

The Option Method Institute

Education based on the teachings of Bruce Di Marsico

www.ChooseHappiness.net

Introduction to the Option Method, pt I

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Bruce Di Marsico

Outline

- Whenever we are unhappy, we believe there is something to be unhappy about.
- We can judge something as a reason to be happy, unhappy, or neither happy nor unhappy
- Even in situations where almost everyone would be unhappy about something, everyone has their own reasons.

Introduction

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

He illustrates, via a story of a young woman going off to college, that whenever we are unhappy, we believe there is something to be unhappy about. He describes a mother unhappy about the event, a sister happy about the event, and a stranger neither happy nor unhappy about the event, demonstrating that the event does not cause happiness or unhappiness, but rather the judgment of the event does.

He further clarifies that, even in situations where almost everyone would be unhappy about something, everyone has their own reasons. For example, of two married people who are unhappy about their spouses extra-marital intimacies, one might be sadly unhappy that they were not “attractive enough” to “prevent” their spouse from straying, a second may be fearfully unhappy that they may catch a disease, and a third may be angrily unhappy that their spouse violated an implicit agreement.

READINGS

All of us in one way or another are striving for happiness. We may all have different words for it; we may all describe, it is a search for truth or the search for fulfillment, for meaning, for inner peace. But beyond all of that, I guess the word that we use is happiness. So I'm going to sort of use that word happiness as a catch-all word. What I mean by happiness is for you to define, that which you are always endlessly searching for, that which you are always endlessly striving for. Some people call it self-actualization; some people call it the fulfillment of human potential; some people call it joy.

Since we all strive for happiness, I guess the big mystery to most of us is why are we unhappy? And by unhappiness, I mean just what it sounds like: that which is not conducive to happiness, that which somehow prevents happiness; those experiences, those feelings that are negative, that are uncomfortable, that are debilitating, those experiences that are self-defeating. Unhappiness. We have thousands of words to describe it, ranging from mild irritation or a slight disappointment to war and rage, depression, suicide. We have all kinds of words to describe what we feel when we feel unhappy. I guess we're a little deficient in our vocabulary regarding happy feelings. I've been told that, by semanticists, that the words for unhappiness far outweigh the words for happiness.

The Option Method is a method of searching for happiness and achieving it. And we begin with a certain kind of exploration of ourselves. We find that unhappiness is not so mysterious; that it refers to some very basic phenomenon, which is based on a judgmental approach we have to ourselves and to our life. And if we think about it, whenever we're unhappy about something, somewhere behind that, no matter how quietly, is a voice in us saying: That is indeed something to be unhappy about. Unhappiness, and the experience of unhappiness, proceeds from the belief that there is something to be unhappy about. Now some people believe

that there are lots and lots of things to be unhappy about; some people don't believe that.

We've had a tradition in our Western society to label those of us who have been most unhappy with such labels as sick, crazy, psychotic, neurotic -- all the psychiatric psychoanalytic jargon -- are all various ways of describing people's unhappiness. And very frequently we lose sight of that fact, that what we're talking about are unhappy people. And in understanding that, we can understand why that might be so, if we begin with unhappiness, if we begin to look at what troubles us, what disturbs us. As a fundamental concept of unhappiness, we can begin to explore it.

Now like I said, behind all unhappiness, there's a quiet voice -- sometimes not so quiet -- but nonetheless very frequently a still voice saying: This is something to be unhappy about. And this we call a belief. In the Option Method, we describe this as the beliefs of man. People behave as they believe. Emotions are a kind of behavior. Feelings are behavior; we feel as we believe. We behave as we believe. And in looking at these beliefs, we find that some of them could have been picked up from childhood. And how many of us, as young children, learned that something was bad? Such and such a thing was something to feel bad about. And lo and behold, if that thing happens, what do we do? We feel bad about it. See that it's perfectly consistent for us to feel bad, because behind that bad feeling there's a belief that we ought to feel bad. And so when we feel happy, it's also likewise consistent because what's behind that behavior is the belief that there's something to be happy about.

I'd like to try to make clear how the belief affects the feeling. Let's say you have a situation of a young girl going off to college. She's out in front of her home with her mother, her father, her younger sister, and there's a stranger passing on the sidewalk. And she's saying goodbye to them and she's going to college. Her mother is very distraught and very unhappy; there are tears in her eyes; she's

feeling very sad. She's going to miss her daughter. She believes that what's happening is really kind of bad; she can't understand why she has to go away to school -- there's a perfectly good school in town. Why she has to leave her family, etc. And the mother sees the situation pretty much as something that's to be unhappy about. And so she feels unhappy about it.

Her father, on the other hand, is kind of mixed. He feels that he's going to miss his little girl a little bit and he kind of wishes she was staying home; he was just getting to know her and they were just becoming friends. But he also sees that she's going to be off with her friends at a school that she's very much looking forward to being at, and how it's going to be really helpful to her for her maturity and her intellectual growth. And so in a way, he's kind of glad, too; he's a little sad and he's a little glad that she's going away. And of course the younger sister is overjoyed! She's just imagining having the room all to herself now, and the telephone all to herself, and nothing could be better than her big sister's going off to college. And the stranger walking down the street, he looks at the situation and he feels nothing and just walks by.

Now I use that to show you that there's one event taking place: A young woman going off to college is the event. And yet there are four different emotional reactions to that. There's a feeling good and a happy feeling about it, which the young girl felt; there's a feeling bad or an unhappy feeling, which the mother felt; there's a feeling good and bad, which the father felt; and then there's feeling nothing, which is an emotional state, which the stranger felt. The one event occurred and yet there were four different emotional responses. How do we explain that? If it was the event itself and the event itself was a good event, then everybody should have been happy about it. If the event itself was a bad event, then everybody should have been unhappy about it. If it was neither good nor bad, then everyone should have felt neither good nor bad about it.

We explain it by saying that the event in itself was just an event. The feelings

about the event are based on the judgments about the event. And that the feelings we have are a result of the judgments that we make. So that if we believe a thing to be good, we feel good; if we believe it to be bad, we feel bad. Now sometimes we feel that when we feel bad, we have no choice; we just simply must feel bad. That's in the nature of feeling bad. That's exactly what it's all about. Part of feeling bad is believing that we have no choice, that we must feel bad, that we have to feel bad.

There are a number of reasons for this, which we'll explore. What stands in the way of further growth and further happiness? There are lots of things like lack of self-confidence, despair, and depression, whatever. Almost all these phenomenon are a result of some kind of judgments that we're making. And sometimes they're very mistaken judgments; sometimes we assume that we have to feel bad. We just simply assume it. And so since we assume we have to feel bad about a certain situation, we go ahead and do that. Like I said, it's inconceivable that we could do otherwise. Once we believe the thing is something to feel bad about, we are going to feel bad about it. Once we believe the thing is something to feel good about, we will do that. But that isn't a problem for anybody -- none of us are suffering from too much happiness. But a lot of us are not as happy as we'd like to be, and we never will be. And that's part of a whole search for happiness -- to be happier and happier and happier. No matter how happy we are, we want to be happier.

The Option Method for achieving that is to look very carefully at what we say we're unhappy about -- identifying it, whatever it is, however obvious it may seem or how ever subtle it may seem. Look at it; what am I unhappy about? Is it the weather? Is it the look on that other person's face? Is it the insult, the rejection? Is it the way my boss acted, the way my children acted? Whichever those things are, look at them. What are we unhappy about? And try to identify it.

So in the Option Method, what we try to do is have a person very clearly identify what they're unhappy about. Give it clear, not be afraid to identify it. Bring it out,

look at it, somehow articulate it. Then after identifying it, we ask the most outrageous question of all, the most ridiculous question you've ever heard: Why are you unhappy about it? And I say it's ridiculous and outrageous because most of us respond: What do you mean, why am I unhappy about it? Wouldn't you be unhappy about it? Wouldn't anybody be unhappy about it? Oh, but that's the secret -- that's the point. Would everyone be unhappy about it? And even if they were, they might all have their reasons. What's ours? Why are we unhappy about it? Just what is behind that?

Without assuming that we have some kind of a fantastic compelling reason, let's look and see why we'd want to do this; why would we want to look at why we're unhappy? Not because we shouldn't be unhappy. No. Because we want to be happier. Because we don't like it; unhappiness doesn't feel good on us. Oh, of course, it bothers other people, and other people would all like us to be happier and we could all go around saying: I want you all to be happier. I mean, now you fix yourselves up and you all become happier, and this is going to be a better world for me to live in. "See, now everybody just go around becoming happier." But that's not where it starts; it starts here, with each of us. If we want a better world to live in, let's at least contribute one happy person to it, one more happy person -- ourselves.

And so let's remember when we begin to look at ourselves and we begin to look at why we're unhappy, we're not doing that for anybody else but ourselves to start. If this is going to be a better world, it's going to be better because we're a happier person. So we look at ourselves because we don't like the way it fits. We don't like the way our feelings fit us; they make us uncomfortable.

I had a class this week, and it comes to mind now because I was trying to demonstrate this point. And we used an example about something that most people would be unhappy about. And it was everyone assumed that the person they loved – I think the way it was phrased is: Your wife or husband or lover was

“fooling around” with somebody else. In other words, was, according to some concept, being unfaithful or falling in love with another person. And everybody agreed that they would definitely be unhappy about that, if the person they loved was fooling around with somebody else. Okay, fine. So that was a good example; it was almost everyone agreed that that would indeed be something for them all to be unhappy about.

And the immediate reaction to the outrageous question was: What do you mean, why am I unhappy about that? Wouldn't you be? Isn't everybody? And there was agreement; everyone was. Of course! Why not? So what we did is we had a go-round; I guess there were about 10 of us sitting there. And each person went around and said why that made them unhappy. And the reasons that each person gave were as individual and as personal and as distinct and different from every other person's there, as you can imagine. One person was unhappy about it because it made them feel insecure; it made them feel inadequate. They said they would feel that they weren't really an adequate male if their wife were fooling around with someone else, and that they felt resentment.

Another one said: I'd feel bad because I feel a kind of relief, and that makes me wonder whether I ever really loved her in the first place, and that makes me feel bad. And each person had a different reason for feeling bad -- very, very different. One person said he felt bad because he might get a disease. Okay. We can't assume that everyone feels bad for the same reason and that is often a big assumption that we make. And we can't assume it about ourselves. We often do. We assume: Hey, I'm unhappy for the obvious reasons. What are the obvious reasons? The obvious reasons are sometimes not so obvious. And that exploring that can make a fantastic difference, because after we identify the first why, why we're unhappy about this, we get a chance to go further. Okay, well, now why does that make you unhappy? What is there about that? And in exploration, sometimes this is what happens. It comes all the way down to: Hmm, I'm afraid that if I don't get unhappy about this situation, I'll never do anything to change it.

And very frequently that becomes the response. “What do you mean? If I wasn’t unhappy, I’d be some kind of a rotten person.”

An apparently obvious thing, “Why are you unhappy that someone you love died?” brings all kinds of responses from: “Now I don’t know what I’m going to do with my life” to “I don’t know where my next meal is going to come from”, or “if I wasn’t unhappy, everyone would say I was no good and that I never loved him, and in fact, maybe I would even think that myself and it would bother me, and if I didn’t mourn and I didn’t feel terrible, I would be afraid that maybe I never really loved him.” And so very frequently, unhappiness is some kind of a proof to us, but “is it a proof that we need?” we can ask ourselves, since it has such disastrous effects so often, since it’s a matter of destroying ourselves, eating ourselves up from the inside, damaging the things that we love around us.

Questions for Reflection

Take any situation (in your personal life, in the world, fictional or real).

Why might someone be happy about it? Why might someone be unhappy about it? Why might someone be indifferent about it?

What are a few different reasons why people might be unhappy about it?

Meditation for the Week

- Anyone's reasons to be unhappy about something are their own, personal reasons.