism.

If the feeling lasts for longer than two weeks, there is an underlying pessimism that can create both short term and long term problems. It can lead to depression. Self-esteem begins to suffer and it can become more and more difficult for the pessimist to change their beliefs.

In a study done with depressed patients, it was discovered that drugs and cognitive behavioral therapy were both effective treatments. The active ingredient in the cognitive behavioral therapy was to change ones' style from pessimistic to optimistic. "This means cognitive therapy specifically works by making patients more optimistic. It prevents relapse because patients acquire a skill they can use again and again without relying on drugs or doctors. Drugs relieve depression, but only temporarily; unlike cognitive therapy, drugs fail to change the underlying pessimism which is at the root of the problem."⁷

Pessimism does have one advantage. It provides a person with a keener sense of reality. The pessimist tends to see too much reality. Dr. Paul Pearsall thinks that depressed people deal with reality all the time. They keep their negative picture in full view all the time. They never take a break. A release into humor or fantasy can be helpful in gaining a new perspective in reality. Balance is important.

Learning to become more optimistic and to enhance the skill begins with viewing life's events as ABC's. Adversity sets upon us. This starts the cognitive, or thinking, process, which rapidly congeals into beliefs. These beliefs may be conscious or unconscious. These beliefs and

⁷ Ibid, p. 81

thoughts are very active and have consequences. They are a direct cause of what we feel and do. They operate every day and all day in your life.

You can be helped tremendously why you recognize what your beliefs are. It is helpful to keep a journal and record thoughts, actions and emotions that occur with negative events. Do the same with positive events.

When you see your beliefs written out, you can then learn to deal differently with your pessimistic thoughts and attitudes. You can use disputation, (arguing with yourself) distraction, and distancing or, as mentioned earlier, humor and fantasy. It is helpful when employing these techniques to recognize that beliefs are just simply that – beliefs.

They may or may not be based on facts. (Usually not based in Truth. Many of your beliefs are diametrically opposed to one another. As discussed in earlier sessions, you are neuroplastic and therefore, your beliefs can be changed.

Once the belief is changed, thoughts and actions are affected and they become changed. Distraction can be used on a physical level to move away from the undesired thoughts. All of this leads to a new manner of thinking and allows new ways of explanatory style.

Theory of Hardiness - Suzanne Kobasa

"A team of behavioral scientists at the University of Chicago, led by psychologists Suzanne Kobasa and Salvatore Maddi, studied a group of 200 business executives at Illinois Bell Telephone Company who were subjected to enormous stresses during the AT&T divestiture. Even before the divestiture, stress was a factor; so many executives had experienced heart attacks by the age of 50 that the company actually had installed a cardiac unit in its corporate headquarters!

Half of the executives in the study reported numerous symptoms and health problems and half did not. Yet they were subjected to the same job stress; what made the difference?

Kobasa and her colleagues found major psychological differences between the two groups. Those who stayed healthy judged their stressors differently and responded to them differently than the illness-prone group.

The healthy individuals possess what psychologists called a capacity for 'optimistic cognitive appraisal' meaning they had a way of 'seeing the cup half-full rather than *half-empty*.' When stressful events occurred, they did not regard them as the end of the world but as a natural and inevitable part of their lives. This allowed their bodies to respond to stress differently, averting injurious biochemical response. In effect, these people could control their bodies' reaction to stress. They also interpreted stress differently by regarding it as a *challenge*, an opportunity to learn, grow, and become a wiser, better manager.

Not only were the healthy executives deeply involved in their work, they had a strong *commitment* to their families and to life in general off the job. Kobasa and her team this identified the "3 Cs" - *control, challenge and commitment* - as the key factors behind the hardy personality that remains healthy under stress."⁸

Blair Justice, in his book Who Gets Sick - Thinking and Health, says "the sense of control is largely a belief." It is not the power of controlling people and circumstances; rather it is the attitude that whatever comes up can be dealt with. Even in dire circumstances - war, torture - when a sense of control is retained, people maintain health.

Aaron Antonovsky calls this a "sense of coherence" that flows from an inner certainty or faith about one's place or role in life.

Complete your day, release it, and wake up inspired.

⁸ Larry Dossey, *Meaning and Medicine*, p 66-67