

# **The Option Method Institute**

Education based on the teachings of Bruce Di Marsico

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**What is the Option Method?**

**How Unhappiness happens.**

**Why are people unhappy?**

From

**November 11, 1995 Lecture**

**Bruce Di Marsico**

## Outline

What is the Option Method?

- The Option Method has not been created to force anyone to be happy.
- The Option Method helps people examine why they believe they need to be unhappy.

How unhappiness happens:

- All people in all societies have always believed it was necessary to be unhappy
- The Option Method has shown us that people are unhappy to the degree to which they believe they need to be unhappy
- Human emotions do not exist separate from judgments.
- Unhappy emotions are a product of judgments.
- Unhappiness is learned.
- Emotional judgments are different than factual judgments

Why are people unhappy?

- “Bad” means “makes you unhappy against your will”
- People don't choose to be unhappy, but unhappiness doesn't happen to them, either.
- Two of the most basic unhappy beliefs:
  - Anyone like me would get unhappy about this
  - I am going to have to feel a way I don't want.
- People want to be happy insofar as they can stand it, and are willing to be unhappy insofar as they can afford it.

## Introduction

In this lecture, Bruce Di Marsico introduces the Option Method.

The Option Method helps people *who want to be happier* examine why they believe they need to be unhappy. It was not created to force anyone to be happy. It discusses how unhappiness is founded on the judgment that “this is, indeed, a reason to be unhappy”, and that people would not choose to be unhappy if they did not feel that they had to be.

Two of the foundations of this feeling of having to be unhappy are the beliefs that “Anyone like me would get unhappy about this,” and “I am going to have to feel a way I don’t want.”

## READINGS

### What is the Option Method?

One of the first things I want to tell you about the Option Method since everybody has some idea probably of what they think it's supposed to be is that that's okay, I'll try to correct any kind of misunderstandings there might be.

But let me start with the first one. The Option Method has not been created to force anyone to be happy. Nothing can force anyone to be happy; not even God. If God could make people happy he would have done it already. Okay; that's my first disclaimer.

Second, the Option Method is the second best method I know of for being happy. The first best method is simply to be happy. What the Option Method is for is to help people examine why they believe they need to be unhappy. The reason why I offer to help people to examine why they believe they need to be unhappy is the most controversial and the lynch pin of what the Option Method is.

The Option Method is based on this rationale--that people are only unhappy when they believe they need to be unhappy. So starting with that principle the Option Method now has a rationale why it would work and why there'd be any purpose to even using it. Why do people believe they need to be unhappy can be questioned.

See, if unhappiness is merely a belief then we can question that belief because it's merely a belief meaning – and when I say merely a belief, I mean that with hindsight you see. One of the things we know about beliefs is that while you're believing, you're believing that what you're believing is true. So you don't believe that you are believing, you believe you know something.

And just so, as we all assume, there had to be unhappiness in our life for this or for that, we weren't and we could never describe ourselves as merely believing.

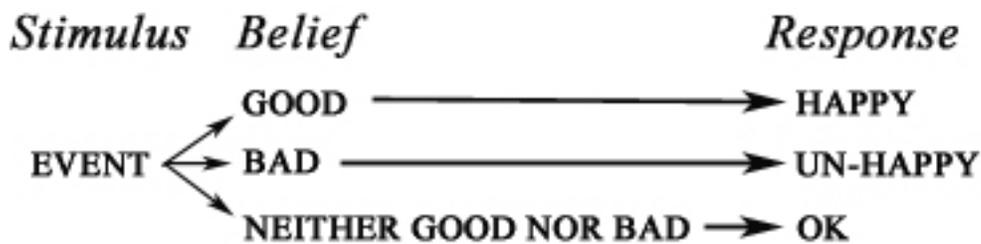
What – I can repeat what I said. We would never describe ourselves as merely believing that we have to be unhappy; because the moment we did that someone would say, 'well, don't be silly.' Because everybody has an opinion about what we should be unhappy about and what we shouldn't be unhappy about.

## How unhappiness happens

All people in all societies – all people in all societies and anyone that I knew of--but that isn't even necessary for me to go into--anyone you've ever known has always believed it was necessary to be unhappy in some way, even the most brilliant among us; Buddha, Jesus, Freud, all have believed it was necessary to be unhappy.

The whole question is, since that belief is that it was necessary it wasn't going to be questioned. What was going to be questioned is, as you know, what was the right thing to be unhappy about? What's the wrong thing about? How much should you be unhappy about it? Okay.

Well, it works like this. It's very simple. The Option Method has shown us that people are unhappy to the degree to which they believe they need to be unhappy. So for instance if they believe that there's something to be very unhappy about, they'll be very unhappy about it. If they believe it's something to be only slightly unhappy about, they'll be slightly unhappy about it.



Now it goes like this--as you see up there. I'm sorry that it's bent. Can everyone see it? Alright. What it shows is how human emotions are created. You've heard that they were created by choice maybe or you've always believed that they just happened to you.

This is how human emotions are really created. There is an event--and by the way, this is called an SOR model, stimulus organism response. It's a scientific model. It's used when you try to train rats or people or anything living; plants even. There's a stimulus that's called the event itself.

There's the organism, which is in the middle. It would be a human being, rat or whatever and then there are the results. As you see in the middle I have one organism. That's a human, but that human is capable of doing three different judgments which change the results.

So after the event happens, the human being judges them as good, bad or neither good nor bad and all human emotions are based on that. There is not one human emotion that is not based on this paradigm.

Good – if you believe an event is good, you feel happy or as we often say, feel good. If you believe an event is bad, you feel bad or unhappy. And if you feel it's neither good nor bad, you feel neither, which for many of you this might be hitting or beating a dead horse, but it's so essential because it's so easily overlooked. *There is no other paradigm.* That is what all human emotions can be described as fitting. There are no exceptions.

A human emotion does not exist separate from the judgment and the event can even be illusionary, illusory; no; illusionary. It could be mythical. It could be a dream. It doesn't even have to be real, but if you feel you need to judge it in any one of those three ways you're going to get any one of those three results.

So even if you find out later that it was only a bad dream--but while you believed that dream was bad, you felt bad. When you learned it was a dream you relegated it maybe to the – it's a nothing. So therefore you don't even feel anything about it, except those people in psychoanalysis.

The whole point of the Option Method of course is to help people see that their emotions don't just happen to them. See, that's the only thing that it's meant to show. Why it can be used to help people be happy is based on that, but that isn't its goal.

The goal of the Option Method is just simply to show people that there are not wandering souls being abused by the universe. That they just get unhappy over this and unhappy about China and unhappy about taxes and unhappy about their boyfriend or girlfriend.

This is to explain why they have the kind of emotions that they have and that they're not victims--that these unhappy emotions don't just happen to them. They are definitely a product of a judgment without exception.

If there is something that looks like unhappiness – now let me put this disclaimer in right from the beginning. I hope you like it. If there is something that looks like unhappiness, but it's not a result of a judgment then it's not unhappiness. Then you ate something bad. Or God's out to get you. Something like that. But if it's not a result of a judgment, it's not a result of a judgment. So therefore it's not an emotion.

If it's a feeling in your body, it's a feeling in your body. There are all kinds of feelings in your body. Do you know even all of these emotions--the only reason unhappiness produces something called a bad emotion is because you wouldn't be satisfied if you didn't identify that emotion as a bad feeling.

In other words, after you judged something as bad and you didn't get a knot in your stomach, what good is your judgment? So if you don't get a knot in your stomach and you don't get a lump in your throat or you don't get a headache or you don't get tightness, you wouldn't call it unhappiness.

See, it has to be believable to you. See again, believing is everything. So for it to be unhappy it has to be believable. Once you realize that, you can realize that even so-called bad feelings are merely feelings that you use in your own body. You created them in your own body and they're your own feelings and you did them to yourself and what's the problem?

The idea is that once you see you do them to yourself then you can decide, 'oh, I can do one of two things. I created this in order to experience feeling bad and I'm not into that' and decide that you know better or something like that or you could say, 'hmm, I only do this if I believe I'm feeling bad about something so I can look at that and see if I am feeling bad about it or not and be done with the feeling bad or not.'

But in either case what happens is that most people are afraid of what they went and made themselves feel. So it goes like this. I'm a child and I decide that something that happened is something I don't want. I've seen models of how people react to crying and I've seen what it's like when my mommy's upset and my daddy's upset or something and I know certain kinds of vocabulary of unhappiness. I see it as--it's supposed to be--I can't be happy without this or without that or without the other thing.

Usually with the individual--I've rarely met a child who was worried about the starvation in China. It's usually more to do with their diaper pin or their own toys or something like that. It's usually very egocentric to start, huh? Because it wouldn't make any sense otherwise.

You can't go from that to worrying about the world without something like that to use as a model. You have to worry about this world, yourself, this body, your whole world.

So if you're creating the illusion of unhappiness or the make-believe of

unhappiness or acting out unhappiness all it takes is you get good at it, okay. You get good at it. You get good at feeling bad when you don't get what you want and you just simply get so good at it you're no longer talking about--like anything you've learned--you no longer talk about the learning process that was involved.

But I think it's still safe to say that any unhappiness is learned. In one way or another you've learned before you ever heard there was a choice, you've learned that there are things to be unhappy about and you learned to be unhappy about them.

Actually you learned the kind of symptoms--you have symptoms that only Americans have; those of you who are, say, American born. You only have the kind of symptoms American have.

There are Oriental symptoms that you would never conceive of. There are African symptoms that you don't have. So the same forms of loss, unhappiness, etc.--there are Sicilian expressions that you don't want to know about.

So the truth is, it is all really cultural. We culturally learn to be unhappy and then we learn how to be unhappy. If you know anything about culture, then there are subcultures. There's your region where you live. There's your family heritage. There's the way on your block and in your school. There's the way your friends do it. There's the way your family does it. The things they get unhappy about.

Then there's certainly aspiration to sophistication. So you start getting unhappy about the same thing as the New York Times' critics get unhappy about and things like that.

The smarter you get, the finer you hone it. By the time you've got your Master's or Ph.D. you should be able to be unhappy about anything in the world--even a Rembrandt because it's cool or it's smart.

Oh, there're lots of myths that perpetuate unhappiness; that it's good for you, that it helps you, that it makes you stay on your toes, that it keeps you in touch with reality, etc. We'll talk about how those things are mythical later, but the truth is they're still constantly being supported by those beliefs; unhappiness is.

Now the Option Method starts with that realization that these are beliefs. You see, again, in each thing that I say, we're talking about that middle ground there, that human judgment. Those are beliefs. The belief that something is good, the belief that something is bad, the belief that . . . see, I call it a judgment because it affects our emotions.

If it doesn't affect your emotions, for instance, if you believe a knife is good for cutting there's not reason to feel anything about that. That's not an emotional judgment. That's meant to be a factual judgment and in so far as you make factual judgments you don't have emotions, except if you're glad about the fact--that you now have a sharp knife to cut with.

But to say knives are evil or guns are evil is like saying, 'you mean a knife that my surgeon uses is evil? The scalpel that he uses to save lives is evil?' No. See, so the problem with calling things bad and evil is that they tend to be moral judgments; overall judgments that just mean they're bad if they exist.

## Why are people unhappy?

Let me talk to you a little bit about dealing with that. I'm jumping ahead, but I just want to say--bad in the way we're going to use it is the way most people use it. Something you feel bad about.

But there is a connotation to bad and evil that has to do with a more fundamental, theological, religious, psychological sense. In those senses as it's used in psychology, anthropology, philosophy and theology it means this: that which makes you unhappy against your will.

For instance, that's the only evil in the devil is that the devil has the power to make a person unhappy against their will. That's the only evil in cancer, is because it has the power, supposedly, to make people unhappy against their will.

That's the only evil in a boyfriend or girlfriend breaking up with you; because they have the power to make you unhappy against your will. Being fired has the power to make you unhappy against your will. Losing money has the power to make you – etc., etc. We go all the way down from all the greater evils to all the lesser evils.

Your country being at war can send you into terror. Terror is just simply a belief in the greatest of all evils, 'that this evil,' whatever it is, 'is so insurmountable that you're afraid that it will and shall overcome you.' That's the kind of terror that often can lead to suicide. That's the kind of terror that leads to people running mad, taking all their clothes off, running mad down the street begging, begging, begging somehow to be saved.

Okay; so evil and bad by definition are things that make you feel bad against your will, without your consent. If it wasn't, if you didn't believe that about it, you wouldn't have ever called it bad, felt bad about it or called it evil.

So anything you've ever felt bad about, you felt bad about because you thought it could make you feel bad without your consent. So I'm not about to jump into your lives and say, 'oh, guess what? No, no, nothing ever made you feel bad without your consent. You wanted it. You loved it. You asked for it. You wanted to be unhappy. That's not true.

Nobody wakes up in the morning and says I think I'll be unhappy about six things today and starts choosing them as the day goes on. People don't choose to be unhappy; people don't choose to be happy. I use that only to say something else, but it is not true that it's not chosen. Meaning unhappiness doesn't happen to

you. It isn't happening to you. You're creating it. You're doing it. I told you it's a feeling in your own body that only you can create.

But here's what happens. I'm using the word choice in a way it was never used before. I'm using it because I'm at a loss for words because I don't really want to say people want to be unhappy because they universally describe unhappiness as a feeling they don't want. That's why it gets that name. I mean, it doesn't matter what the feeling is, even if it's not your unhappiness, it's their unhappiness and they mean the feeling they don't want or they wouldn't call it unhappiness.

So I don't want to say that they want it and I don't want to say anything like that--that they delight in it or that they enjoy it or that you delight in it and you enjoy it if you get unhappy. No; you're not supposed to. That's the whole point of unhappiness. And it's supposed to feel like it happens to you. Otherwise it won't be unhappiness.

So if you've ever felt unhappy and you didn't feel like it was happening to you then I don't know what you're talking about because for it to be unhappy you've got to feel like a victim and you've got to feel like it's happening, even if it's from some demon inside you. You've got to feel like it's happening to you.

But there is a sense in which we choose it and only if you understand that sense right can you use the word choice. The sense in which we choose it is in the sense that we don't want it, but we believe it's necessary. We believe we have to be unhappy. We believe we have to feel it. Not going into what are the reasons we believe. That comes into what's in that chart up there, but none the less we're believing it you see.

Where do our beliefs come from except by a choice? So indirectly we choose it. They come to us of course, our beliefs are chosen. I have to agree that that's a worthy belief. I have to say yes, that's true in order for me to believe something.

Remember, I'm not talking about merely an opinion because nobody gets unhappy that way. It's more that, as soon as I really think it could make me unhappy--oops--I'm already unhappy, because I just thought "that is something that could make me unhappy or that is something that I would get unhappy about or that it's something that I should get unhappy about or I need to get unhappy about or it's just simply something that makes somebody like me unhappy."

That's a good one. I meant that'll get all of us 99 percent of the time. If

you love your past at all and you love to reminisce, you haven't got a chance. If you want to make--change ancient shit into chocolate ice cream go ahead, but that's what's going to happen. You can't honor it without feeling it.

Unhappiness as soon as you think somebody like you gets it, will get it, can get it, can catch it, can remember it, can stumble into it, cannot resist it, can't keep it away, doesn't remember the formula, you're sunk. You're unhappy already. Why? You're ass is sunk. Your safety net is gone. Your magic isn't working. Right; that's the way it's supposed to work. Now that's unhappiness. Good unhappiness--worth at least \$150 an hour.

So anyway, that's the way it works. If you believe it's yours, it's yours, but now--that can be called a choice, because you see, that's not forced on you. Now, you don't feel like you chose it and you don't feel like you merely believe it. You just thought that's the truth. So anything that you believe that's true between you and something called unhappiness, it's done; because that's the way emotions work. That's the way all human emotions really work.

If you believe that you're the one who's going to get woozy, dizzy, sleepy, you're the one. You're the volunteer. "Oh no, I saw this coming", and that's called panic because people know sometimes that they've set it in motion by something that they thought and believed.

The problem is that they fear themselves, that they would do that to themselves. No. That is called panic in the normal psychoanalytic world. That's the patient who believes that they tripped the wire that set off their bad feelings, that they went and thought of their dead mother again. There we go. Or they thought of this or that you see. And they're afraid they set off the wire and that they're torturing themselves.

So there's a whole cluster of unhappinesses that people believe are ones they set off for themselves. But nonetheless, they're still victims and they're afraid that they're victims to some kind of evil force within them--whatever you call that, insanity usually, neurosis, psychosis; something like that. Give it some fancy name; it doesn't matter.

But you're afraid of it and that "it" was what? Your belief that you're going to have to feel that way. Sometimes "that way" may be nothing more than a slight feeling of exhilaration, which is entirely frightening to some people--entirely frightening. And they just felt a little exhilaration because they're very afraid of that feeling, that particular kind of feeling because they remember what they've

done with that, what has happened with it, some supposititious connection they've made--their dog died as soon as they felt that, or something.

But some kind of connection is that "that feeling" is bad. Now what makes it bad? What makes "that feeling" a bad feeling? Now the feeling itself is a slight feeling of exhilaration. What makes it a bad feeling is that the person is scared of it.

How are we ever going to know that? Well, that's where the Option Method comes in. The Option Method is starting off with the principle that those feelings may come from beliefs and in so far as those feelings come from beliefs and then the person has beliefs about them, there can be feelings about feelings. That starts complicating the psychoanalytic process by the way and knocks the hell out of most psychologists.

The truth is people have feelings about feelings, because after they have these feelings and these results, then they make judgments on those feelings. A lot of people seem to have asked questions like, 'well, we've been taught that feeling unhappy is bad.' Well not lately you haven't. If you were taught it lately, you haven't heard it any differently than you heard it from the day you were born.

If you're not unhappy at proper times you're wrong. If you're unhappy at improper times you're wrong. So there were always times when you were unhappy-- that it was wrong to be unhappy. For instance, it was always wrong for you to be angry at somebody. Do you have anybody that you were ever angry at who agreed with you that you were right to be angry at them? I don't think so.

Did you ever have anybody that you were angry at that you were willing to say to them, 'oh, you're not making me angry? It's just something in the air.' No.

In fact, when you're trying to express your anger you're saying to somebody, 'you're making me have a bad feeling goddammit and I want you to stop or else I'll have a worse feeling and I'm not accountable' or something like that. And I'll yell louder and louder and act wilder and wilder and threaten you in some way or whatever.

Okay. People have known full well and you always have, to tell people that they were wrong to be unhappy with you. They've always told you that you were wrong to be unhappy with them. So it's not new to any of you to hear that you're wrong to be unhappy.

That's one of the things that the Option Method is to deal with--because

those of you who brought it up--by the way in your questions, I won't mention who you are unless you want to--you already obviously believe that it's not wrong to be unhappy or you wouldn't be saying you've got a question about why you believe it's wrong to be unhappy and you don't like believing it's wrong to be unhappy. What's new?

I don't think you like believing it's wrong to be anything you are, do you? I've met very few people--I don't mind, by the way, finding out that I'm wrong if you can tell me what the wrong means. I'm glad to be wrong about anything--doesn't matter to me. Everything I believe, I believe tentatively. Everything I swear to, I swear on a pile of paper.

I need to know and am glad to know I'm wrong. See, the whole problem is feeling bad about being wrong. Who cares that someone believes that you're wrong to be unhappy? So what? That never stopped you.

Enjoy it. Enjoy knowing that what I'm saying is what human emotions are like. I'm not telling you what they should be. I'm just telling you how they're formed and how they are.

## Questions for Reflection

Ask yourself these two questions repeatedly and alternately:

- What am I unhappy about?
- How does the unhappiness motivate me in a useful way, or let me know that I am the kind of person I want to be?
  
- Pick two things you are unhappy about. How do you decide which one you are *more* unhappy about?
  
- Write down some judgments you make everyday. Which ones are judgments that you need to be unhappy? Which ones are merely factual judgments?
  
- What are some things that other people get unhappy about that you do not?
  
- Write down some things for which you believe:
  - Anyone like me would get unhappy about this
  - I am going to have to feel a way I don't want.

### **Meditation for the Week**

- People don't choose to be unhappy, but unhappiness doesn't happen to them, either.