

## Let's Play The Happiness Game

October is not usually a particularly exciting month is it? Our summer holidays are just a fading memory and the craziness of the winter festive season is not yet upon us – thank goodness! So I thought we might liven this month up a bit by playing a game together.

A few weeks ago, I downloaded a short book onto my Kindle called *Awareness Games*. None of the games in it really grabbed me, but I loved the basic idea that cultivating awareness should not be a chore. It should be a joy. So whilst we were on retreat in Assisi the other week, I invented an awareness game for us all to play called 'The Assisi Game', but now I am back home I am going to rename it 'The Happiness Game'.

Here are the basics of the game. Once in the morning, once in the afternoon, and once in the evening, pause whatever you are doing and notice what you are thinking. Then ask yourself, 'Is this the happiest or most loving thought I could be thinking right now?' If the answer is 'No.' the next question to ask yourself is: What is the happiest or most loving thought I can think right now?'

That's it, although if you would like to make playing this game a lot more fun you could dig out a Snakes and Ladders board and go up a ladder each time you remember to play the game and go down a snake each time you forget. If you do not have an old Snakes and Ladders board in the attic, you could even make yourself one on a piece of cardboard. Or is that going a tad too far??

Since I returned home from Assisi, I have been feeling a little out of sorts, partly because I always feel a little low when I come down from the high energy of any kind of spiritual retreat and also because I am still recovering from the eight and a half hours Gloria and I spent being stuck at Heathrow Airport on the evening of our arrival back into the UK. We finally got home at around 1am in the morning which was actually 2am Italian time.

Anyways, enough of the sob story! Because I have been feeling a little low recently, I have had an additional incentive to play the Happiness Game and I have to tell you it really does help!

*A Course in Miracles* tells us that we have no idea how much we tire ourselves out with all our fearful, judgemental thoughts about ourselves, other people, and the world in which we currently live. Scientist also now tell us that these fearful, judgemental thoughts send waves of toxic energy into all of our cells and thus weaken our physical bodies day after day after day. The problem is that we all think fearful thoughts instinctively virtually all of the time and there is no way to stop these pernicious thoughts destroying our deep peace of mind before we are already conscious of them. This is where 'The Happiness Game' is so helpful! We cannot stop ourselves thinking fearful/judgemental/angry thoughts. However, we can decide that we are not going to entertain these life-destroying thoughts for any length of time. Even better, we can choose to replace all our fearful thoughts with loving thoughts.

Let us now look at a hypothetical example of how this works. Suppose one morning you wake up with a prickly throat or a bit of a cough. Immediately the fearful thought 'Oh no, maybe I have Covid again!' pops into your mind uninvited. But then you remember that this month you are supposed to be playing 'The Happiness Game.' So you pause and ask yourself, 'What is the happiest thought I could be thinking right now?' Now the best you might be able to manage in that worrying moment might be, 'Oh well, I had Covid before and it did not kill me!' But then you might gently ask yourself, 'Is that really the happiest thought I could think right now?' You then come up with, 'Even if I am a bit croaky this morning, I am so glad to be alive and so happy and grateful that the sun is streaming through my bedroom window right now!'

For some reason, when I have played this 'Happiness Game' recently, I have noticed that I tend to replace a fearful, grumpy thought with a thankful thought of some kind. Then, the more I have done this, the more I seem to feel a deeper gratitude spreading out from the core of my heart just for the miraculous fact that I am still alive and conscious.

Now please do not misunderstand this life-supporting awareness game. I am certainly not suggesting in this message that you should ever suppress feelings of anxiety or depression. Nor am I asking you to put on a fake, 'happy-clappy' smile whenever you are feeling low. But I do know from a long lifetime of experience that whenever I am feeling anxious or fearful the very best antidote is to wrap myself in some Love Energy, and the quickest and easiest way to do this is to pause and say something kind and supportive to myself such as: 'This too will pass.' 'You can handle this.' 'Thank God for my wonderfully kind and supportive friends.' 'Thank God for Paracetamol.'

In sum, the wonderful Buddhist teacher, Mingyur Rimpoche teaches that cultivating awareness of what is happening to us moment to moment is the key to awakening from our dream of almost constant suffering. So this month, perhaps you would like to cultivate a little more awareness of what type of thoughts you are mainly thinking day by day. You might then take this life-transforming practice one step further and choose to change any instinctively fearful thoughts into much happier compassionate or grateful thoughts.

OK, that's enough words for now. We all know that actions speak louder than words, so let's just do it! Let's play 'The Happiness Game' this month so that rather than adding yet more fear or anger to a world that is already choc-a-bloc with destructive fearful energy, we fill ourselves with the life-supporting energy of gratitude or joy several times a day and then quite naturally spread this lovely energy out into the world around us.

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