

Healing Hearts

Healing, Consciousness & Wellbeing News

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HEALING HEARTS

Edited by Suzanne King, *Reiki Energy for Life*

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"*There is no way to happiness; happiness is the way,*" stated revered Buddhist monk Thich Naht Hanh, one of the most influential mindfulness teachers of our times. By this he meant that many of us are constantly in a cycle of wishing and wanting. Yet if we can just 'be' then happiness can always reside in us, no matter what conditions are present.

Training the brain to be happier and learning just to 'be' is the focus of this edition. We learn from science and local identities who discuss happiness from their perspective. Alice Hansen of the Wild Wellness Method explains how nature is fundamental to our happiness. Paul Kelly teaches us that there are ways to negotiate adversity, and move forward with grace, with your spirit intact, and Ivan Zwart explains how to find the happy stuff in his book 'Finding Happy Ground'.

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So time to dive in - and grin!

Editor's Letter

Turn your face towards the sun and the shadows will fall behind you - Maori proverb

Happy New Year and welcome to 2023 which I hope is filled with joy, fulfillment and happiness.

Indeed, 'holding on to happiness' is this edition's food for thought. To most of us, if happiness was a creature it would be mythical; camouflaged in the shadows, fleetingly running into the sunshine to tease us before slipping back to its secret hideout. So how to make friends with happiness, and make it your constant companion before it slips away?

In preparing for this edition, I've reflected on what exactly defines my 'sweet spot' in the happiness and contentment stakes. I wonder too how much time and attention people attribute to happiness in their daily lives? So maybe that's a good start for the beginning of this year; coming to understand what makes you happy and then striving for the happiness 'sweet spot' in your life.

For me, I think I'm pretty lucky, having inherited my father's happy disposition. (I would like to add 'and happy whistle' but apparently my whistle doesn't tend to make other people happy ...can't imagine why). Nonetheless, apart from having a fairly good dose of inner happiness, on reflection, I think my equilibrium comes down to a combination of central themes being space, creativity (through writing), connection and reiki. So time to walk, create, connect, love, laugh and help others by reducing their pain and anxiety. So that's my happiness 'sweet spot' but each to their own. Your truth, your happiness, might mean something completely different. The main thing is to 'batten down' what actually makes you happy and not only striving for that, but also, just 'being' that - being the embodiment of happiness.

Contemplating what happiness means to you might for example involve tapping into your generosity of spirit, finding ways to help others or becoming more spiritually connected or striving to do something that you've always dreamed about. According to the World Happiness Foundation the following core pillars relate to happiness: freedom to be yourself; the opportunity to expand and evolve your consciousness and promoting your curiosity through exploration. To build awareness around concepts of happiness, the Foundation urges you to increase your physical and emotional wellbeing by tuning into the largest happiness event on the planet. The World Happiness Week Fest (17-26 March 2023) will feature hundreds of happiness leaders via digital summits and webinars (refer page 11 for details).

If you are reading this and feel like happiness to you lives on the other side of the Universe - then firstly, I hope that you are getting the support you need. I also hope that some of the articles in this edition work to lift your spirits a little. Certainly, the interview with Paul Kelly is inspirational. Personally, I've felt honoured over the past four years to have been invited into Paul's life as a reiki practitioner and to have had an opportunity to witness his resilience, smile, twinkly eyes and good humour. I think all readers of *Healing Hearts* will find he exudes wisdom on the subject of happiness, and beyond.

So I hope the interviews and articles in this edition inspire you to find ways to 'light yourself up' this year.

Best wishes,

Suzanne King
Reiki VII Practitioner
Reiki Energy for Life

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Wellness in the Wilds of Tasmania



Alice Hansen (right) pictured with surfing legend Layne Beachley
Photo Courtesy: Wild Wellness Method

Interview with Alice Hansen of 'Wild Wellness Method'

About Alice: Alice is the founder of the 'Wild Wellness Method' and 'Tailored Tasmania' which provides clients with unique wellness opportunities in magnificent wild and beautiful locations across Tasmania. Through her packages, clients can be tutored by talented practitioners, breathe in the beauty of nature, and discover lifelong wellness practices.

Alice also carries her love of Tasmania's precious natural environment and distinctive fauna and flora into her writing. Her natural ability as a talented writer (as well as her studies at the University of Carolina), have led to a freelance writing career.

Apart from writing for magazines and organisations, she is also the author of a range of best-selling children's books – Pablo the Penguin, A Devilish Tale and Tassie Devils and Marshmallows - and Tailored Tasmania guides on where to eat, play and stay across the island. Through her writing therefore, Alice is teaching the importance of love and respect for our beautiful natural environment and showing how immersing yourself in nature can help to instill a lifetime of wellness habits.

Alice, what inspired you to start 'Wild Wellness Method'?: I had always walked in the wilderness and written a lot about Tassie when I was working for Tourism Tasmania, but beyond that, I realised the power of the wilderness and connection to others through my own struggles and journey. My issue was drinking and I had been to rehab, but like me, I found a lot of people weren't getting better. I had found the Wim Hof breathing method which was powerful for me, but really nature was my natural healer. Walking in nature, especially in Tassie; that's when my healing started.

Around that time I thought "I'm going to go to the best health retreat in the country" but I was incredulous when I couldn't find a retreat here. Tassie should be the epicentre of wellness! So I decided to share with people what type of wellness experiences had worked for me. Since then, it's been a beautiful journey of connecting with other like-minded people, like Piet Blokker of *Stay Koel* and Andy Crawford of *Walk on kunanyi*.

How do you think Wild Wellness Method helps people? The foundation for wellness starts with nature as it is our beautiful, natural surroundings which provides peace, calm and healing. Then I've added in experts i.e. to instruct on breath-work and cold-water immersions. I also see the value in writing about our experiences as a journal becomes a portal to record how you are feeling - the elation - while it's still fresh in your mind. On top of that, the shared experience is very special. You might be part of an eclectic group, but in no time at all people relax and find the strength of the group to share stories. So the group bonding part is very special.

Just one day's activities leaves people nourished in mind, body and spirit. A day with us provides an opportunity to connect - with nature, other people and yourself – and provides space for you to connect with your inner child. Also, a lot of places we go, there's no reception, so people are forced to tune into themselves and to talk to each other. People can just be free to be themselves, which is all very joyful and liberating.

[continued next page]

Interview with Alice Hansen, Wild Wellness Method continued



Group pictured at waterhole kunanyi during filming of *Well Traveller* Tasmanian episode Photo courtesy: Wild Wellness Method

Do you think wellness opportunities in the wild are becoming more popular? Absolutely. For example, I was thrilled to have been approached by the producers of the *Well Traveller* series on Channel 10. We've only just finished shooting the episode on kunanyi with a group of 13 people including a fire-fighter and Tommy Windsor, who has done a lot of work in the mental health space. Hosted by 7-time World Champion surfer Layne Beachley, it sure was a special day out where everyone hopped into the waterhole and some seriously interesting 'wild calls' filled the mountain air!

How does a group react to Wild Wellness Method activities? Like the *Well Traveller* group we hosted on kunanyi, people don't know each other at the beginning of the day. So to help us unwind and relax, our guide led us through a 'Breathe for Joy' practice when we arrived at our beautiful waterhole. That really loosened everyone up. Everyone supports each other and there's this powerful collective experience. People find they may not have taken the plunge in a freezing waterhole or in an ice bath, but as a group, they become more empowered. And at the end of the day, when everyone is huddling around the fire, there's a lot of laughter.

Why do you think immersing yourself in nature is so healing? Nature provides a beautiful way to slow down and get you in touch with your senses and helps your body to stop and check-in. Particularly doing breath-work on the mountain. It's such a magical place to sit. Suddenly you feel far more in tune with the sound of the river. People come alive and start to ask things like 'is the sky brighter?' People are surprised by how much they slow down and that is so important, as our daily lives are full of stimuli.

What do you think stays with people long after their experience?: Being immersed in nature, the quiet. Many magical, spontaneous, unexpected and joyful moments can happen when we are just walking quietly, being with nature. Also, people find they have tapped into their resilience; particularly with regard to the ice-baths and mountain waterholes. There's a sense of 'If I can do that, I can face other challenges that come up in life.' Seeing people find their inner strength is a lovely thing to witness.

What is your 'take-away' message for readers to consider?: Not to overlook the beaches, rivers and forests when it comes to healing. Nature puts everything into perspective. People start to question why they are hurrying in their lives. Also nature quietsens the mind and in those moments of stillness, you can tap into what your body truly needs. Stillness allows you to embody simple joy and I think joy should be a feature of our daily lives.

Channel 10's *Well Traveller* Tasmanian episode aired on 18 December 2022. To view the episode at any time, visit:

<https://www.welltraveller.com.au>

The Wild Wellness Method has put together a range of unique experiences. Visit the website for more information on day trips, courses and there's even a Free Mini Course on offer.

Email: alice@tailoredtasmania.com
Website: <https://www.tailoredtasmania.com>
Website: <https://www.wildwellnessmethod.com>



Laughs all round on kunanyi
Photo Courtesy: Wild Wellness Method



Paul Kelly pictured at a yoga school, India 2015

Finding Happiness Amidst Adversity

Interview with Paul Kelly on sustaining happiness

About Paul Kelly: I'm a born and bred Tasmanian. I graduated from RMIT with a degree in Communications and have had various stints in journalism. Later I became a yoga instructor after spending five months in India studying at various yoga schools. In 2015 I was given the devastating diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease (MND) which has a prognosis of just a few years and is rapidly disabling. Since then, I've been on a long journey of exploration in health, healing and indeed happiness in the face of disease and disability. Recently, I was involved in managing my father's (John Kelly's) campaign for Lord Mayor and Councillor of Hobart City Council.

Paul, you're such a bright spark, radiating happiness. What do you think sustains your happiness amidst adversity? Look, I think it's important to note that I'm perched on a mountain of privileges. Everything from having a home in Australia, the social support I receive, the technology of today, the education that I've received and so, so many other things that play a significant role in much of the happiness that I lay claim to. However, I will confess that I never would have thought that having been struck with MND and all that comes with it, that I would be able to find as much happiness as I have in its midst. Having MND is a situation that has the potential to destroy you with despair. Despair for the relentlessly ensuing disability, despair for having your life turned upside-down, and after all of that, despair for having to face your death. Honestly, prior to having MND, I always had thought that I would rather be dead than put up with a disease like that. So finding sanity, and indeed being able to find happiness on this path, has been and probably will continue to be a challenging process, but it is one I have got better at over time.

I think a big part of that is that I have generally taken the perspective that there is something to be salvaged. That there can be purpose and meaning in it, that all is not lost, and that there is opportunity in it. Other than that, I have been very devoted to self care. Good diet, sleep, exercise as well as meditation and other stuff to keep me mentally and emotionally buoyant.

So your technology is one of the things that contributes to your happiness? So the eye gaze has been a massive godsend, for me and for so many others no doubt. This is a gadget that basically tracks your eye movement and enables you to use a computer in the event that you are not able to use your hands to do so. We use computers and the internet for so many things; not only to communicate but also to organise our lives, to learn and for entertainment. So having an eye gaze opens that all up to someone in my situation.

I had a period of about a year where I wasn't really able to use a regular computer and I wasn't yet using the eye gaze. My life was definitely more limited at that point. So now I've got the eye gaze and all of a sudden I am able to write again, trade shares, do research and online shopping. I can contact people around the world and in recent times, helped my dad with his campaign for Hobart City Council. So the eye gaze is enormously empowering and I really don't know where I would be without it.



Paul Kelly using new eye gaze technology, with his father, Hobart City Councillor John Kelly

Interview with Paul Kelly continued

The biggest increase it has had on my happiness though is being able to converse with people more effectively. The most devastating of all my disabilities is the difficulty I have talking. Not being able to communicate and express yourself is crushing and impairs so much of life. But having the eye gaze means that I can do a pretty good job of getting myself understood. Being able to have a decent conversation with a friend is one the best and happiest things in life.

Would you say that happiness is a mind-set and that any adversity can be overcome? I think happiness is more than just a mind-set. It is more of a by-product of many things. As for adversity, I don't think all adversity can be overcome, but it can be negotiated. Unfortunately, some of life's afflictions are irreversible or unavoidable, however there are typically ways for us to move forward with grace and our spirit intact.

How would you recommend people start to set up the foundations of happiness, to access greater calm and peace, which in turn provides a greater sense of wellbeing and joy? There really is no 'one' size fits all' however, a few things that I have found really helpful are:

- **Having a regular practice of gratitude:** It is the norm to be focused on everything that is wrong. It pays to balance it out by deliberately finding what it is you are grateful for and consciously cherishing it for a moment.
- **Cold water exposure:** It is easy to talk about being resilient, but how can we actually develop that trait? I fell in love with cold water exposure a few years ago, ie taking a cold shower or an ice bath. There is now a chunk of scientific data showing its benefits, and I have really appreciated its effects on me like improved mood, energy and better able to tolerate difficulty in whatever form it comes. When you're showering, you may as well make it a cold one.
- **Connect socially:** We regulate ourselves best when we are with other people. While there is nothing wrong with a bit of 'me' time, it is important to have social connection, as we are hardwired for it.
- **Get focused:** We are happiest when we are focused on something. Various studies have shown that it is not so much what you are doing but rather your level of focus that determines how happy you are. We don't need fireworks or celebrations to make us happy. Just pick up a book, play a game, find work that keeps you focused which then limits the amount of 'mind wandering' time.



Paul in one of his 10-20 minute morning ice baths

I know you meditate too. Would you say meditation has opened up new frontiers of happiness? I had practiced meditation prior to MND. I think one of the silver linings of my situation is that I have been given the time to really explore the domain of meditation further. There are many ways to meditate. Prayer, contemplation, just observing nature; it is a very broad term. I have experimented with guided meditations, Vipassana meditation, yoga nidra and various other styles, and I have gradually developed my own personalised combination of all of it. The value of it I think is born out fairly well by scientific inquiry; being a generalised improvement in health and wellbeing is the norm. For me, I really appreciate it as a way to help reset and vitalise myself, but also as a way to explore feelings, ideas and my mind generally. I would say that my sense of intuition and self awareness has also improved because of it.

So, happiness in summary: I gave up pursuing happiness a long time ago. It was too ephemeral, too inconsistent and temperamental. Instead I settled on a dedication to harmony and service in some form. **Ironically, I have been happier as a result.**

Gratitude & Grounding - Foundation for Happiness



Interview with Ivan Zwart, author of 'Finding Happy Ground'

About Ivan: Ivan has a doctorate in Political Science from the University of Tasmania and works as a community engagement expert. Between 2013-2021, Ivan and his wife Danielle (who has a psychology degree), ran their business 'Happy Ground' in Hobart. Here Ivan developed and taught Happy Ground Wellbeing Programs to private clients, corporate and government clients like Corrections Officers, State Service Employees and teachers.

His courses later became encompassed within his book *'Finding Happy Ground: A Practical Guide to Hope and Happiness'*. The book features over 40 practical exercises and guidance on how to find happiness and contentment. Since travelling overseas and returning to Hobart, he has focused on a revised edition of his book and will restart teaching community groups in 2023.

What brought you to develop your courses and write your book? I was fortunate to have had a great upbringing in South Hobart but then I went through about a 15 year period where I struggled due to my parents' respective illnesses. So when I was 21 years old, mum was diagnosed with dementia (and she was only in her 50's at the time), and it was difficult to watch her battling the disease for 10 years. Then four years before she died, dad was diagnosed with cancer. So I was young and I saw how they both suffered before they passed away, and then my mental health started to suffer. It sort of started when I was 23 years old and I developed chronic fatigue. As I say in the book, after dad died, I had a manic episode and was diagnosed with bipolar and depression. So I have the background to understand what it is like to suffer and I have also learned how to find my way back to happiness. So I wanted to share that understanding with others. It was 2013 when I started my business and when I started researching and writing about happiness. I already had the capacity to lecture, so I knew I was on the right path, helping people. I just didn't want people to suffer and I think a lot of suffering can be avoided.

What did people learn in your courses? My happiness courses were made up of 2 hour sessions over 10 weeks and featured breathing exercises, body scanning and heart meditation. I found through my own experiences, that you are often told to improve your thinking but I learned that it is important to improve your feeling first. Once you are feeling better then you are more liable to learn about tips to retrain your brain towards happiness, because you are in a better place to receive that type of information. So heart meditation is a beautiful exercise as it focuses on the centre of peacefulness and joy in your body. Through heart meditation exercises you can improve the feelings of gratitude and love for others and relax. I also taught mindful walking and grounding exercises which help build gratitude for the earth, and then that flows on to the people around you.

What would you say is a critical learning when it comes to achieving happiness?: That you need to take some responsibility for your own happiness. Also, that happiness is not about feeling constant elation or an excited type of happy. A happy human is both 'happy' and 'grounded', because when you feel grounded, you feel peaceful and content. If you are content, that's a nice place, and from there you can interact better with others.

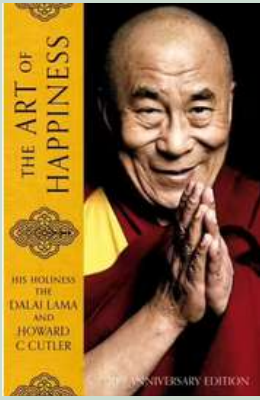
For more information about Happy Ground Wellbeing contact Ivan:

Email: ivanzward17@gmail.com

To purchase 'Finding Happy Ground', go to:

<https://www.amazon.com.au/Finding-Happy-Ground-practical-happiness/dp/098763500X>





20th Anniversary Edition
of 'The Art of Happiness'
by His Holiness the
Dalai Lama & Howard
C. Cutler

Life Mission = Happiness

Training the Brain to be Happier

Can you train yourself to be happier? His Holiness the Dalai Lama has spent a lifetime teaching and encouraging people to be happier, and one of the ways to do this is to practice new ways of thinking; to literally retrain your brain. Positive conditioning can come about by steering away from actions, words and thoughts which are negative and training yourself to think thoughts that provide the grounds for happiness to sprout and flourish. The Dalai Lama reiterated in *The Art of Happiness* (book authored by Howard C. Cutler) that it is possible to train the brain to think in different ways, which builds whole new neural networks. Indeed an entire Global Joy Summit recently focused on ways to overcome immense hardship and build joy within our hearts.

Neuroplasticity has been heralded over the last few decades as a great leap forward in neuroscientific discovery (refer *The Brain that Changes Itself* by Dr Norman Doidge, M.D.). Dr Titus Chiu, one of the world's leading neurologists, is passionate on the subject of the capacity to rebuild new neural pathways. He has at least one thing in common with His Holiness the Dalai Lama – both are on a life mission, teaching people that they can lead happier, healthier lives, through retraining the brain.

According to Dr Chiu, if a person is suffering from depression, brain fog, or anxiety for example, there are ways to achieve a brighter, happier future. These core elements include firstly getting to the core issue of why a person is suffering then working out a treatment plan which incorporates healing the brain on a physiological, chemical and emotional level. This will often include treating the gut, as your gut biome is inextricably linked to the health of your brain (refer article page 8).

Yet even amidst these scientific advances, if you are suffering from debilitating, looping, negative thought patterns or you're swamped by grief or struggling with anxiety leaving you sleep deprived, just being told to 'think happy thoughts' can seem too simplistic. Buddhists spend a whole lifetime striving to understand the basis of happiness and cultivating joy, so retreating from negative thought patterns isn't easy.

The pathways to happiness can seem like they weave through an endless maze of twists and turns. The big question is how to navigate the maze to emerge into the light, to find wondrous beautiful moments that are lying there, waiting to be discovered. Is it possible to even find the path marked 'Happiness - This Way' and find a way to breathe and just be?



Kristen Neff PhD,
Founder Center for
Mindful Self-Compassion

For Buddhists, finding contentment and building a life around loving kindness and compassion brings about immense joy. Indeed eminent scholar Kristen Neff PhD, has spent the last twenty years studying the Buddhist psychology of self-compassion and how these practices can help us all to learn how to support and ground ourselves in joy. Self-compassion therefore becomes a 'big ticket item' in the happiness stakes. Apart from self-compassion there are many factors, like building blocks, that work to make up your own inner house of joy. The following articles present some of the nuanced ways in which we can start and end each day committed to supporting our happiness.

Cultivating Self-Compassion



Self-Compassion = Loving, Connected Presence = Joy

Kristen Neff PhD, Co-Founder of the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion, teaches that self-compassion is "giving ourselves the same kindness and care we'd give to a good friend".

In a recent interview for the Global Joy Summit (refer www.globaljoysummit.org) Dr Neff was asked if a self-compassion practice can help when we are feeling overwhelmed? She responded that "there are over 5000 studies on how powerful self-compassion is in reducing sorrow and depression and increasing our sense of happiness." According to Dr Neff, if we practice compassion for ourselves and others, the reward centres of your brain are activated. It is important however to differentiate self-compassion with self-pity. Self-pity is isolating, pulling you inwards, making you feel alone, vulnerable and out of your depth. Self-compassion on the other hand is warm and embracing. It is outwards flowing, allowing space for communication and allows you to feel safe. Through connection, talking and being with people, sharing your problems, we allow ourselves to be part of humanity. Dr Neff highlighted that "kindness, common humanity and mindfulness equals a loving, connected presence." From this understanding, we can move from being self-compassionate, to feeling a loving, connected presence to moving yourself towards joy.

Dr Neff explained the following self-compassion practice which provides a way for you to find peace, comfort and respite from difficulties that you may be experiencing.

Close your eyes, notice that you are aware, you are here, right here, right now. Think about a situation which is causing a challenge. You can allow yourself to acknowledge that this is a difficult experience and by doing this, you are opening your heart. It shows you understand that these types of feelings are part of being human and that everyone around you, everyone you know, would have experienced exactly the same types of feelings. We are therefore not isolated. This is a recognition that nothing is wrong with you. It's a part of life.

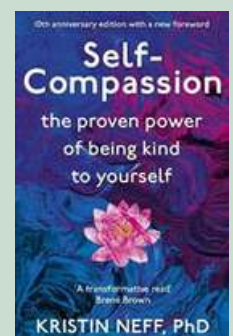
Once you have correlated your feelings with the experiences of others, you can then put your hands on your heart. Feel the warmth, comfort and support of your hands on your heart. Then add words of kindness - what you would have said to a friend in need, something like: "This will not last forever. This too will pass, so you can get through this." Then let go of the problem, and turn your attention inward, and feeling your hands on your heart, see if you can feel the loving presence within yourself. If you keep practicing this exercise you will become more attuned to feeling more connected to yourself, to your true loving nature.

The above was an example of 'tender self-compassion', which focuses on acceptance of ourselves and our emotions. Dr Neff also points out though that 'fierce self-compassion' is also very nurturing and protective. This is the self-compassion of speaking out, speaking your truth, drawing boundaries and taking action.

To learn more visit: <https://self-compassion.org>

Here you will find loads of free self-compassion and loving kindness guided meditations, a free test which indicates how isolated or self-compassionate you are, plus courses and a range of books available for purchase, including:

- 'Fierce Self-Compassion: How Women Can Harness Kindness to Speak-Up, Claim their Power and Thrive'
- Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself



How a good diet supports our mental health



Feeding our neurotransmitters

In recent years, science has proven that a healthy gut biome is essential to support mental health. A Mediterranean diet is considered to provide protections against depression as it features minimal processed food and is high in dark leafy greens (like spinach and kale) and fish which contains a high Omega-3 content.

Diet supports mental health as there is a flow-on effect between the gut biome and neurotransmitters in the brain. As these are the body's chemical messengers used by the nervous system to transmit messages between neurons, then the flow-on effect continues within the brain, affecting mood. Common neurotransmitters in the brain include dopamine (known for its 'feel good' or 'pleasure effect') and endorphins (known to generate feelings of euphoria).

Let's consider how increasing levels of dopamine work to provide an uplift in mood, motivation and enthusiasm. This can be done in various ways (i.e. going out in the sunshine, exercise, meditation and listening to music) and can also be generated through food. Here's the tricky part though – dopamine is produced regardless of the quality of food you eat. To avoid saturating the body with processed foods, sugar and fats (which can lead to binge-eating, addiction and on-set of diabetes) opting for a well-balanced diet (especially rich in the essential amino-acid Phenylalanine) will trigger dopamine, while also being kind to your waistline.

By not reaching for sugar-rich food, you are also being kind to yourself. As tempting as sugary treats are, the more sugar you eat, the more you crave. This is because although dopamine is being produced, the receptors in the brain aren't working as effectively (as opposed to triggers emanating from a Phenylalanine rich diet). As the conditions are not optimum, you end up craving more sugar, especially if you are stressed.

To find out more about how a diet which includes high-protein foods (i.e. eggs, dairy, meat, fish, tofu) triggers dopamine to feel pretty good about life, visit Dr Perlmutter's blogs and Optimal Living Dynamics, who have helpfully produced a *Free Grocery Shopping Guide for Optimal Brain and Mental Health*.

<https://www.optimallivingdynamics.com/subscribe/>

<https://bigboldhealth.com/news/immuno-rejuvenation/5-top-foods-for-your-mental-health/>

Reiki Natural Energy Healing

As one of the few Reiki VII professional practitioners in Australia, I always feel honoured to be able to assist my clients to ease their suffering. Clients often arrive looking tense, are distressed and/or in physical pain. Yet nearly two hours later they have achieved a place where they feel more emotionally and physically balanced. They leave in less pain, are more rested, relaxed and refreshed, and feel more positive and buoyant.



Reiki session on Hinsby Beach
Tasmania

This positive change occurs because reiki natural energy healing activates the parasympathetic nervous system (refer page 9). From an academic articles have been published on the value of reiki on wellbeing. For example, in December 2019 the *Journal of Alternative and Complimentary Medicine* (JACM) published an article entitled 'A Large Scale Effectiveness Trial of Reiki for Physical and Psychological Health'. The conclusion was that "significant improvements were observed for all outcome measures including ... pain ... anxiety, depression, and overall wellbeing."

For more information or to make an appointment contact *Reiki Energy for Life*:

Supporting our Parasympathetic Nervous System



Moving from anxiety to calm to joy

Introduction: Key to moving from anxiety and stress to a calmer, more joyful you, is to find ways to activate your parasympathetic nervous system (which encompasses 'rest and digest' responses). This means shifting away from sympathetic nervous system 'flight and fight' responses. To do this, there is a need to become more aware of what is called your 'vagal tone' which can be explained as follows.

The theory in a nutshell: Professor Stephen Porges' epic *Polyvagal Theory* has revolutionised how to apply an understanding of the branches of our nervous system to improve behavioural responses to stressors. These adaptive behavioural strategies can be used to shift people from sympathetic arousal responses of anxiety and fear to parasympathetic responses of calm. People who are feeling inundated by sympathetic responses are more likely to have a low vagal tone, whereas someone who can manage their anxiety and shift away from stressors more easily, are known to have a high vagal tone.

Striving for the 'holy grail': Key to shifting out of sympathetic responses is to soothe the vagus nerve and learning how to access the ventral vagal part of the parasympathetic nervous system. The ventral vagal is therefore the place you want to be. This is the place that allows your mind and behavioural responses to rest in a state of calm. This is where you feel all is well with the world and you feel good about your place in the world.

So a great place to start is learning about your vagus nerve (the tenth cranial nerve) which starts in the brain stem and wanders into your face, eyes, ears, throat, heart and lungs, and goes all the way down to your diaphragm. There are easy practices that soothe the vagus nerve which places you into a calmer state. There are also easy mindfulness and visualisation practices which allow you to activate the ventral vagal part of the parasympathetic nervous system (refer next page).

But how do I know if I'm in sympathetic or parasympathetic?: To start building a practice to activate the ventral vagal and place yourself in a calmer state, you need to start becoming aware of how your body feels. If for example you find it difficult to get off the couch or out of bed, even on a beautiful day, according to Polyvagal Theory, that's the dorsal vagal talking, where your body has gone into a 'freeze' response.

So being aware of your lethargy, and also where pain and tension are residing in your body, can tell you a great deal about whether you are living in sympathetic or parasympathetic nervous system. As explained on the next page (refer section on the psoas muscle) if you feel tension and pain in your hips, that means you are storing stress. Stress can also manifest as a tightness or constriction elsewhere in the body i.e. in your gut, in your heart or throat.



Traditional Chinese Medicine and qigong provide a foundational understanding of how stress or grief or any number of negative emotions become manifest in the organs (refer October 2022 edition of *Healing Hearts*). For example, the liver is known to be vulnerable to anger or frustration and prolonged tightening of the gut has the potential to cause inflammatory conditions such as an irritable bowel. Holding on to stress therefore can cause a myriad of health-related issues.

So what to do? See a counsellor, psychologist, hypnotherapist or reiki practitioner to help you access your parasympathetic nervous system, or you can start to learn to return to the prized ventral vagal state by yourself.

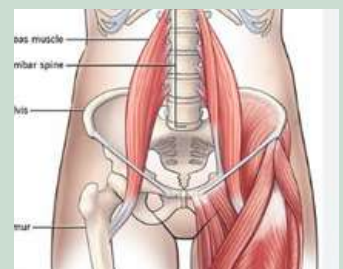
Supporting your Parasympathetic Nervous System continued



Exhale longer than the inhale can help to reduce anxiety

Bringing awareness to your body: Events throughout the day can set your mood and behavioural responses on a rollercoaster ride. To put a brake on your sympathetic nervous system responses, there are techniques you can use to get back to feeling 'all is well with the world and your place in it.' The key is to bring awareness to your body first. The next step is to allow a release of dopamine in the brain and this can be done by stimulating the vagus nerve. The following simple exercises can be easily moulded into your day, no matter how busy you are:

1. **Trace the vagus:** Run your index fingers along your eyebrows out across your temples to the back of the ears. Flatten your hands and move them down your throat and rest for a few moments at your heart (and repeat).
2. **Coming home to your body by just breathing:** There are many breathing practices to explore but one to start with, to reduce anxiety, is to inhale for 4 breaths and exhale for 7 breaths (or any number, as long as the exhale is longer than the inhale). Note however, that if someone is stuck in a dorsal vagal state (in a 'freeze' state) more activated breathing is preferable. To really master the art of breathing to reduce anxiety and calm the body, try qigong or Wim Hof breathing practices. There are plenty of free YouTube videos available like Qigong Master Lee Holden's '*Heart to the Sky*' exercise. Alternatively, Wim Hof breathing techniques might be for you. Either way, these practices will make you feel lighter and more joyful (and maybe have you grinning from ear to ear)!
3. **Mindful exercises:** Turn your attention to the colours and space before you, the trees, the air on your face, the beauty of nature (and maybe combine that technique with the above breathing practices). Mingyur Rinpoche (refer back page) suggests you listen to sounds like the wind in the trees or birds. You could add a mantra or even make up a few words like 'I'm fine' and recite that silently.
4. **Relax the psoas muscle:** This is our deepest core muscle, which tightens to ready the body to flee or fight. Stress will therefore reverberate through the body, causing the psoas to permanently tighten. There are many ways to release the psoas, including yoga poses, but a simple exercise is to lie on your back, put your knees up, feet flat on the floor. Perhaps place a pillow under your knees, then breathe, relax, focus attention on your belly and remain doing so for about 25 minutes. You could even combine this with a guided meditation or a mindfulness exercise.



Location of the psoas muscle (Cleveland Clinic)

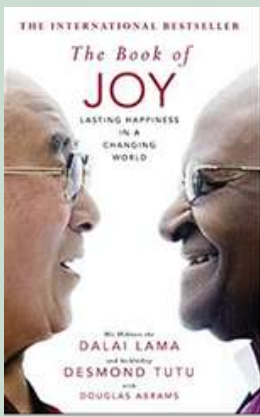
To find out more about the parasympathetic nervous system, refer to the below links. Here you will find the free YouTube video of the interview between Sounds True Tami Simon and Melissa Brown, who has a Degree in Medical Anthropology, and works as a Somatic Counsellor and Hellerwork Structural Integration Practitioner. The interview was designed as an introduction to Melissa's audio course '*How to Nourish your Parasympathetic Nervous System*'.

Website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KHSuUsVAXA>

Website: <https://www.islandhellerwork.com>

Website: <https://embodiedroots.com>

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1. Qigong Master Lee Holden's 3-Minute Qi Gong Exercise for Less Stress: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9_D-7hj6iU
 2. Wim Hof Method Guided Breathing for Beginners: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BNejY1e9ik>
 3. Positive Psychology's Mindfulness Exercises: <https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-exercises-techniques-activities/>



Finding Happiness in Troubled Times

How Nobel Prize Winners Retrain their Brain to be Happy

A joy-filled, uplifting and insightful documentary entitled '*Mission: Joy - Finding Happiness in Troubled Times*' will be available on Netflix in January 2023. The film was inspired by Douglas Abrams' book entitled '*The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*'. Both the book and movie trace the friendship between two Nobel Peace Prize winners - His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Reverend Desmond Tutu - and was filmed in 2015 (prior to the Reverend's death in 2021).

At the centre of their interaction and joyful banter is their answer to the question: How do we find joy in the face of life's inevitable suffering? Both spiritual leaders have known great adversity in their lives, yet they possess immense happiness. During the documentary we learn that although His Holiness the Dalai Lama lost his country at the age of 24 years and has been living in exile ever since, that he maintains a joyful outlook. This outlook emanates from cognitive reframing; a fundamental Buddhist psychology practice. This means that he doesn't hold on to resentment or bitterness, but reframes his mind, to look at things from a different angle. He teaches to think "how can I use this as something positive".

Similarly, Reverend Tutu had experienced extreme poverty, is known for fighting vast and embedded injustice as an inspirational anti-apartheid leader, and endured various bouts of cancer in his life. Even so, he stated that "you can overcome some of the most horrendous circumstances and emerge on the other side not broken" and that from there he has had an eagerness to spread kindness and compassion in the world. According to the Reverend, "the key to joy is to get in touch with your own natural compassion and find a way to live from there." In doing so, "joy is the reward of seeking to give joy to others." In summary, "suffering can be embittering or ennobling."

The documentary also highlights the work of Dr Sonja Lyubomirsky PhD, University of California Riverside, who has found in her studies that people are happier if they do acts of kindness. In turn, the person who performed the act of kindness experiences a positive change in their blood, they feel good and usually have more friends. They are therefore physically healthier, and therefore likely to live longer as they have better immunity. This contemporary finding accords with what the Dalai Lama has always known, that "taking care of others' wellbeing - that is ultimately how to fulfill a joyful, happy life."

For more information, or to purchase the 'Book of Joy' go to:

<https://www.amazon.com/Book-Joy-Lasting-Happiness-Changing/dp/0399185046>

<https://www.douglascarltonabrams.com/>

To watch the movie trailer, go to:

<https://www.missionjoy.org/film/>

World Happiness Week Festival (17-26 March 2023)



In 2021, the World Happiness Foundation brought World Happiness Week to over 10 million people. This colourful and educational experience (marketed as the most diverse and accessible happiness and wellbeing event on the planet) is coming again from 17-26 March 2023! Tickets to the online speaking events only cost USD\$8.99 and includes access to 150 talks by world experts and 30 online workshops.

The Agenda covers the following streams: workplace wellbeing, mental and physical health, positive education, sustainability, transformative technology and public policy and the economy. All proceeds from the event goes towards supporting projects and a teacher working in under-supported areas of Bhutan. The World Happiness Week events also work as a stepping stone to introduce you to the world of the United Nations University of Peace and the World Happiness Academy which conducts courses as diverse as Chief Happiness Practitioner, Positive Psychology Practitioner and Meditation and Mindfulness Teacher. For more information, go to:

<https://join.worldhappiness.foundation/en-fest-2023>

<https://worldhappiness.foundation/academy/>

Opting for Inner Joy and Contentment



Pursuing Inner Joy

Tsoknyi Rinpoche is a renowned and highly respected Tibetan Buddhist teacher and author of many books including: *Open Heart, Open Mind; Why We Meditate;* and *How Mindfulness Works*. The Rinpoche was interviewed recently during the Global Joy Summit and explained the difference between natural joy and 'attachment' type joy which leads us down the path to disappointment.

According to Tsoknyi Rinpoche, joy can be considered in three ways, being:

- Organic Joy = natural joy which could be viewed as an 'essence of self'
- Objective Joy = joy which results from an attachment to something (known as a selfish-based joy)
- Compassionate Joy = joy emanating from compassion

The Rinpoche explained that an 'objective' type of joy might seem exciting, and perhaps you might even consider this as lasting, permanent joy. Yet, eventually if joy is based solely around 'attachment', then we are setting ourselves up, because everything changes and the 'attachment' will not last forever. Just like an icecream; this type of joy just melts into disappointment. A true source of joy comes from within and has nothing to do with the external excitements that come along.

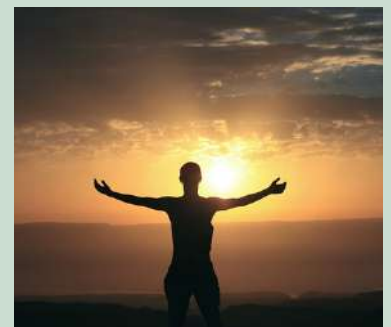
The Rinpoche suggests that to find ways to cultivate and contemplate natural inner joy, firstly say to yourself, "I am okay." If your feelings respond with, "no, I'm not okay," then that means you have disconnected from yourself. The next step is then to drop your thinking mind but still practice awareness. You can do this through mindfulness and meditation practices. By doing this you will get to know your subtle body and your inner essence love and joy, which is always residing within you.

For more information on Tsoknyi Rinpoche and to find out about his *Fully Being* meditation course, to go:

<https://tsoknyirinpoche.org/>
<https://fullybeing.org/>

Expanding Social Networks for Happiness (by Suzanne King)

Luckily I grew up on a property where I could feel the pulse of the land, commune with nature, and feel contented just to 'be'. I think being close to nature in my childhood (plus being an only child) allowed me to develop a deep gratitude, which I carry with me to this day. So from the inside out I can think of my inner joy as being predominately made up of gratitude. If I combine this feeling with my favourite qigong practice which encompasses a part where you express gratitude for everything you can think of - well, that's just bliss, right there (especially if practiced outdoors).



As I said in the Editor's Letter however, my happiness 'sweet spot' also relates to space, creativity, connection, relationships and reiki. So - that means happiness has also meant expanding beyond myself - which can take courage and commitment. Just like the old adage which says 'you need a village to raise a child', so too have I needed many others around me to support my endeavours. For example, in publishing my first book this month (*Spirits Over Time and Oceans*) I have needed the support of 'a village' to keep me moving forward (from my husband and friends, to writing professionals, an editor and publisher). In summary, I've found there is a great deal to be achieved by moving out of my comfort zone and being open to creative possibilities, new social networks and new opportunities. So maybe - if you join that craft club, bushwalking or kayaking club or 'bite the bullet' and dive in head first into that course you've longed to do - who knows what fabulousness is heading your way this year. All you have to do is take the first step and be open to new horizons and new friendly faces. Best wishes for a superb year ahead!

Courses

Joy of Living Course

The recent Global Joy Summit presented an interview with Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, who is renowned for integrating Buddhist practices with science and was the author of '*The Joy of Living: Unlocking the Secret and Science of Happiness.*' During the interview, the Rinpoche discussed joyful wisdom and ways to transform anxiety, panic and difficulty into opportunity. According to the Rinpoche you can transform panic into something positive. By making "friends with your panic", you can find a way to ascertain wisdom and becoming more purposeful. For more information, refer to the Rinpoche's many free YouTube videos and TED Talks.



Alternatively, the Rinpoche has a *Joy of Living* online course that you can do at your own pace. The course is delivered in 3 x modules, including: calming the mind, opening the heart and awakening wisdom. For more information go to:

Website: <https://joy.tergar.org/joy-of-living/>

To purchase Mingyur Rinponche's book, go to:

<https://www.amazon.com.au/Joy-Living-Unlocking-Science-Happiness/dp/0307347311>

The Best Year of Your Life Summit - Free Online Event (11 - 20 January 2023)



Alex Howard, Founder
of The Optimum Health
Clinic

Learn how to make 2023 the Best Year of Your Life - all for free!! Learn about life purpose and vision for the future, ending old habits and creating new ones, live with more vitality and flow and how to find more meaning and more joy in your life. Features interviews with close to 50 x world renowned experts on topics as diverse as conscious living to health and wealth creation. Speakers include:

- Self-Compassion expert Kristen Neff PhD
- Thomas Hübl PhD, Founder of Inner Science
- Daniel Siegel M.D., UCLA Clinical Professor of Psychiatry
- Fleet Maull PhD, Meditation Teacher, Mindset & Habit Change Coach
- Alex Howard, Founder of Optimum Health Clinic

<https://www.bestyear.life/>

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Dr Sue Morter

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- Lisa Garr - who (after a near death experience) rebuilt her brain by working on different levels of consciousness through visualisation techniques.

<https://quiz.youryearofmiracles.com>

April 2023 edition

- Living in harmony with nature
- Celebrating the centenary of Usui Reiki



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