

The Option Method Institute

Education based on the teachings of Bruce Di Marsico

www.ChooseHappiness.net

Guidance in Questioning

From

Monday Night Study Group, 1973

Bruce Di Marsico

Outline

- Even if you have to be unhappy in the future, you don't have to be unhappy about that now.
- Unhappiness about the possibility of being unhappy is no different than any other unhappiness.
- Not everything described as unhappiness is actually unhappiness.
- The simplest way to help someone be happier is to be happy with them.
- Your opinions about others happiness is fundamentally irrelevant to their happiness.

Introduction

In this talk, Bruce Di Marsico gives guidance to student therapists in working with people who have a very global view of unhappiness as permanent, pervasive and personal, such as “I’m unhappy about everything because that’s the way I am, and I will always be.”

His fundamental guidance is: Unhappiness about the possibility of being unhappy is no different than any other unhappiness. Even if you have to be unhappy in the future, you don't have to be unhappy about that now.

READINGS

Questioner: What do you do when somebody says “if I really feel good about myself, and I’m really happy, then it will change, and some magic will happen, and I will become unhappy.”

For informational purposes, first I would ask them if they are describing an actual experience of theirs: “has that happened before?” The next question might be “if something would ever happen, and you became unhappy, are you unhappy about that now?” “If something happens, you believe that you had to be unhappy about, why do you believe that?” If you decide that for some reason you just want to be unhappy, you are only in touch with your freedom, why would you want it to otherwise? “As long as you don’t want to be unhappy, would you? As long as you didn’t believe you had to, would you?”

Then they could get in touch with it that they could really have to be unhappy then, if that was the case. But why now? Do they want to be happier now? That’s the basic kind of thing you’ll always get to: they could be really happy now, and there is nothing now to be unhappy about. The feeling is: someday there may be something I will have to be unhappy about, and I don’t know what it is. And I don’t have any reason to believe that this would be so, so I want to cover myself. But the question is, even if that were so, “would you have to be unhappy now? And if that were so, couldn’t you know if then you had to be unhappy, you could be?” They may start talking about believing that they don’t want to be out of touch with themselves, that they don’t want to be unhappy when they should be. They can start to get in touch with their basic freedom, and just explore why they would be unhappy about the other things. And when it is reduced to “So your life would be unhappy about nothing else except some possible unhappiness that you didn’t know why”, you can address why they believe they would have to be unhappy about that now.

Questioner: I have had the most problems working through this kind of magic “I can’t get too happy, because I’ll pay for it.”

I never met anyone who didn’t believe in that adage. I wouldn’t try to get anyone to accept that it’s silly. You see, one thing we know is that they are believing that somehow they think using that frame of mind is going to help them. Ask, “why do you want to believe that? Why do you believe that, believing this would make you be happier?” And let them answer that.

Sometimes, it’s useful to truly work it all the way down, so that they aren’t unhappy about anything except the possibility of being unhappy, before addressing that. But in general, I see the belief that if you are happy, then you will be unhappy, as basically something you just work with like anything else. I mean I’ve had people say God made me unhappy, or the devil did, or evil spirits.

Questioner: Someone said, “I’m unhappy, because I’m afraid to be happy. Because if I’m happy, I know that I’m only going to get unhappy.”

Somehow it seems to me that you’re talking with your patients somehow about the nature of unhappiness. And once people come up with the reason of why do I get unhappy, *in general*, they come up with all kinds of magical answers to explain it. Question, “why do I have to be happy about a certain particular thing?” You didn’t identify what she was unhappy about. Ask, “what do you mean by happy?”

There’s so many things you could ask like, well “why do you believe that you should be unhappy because of some evil spirits? You mean that you didn’t want to be unhappy? Somebody made you unhappy? Where was the case where you didn’t want to be unhappy but somebody made you? *Who* made you?” When you’re into this general kind of hocus pocus magic kind of thing, they’re not talking about anything. They’re not talking about being unhappy -- there might even be no reason to believe that they *are* unhappy. There’s nothing more

happening. And then they say “I’m unhappy being unhappy and I’m unhappy that I could be made more unhappy”, you can ask

“what could you be made more unhappy about?” Or if they say “I’m not happy just about myself”, you can ask “what is it about your self that you’re unhappy about?” “How do you know if you’re unhappy” would be another question? A person says “I’m unhappy because I’m unhappy.”, and you ask “How do you know you’re unhappy? How do you know? How do you know it’s not indigestion? How do you know you’re unhappy? Do you want it to be unhappiness?”

Get particular. For example: Question: “Do you want to believe that you’re unhappy?” Response: “Yeah I just do believe it.” Question: “What do you mean by that? What do you feel bad about?” Response: “About everything. Well, for example, just everything.” Question, “Well for example just . . .”, okay. I’ve had with the cases of the people who were hallucinating, and believing that they were being made to do bad things-the devil is making them do it, or God is making them do that to be unhappy. But I would ask them things like “if were really happy, do you think this would last?” And they did not know. Just like that. “Do you think if you were really happy, God would be talking to you every night?”

Questioner: What keeps happening is that she keeps getting into story telling, and then I would keep bringing her back and tell her that’s fine but now what are you be unhappy about? I’m trying to get her out of the story telling and into working.

I ask “why are you telling me that?” There might be a chance for you to reaffirm why you are there -- if you are not understanding why a story is being said, just as with anything else, you ask “what do you mean?” If you don’t understand the connection, if you don’t see the relevance, if you don’t see how it’s an answer, you might ask them what does it mean? You might do the same thing with the story. “Why is it that you’re telling me this” “What are you trying to say about the story? What is it that you are unhappy about?” And she might try to explain to you what

she's unhappy about. And if she goes off into another story, then "I understand that he makes you unhappy, and I want to try to help you be happier": restate and reaffirm your purpose. And I don't know that you will continue to get stories, because it seems to me if you asked "why are you telling me?", you have to go somewhere with that, she'd have to tell you and she will tell you why she was telling you that. And if she went to another story, you would say to her well why are you telling me that? I'm not sure if you're answering my question -- why are you telling me that?"

You're not impinging on their freedom, they can go right on with their story, you're not stopping them, but somehow you're making it clear why you're there. If you want, you could say it quite clearly, "it's really okay that you tell me this, but I what I'm wondering is why? And you can tell me anything you want to tell me, but that's not why I'm interrupting you right now. Why I'm interrupting you is to find out why you want to tell me this." If you think that they are thinking that you're going to try and stop them, you could make it clear that you're not trying to stop them from telling you the story; they can feel perfectly free to tell you, you just want to know why.

Questioner: Often times when I ask a question, she'll counter with a question like "would you say it's normal?"

Ask, "Well, do *you* think it's normal?" You are able to find out the reason behind the question, just simply by saying, "well do *you* think so?"

They just don't know how you're going to help them. The way you help motivate them to want your help, is to just let them know as clearly as you can what you intend to do, then they can make a decision. "I'm here to try to help you, to try and find out what you're unhappy about. "When you discover why you are unhappy, you may find that some things that you have believed you have to be unhappy about, you may not, if you look at them more closely. I don't know, but

let's find out."

Even though they may come in to you week after week and complain to everybody else "why are they coming to you?", they expect you to really go out and do something about it. And if a person is very repressed, and they start getting angry, say "at least they have a way to express their anger", and they go on being angry, and angry, and angry, they stop being angry, and start crying, so now at least their able to be in touch with where it is really at. All behavior starts to change, and all the behavior that they weren't okay with starts to fall off, and then any behavior can be okay.

Questioner: Could you know if a person is really happier or not?

No. What does it mean? I guess the question is, why would you want to know? Why would you need to know? What difference does it make to you whether they get happy or they don't get happy, or if they get happy, whether you know it or not or whether it shows it or not. It might be an indication that someone may really need your patience to get happier, or at least to show their happiness.

Patients estimate their own happiness, and say "I'm getting better", or "I don't think I'm happier", or any such number of things. There was a case, in which anybody else would say that a patient had ended up regressed, he was absolutely a sheer mess by any worldly definition. And I just thought I'd say what I felt like saying. I said "I think you're better than you've ever been before", and he screamed, "what do you mean? How could I be? Look at me", I said, "that's why I think so." And then all kinds of things started falling away. I said, I think you're happy, and that was all that was needed.

Is it within the Option Method attitude? The question is, well do you have the Option Method attitude? I did. I don't know if you consider this actual therapy or not, but that wasn't my rationale – I was not trying to help them feel better or

anything, I was just saying where I was and what I felt. And I was perfectly prepared to say that “the reason I think you’re better is because I’m happier.”

I’ve taught you technique, I’ve told you to use the questions, and I said to you that they were models. The models spring from the Option Attitude.

In his way, he was asking – “do you think I’m better?”, and I was communicating “what you think matters, it all depends on whether *you* think you are happy or not”, and so I just thought that I would make what I thought totally irrelevant, and I figured the best way to do that would be to be totally honest, and to just say whatever it is I’m thinking, and me knowing that it’s totally irrelevant might make the difference, and would make the difference as long as I knew that what I was saying was totally irrelevant to where he was at. So I said that I think that you’re happier than ever, and that you’re a big actor, and he said he knew that and he smiled, and then he reached over to my wall, and knocked on it and said “help” and it just became a joke. Somehow he was telling me – “see through me”, at least that’s what I picked up, “if you can really help me, you should be able to see through me right now”, maybe something like that.

As long as my attitude is to do what I consider the best for who it is, whatever is going to follow from there will follow. I did notice that a few sessions later, He thinks of me more as an ally now. We have a little joke that sometimes we use, if somebody says “if such and such happens, I’m going to really be unhappy”, the joke is “you promise?” which then puts it back on ourselves.

Questioner: How do you handle the threat of physical violence?

It’s so very unthinkable to me, I just don’t believe it.

If you’re ever mugged or robbed, perhaps one of the worst things you could say to a person would be, “could you please not hurt me?” Because in that begging, is an

accusation that they are rotten really miserable people, who would be out to hurt you. If you treat people as if they are bad, as if they are robbers, as if they are evil, they will live up to that, they will hate you for the accusation.

If someone threatened me, I'd do whatever I thought I was best. I'd be sure to give them some satisfaction, I would let them think they were taking something, rather than giving it to them. "God bless you" is liable to get you punched or killed. You could simply not say anything, and then if you're asked a question, that attitude would come through whatever you decide to answer.

Questions for Reflection

No Questions

Meditation for the Week

- Not everything described as unhappiness is actually unhappiness.