

The Option Method Institute

Education based on the teachings of Bruce Di Marsico

www.ChooseHappiness.net

Why we use unhappiness

From

Monday Night Study Group, 1973

Bruce Di Marsico

Outline

We use unhappiness to stay in touch with our wanting

- Staying in touch with our wanting is more important to us than getting what we want
- We use anger to affirm to ourselves that we want what we want
- Unhappiness is being afraid of giving up wanting what we want
- Unhappiness is being afraid "I will be unhappy unless I get what I want"

Being tempted to give up wanting

- Our apparent choice is to either be unhappy, or to want less.
- Unhappiness helps us to keep us wanting, instead of giving up wanting
- Unhappiness works, but brings problems with it.

Introduction

In this lecture, Bruce Di Marsico introduces how we use unhappiness to stay in touch with our wanting. Staying in touch with our wanting is more important to us than getting what we want, because it is our only hope of eventually getting what we want.

He discusses how, when we do not get what we want, we may be tempted to give up wanting, and our unhappiness affirms to ourselves that we do, indeed, want what we want.

One foundational way of describing the belief behind unhappiness is "I will be unhappy unless I get what I want or avoid what I want to avoid". Unhappiness *does* work to motivate us towards what we want, but brings problems with it.

READINGS

Wanting is more important to us than getting

An example: I get angry at you for not wanting to be with me more. That becomes patently self-defeating. The more angry I get, the less you want to be with me, yet my anger is to assure me that I really want you. Even if it doesn't work, I have the assurance that it isn't for lack of my wanting. I feel that it is bad not to get what I want, but it is worse not to even want what I want—so my anger, my unhappiness, is to reassure myself that I really do want what I want: it is a protest.

Unhappiness in this case is my protest to myself that I will *never* give up wanting. Just wanting in itself is much more important to me than getting what I want—this is obvious in an example like anger.

In situations like the above, apparently, the need to keep in touch with my wants is stronger than the need to get what I want. How could that be? Why does that come about? One reason why I may need to protest that I will never give up wanting is that so often in the past, after causing myself so much pain in similar situations, the only way I believed I could relieve the pain was to do exactly that: to stop wanting it, and by believing that it wasn't really important to me somehow. And my desire to give up is strong, so I protest.

There were others in the past that I wanted to be closer to, and remembering the context, I get angry at you for not wanted to be with me more, for not wanting to be closer with me. Yet the more angry I get, the further away you go. Why do I do that? To protest that I really want to be with you. Why do I do that? Because I need to keep in touch with my wanting. I'm scared. I have to get angry so I won't lose sight of what I want. Here's why: There were others in the past that I wanted to be closer to. I used so much unhappiness, and when I didn't get the closeness that I wanted, the way out of the pain was that I stopped wanting to be closer to that person, and then I sought a less painful relationship with someone else. Eventually I stopped having the original relationship that I wanted so much.

I'm very aware that it is attractive to stop wanting in order to stop the unhappiness that I use in order to make sure that I keep wanting. I get angry at you for not wanting to be closer to me even though that drives you away. I keep reassuring myself that I want you to be closer, and keep protesting it, so that I won't give up wanting, because in the past and in similar situations I said, "Okay, you don't want to be closer to me, I give up. I'll go to another relationship." To give up the pain, I have given up what I wanted, and now I'm beginning to see that I'm going to

have to do that again, and that has been more and more painful to me. The more I foresee that it is going to be painful to me, the more I protest, the more I get angry. The more that I see that you're going to go away from me, in fact, the further away you go, the angrier I'm going to get, because as it becomes easier to give up my wanting, it becomes all the more important for me to keep my wanting alive.

This dilemma is caused by instituting in the first place the belief that I will be unhappy unless I get what I want, and so all of this has to follow from it.

Being tempted to give up wanting

My anger is all to motivate me to continue wanting. This dilemma is caused by instituting in the first place the belief that I will be unhappy unless I get what I want. The degree of unhappiness is in proportion to the temptation to give up wanting—to the fear of giving up wanting. This is why the more I believe I have to use unhappiness to get what I want, the more and more the choice becomes between giving it up all together, just forgetting the whole thing, or becoming more and more unhappy.

Now, since I've coupled "I want more" and "I'm going to be more unhappy if I don't get it", the choice I am apparently faced with is either to be more unhappy, or to want less.

Since I want it, and need to remind myself that I want it, I must increase my fear of giving up wanting. I must not be persuaded to not be angry, I must remain angry. I must be unhappy until I get what I want, or give up. I cannot stop being unhappy unless I stop wanting. And that's a horrible choice. I don't want to give up wanting, I want this. I want you to be closer; I want you to love more. I don't want to stop wanting that, damn it!

And so if getting this good thing requires this unhappiness or a sacrifice in order to get it, I'll have to then want to make a sacrifice, and there's a fear of not wanting to go through the hell of making a sacrifice, there's a very strong temptation to not to bother to go through all that unhappiness. And so there is the desire to stop wanting it in order to avoid having to pay the price.

Your other alternative is to stop wanting it, but you don't want to at this point. It was something you started out by wanting, and you won't stop wanting it unless you're really pushed to the wire, when it becomes real painful.

We know that to stop wanting is not the way out. The unhappiness doesn't work, except in the sense that we become so unhappy that we stop wanting. But that is working against ourselves, because we started off by wanting.

Unhappiness works to keep us wanting. Unhappiness motivates me to get what I want, and if it just got me what I wanted, well then there's no problem. In the example I'm referring to, anger at wanting someone to be closer, it doesn't. It gets me just the opposite of what I'd want. And this is the sticky problem.

Questions for Reflection

What do you want, that you believe you would be unhappy if you didn't get?

Order these things from what you would be *most* unhappy not to get, to what you would be *least* unhappy not to get.

How do you imagine reacting to someone suggesting you give up wanting these things?

How do you imagine you would feel if you gave up wanting these things?

Have you ever been tempted to give up wanting these things, or to want lesser versions?

Have you ever experienced unwanted consequences from being unhappy about not getting these things?

Meditation for the Week

- We have a good reason to be unhappy: unhappiness helps us stay in touch with our wanting. It just isn't the most effective or pleasant way to do this.