



Awakening Joy: 10 Steps to Happiness

By James Baraz, Shoshana Alexander

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Awakening Joy is more than just another book about happiness. More than simply offering suggested strategies to change our behavior, it uses time-tested practices to train the mind to learn new ways of thinking. The principles of the course are universal, although much of the material includes Buddhist philosophy drawn from the author's thirty years as a Buddhist meditation teacher and spiritual counselor.

In these times of economic uncertainty *Awakening Joy* shows we can get through hard times and use our experience to keep our heart open while moving from discouragement to well-being, regardless of the external circumstances. Genuine well-being is not expensive. True happiness is not about acquiring anything, but rather about opening to the natural joy and aliveness right inside you.

In this practical down-to-earth guide, readers will learn how to

- make happiness a habit by inclining your mind toward states that lead to well-being
- find joy, even during difficult times, and avoid the pitfalls that prevent you from achieving the contentment you seek
- cultivate effective practices for sustaining joyfulness, such as reclaiming your natural sense of wonder and finding joy in the midst of everyday experiences.

Each chapter of *Awakening Joy* consists of one of the steps in Baraz's ten-step program and includes engaging exercises and practical advice to make happiness your natural default setting. For everyone from the cynic who is despondent over life's many sorrows, to the harried commuter raging at freeway traffic, this book offers up a simple yet powerful message of hope grounded in the realization that joy already exists inside every one of us. Like a precious child, it only needs to be recognized, embraced, and nurtured in order to grow to its full potential.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Even if you never read anything in this genre, this book is one you should try.”

—**Bill Gates**

"Baraz turned *Awakening Joy* into a six-month class and found that participants maintained a positive attitude even after it ended (as long as they practiced the exercises; as with diets or working out, continuity is essential). Word of mouth about the course that could make people happier began to spread: The first round of Awakening Joy meetings consisted of about 40 members. The next numbered 100; the next, 200, and then 500. It went international when its members began e-mailing their monthly homework assignments from the lectures to friends. Baraz was thrilled to receive messages from strangers in Europe, Africa, and New Zealand. 'It works!' they wrote. Apparently, you didn't have to be there to get the joy."

—*O, The Oprah Magazine*

"The readings evoke the feeling of sharing an intimate conversation with a wise teacher over a cup of tea. They are gentle, personal, and helpful...The lessons offered in *Awakening Joy* are highly relevant for beginning and experienced practitioners of mindfulness because they bring a fresh and unique perspective to many of the core teachings and practices of Buddhism."

—*Mindfulness Bell*

"*Awakening Joy* can lead each of us to live with dignity, compassion, and gracious freedom. Read these words slowly. Savor them and practice the exercises in this book. Use them to open your heart and transform your life. Your days on Earth will be full of blessings."

—**Jack Kornfield**, author of the best-selling *A Path with Heart*

About the Author

James Baraz has been teaching meditation for more than thirty years and the Awakening Joy course, both on-site and online, since 2003. He is a co-founding teacher of the Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California, and is on the international advisory board of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

Shoshana Tembeck Alexander has studied Buddhism since the early 1970s and is the author of *In Praise of Single Parents* and *Women's Ventures, Women's Visions*. She has guided the work of several prominent Buddhist authors, including Tara Brach, Sharon Salzberg, and Wes Nisker. She lives in Ashland, Oregon.

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Chapter One

INCLINING THE MIND TOWARD JOY

With our thoughts we make the world.

—The Buddha

One evening after hearing me give a talk on real happiness, a student approached me. “I have something to show you,” he said, opening a slick magazine to a two-page advertisement. There, in shimmering glory, was a beautiful woman draped in gold jewelry, looking satisfied and happy. Across the pages in bold lettering were the words: “The Gold Shivers.” I felt both amused and appalled as I read the pitch:

From the First Small Shiver

when a Shimmering Necklace of Gold Beads Catches a Woman’s Eye.

To the Great Shivers of Delight

when the Coveted Object Actually Becomes Hers . . .

Among Life’s Pleasures, Count this Deeply Held Euphoria as Unique.

The Only Way to Get the Gold Shivers is by Getting the Gold.

Because we’re bombarded with thousands of marketing messages like this every day, it’s easy to think that gratifying our desires is the way to find happiness. We might even know, as one bumper sticker says, “The best things in life are not things,” but we can still believe that something else out there will make us happy. When I find my soul mate, or when I write the great American novel, or when I retire . . .

There’s no denying the hit of pleasure we feel when we fulfill a desire for a particular experience or object or goal. But how long does the satisfaction last once we receive the “coveted object”? Perhaps until we notice there’s something else we want. When we equate true happiness with getting something (or someone), we can end up like hamsters in an exercise wheel—running but never arriving.

If genuine happiness is not based on objects or experience, where can it be found? And how? Like following a road map, once you know where you’re going, it’s easier to figure out how to get there.

TAKING THE FIRST STEP

The journey of awakening joy begins with setting a clear intention. Although we all want to be happy, most of us don’t place an explicit wish for that at the center of our lives. We think if we are successful, rich, or liked by others, happiness will come. We tend to hope that achieving certain goals in the future will make us happy. But these are roundabout ways to get to happiness, and they don’t necessarily work. What does get you there is starting where you are and discovering what you are looking for in the midst of your current life.

You might think that the circumstances of your life will have to change a lot before you can find happiness in the midst of them. While it’s true that our well-being is affected by how we live, we also know that even in the best of circumstances we can be unhappy. And sometimes in very challenging situations, we can feel surprisingly at ease. While this book will encourage you to bring experiences and circumstances into your life that contribute to your well-being, the key factor is deciding to change your mind. As my colleague Sylvia Boorstein puts it, “Happiness is an inside job.” When we consciously intend to be happy, actually saying that intention aloud or to ourselves, we set in motion a radical transformation. Profound changes begin to take place inside us, in our body and our mind. The momentum of positive change grows as we learn to choose actions and situations that align us with our intention.

THE GOLD OF TRUE HAPPINESS

I was a gloomy existentialist in college until one day it struck me that I actually wanted to be happy. I believed the only way to achieve that was to get and to do what I wanted. My personal strategy to ensure happiness was trying to string together enough moments of pleasure and gratification that the underlying unease couldn't get through. Getting the latest album of cool music felt good—for a little while. Having fun at a wild party was exhilarating—at the time. But no matter how many happy moments I had, I still didn't feel any closer to being a "happy person." I felt like I was on a roller coaster, and the ride down seemed to last a lot longer than the occasional trip up. There had to be another way.

That was what led me in 1974 to Naropa Institute, a kind of spiritual summer camp, in Boulder, Colorado. I'd read some books on Eastern philosophy that made me question a lot of my assumptions, and I wanted to check things out for myself. When I walked into meditation class that first day, I was excited about the promise of an exotic new teaching. There in the front of the room a man was sitting cross-legged—but he didn't at all fit my image of the great spiritual guru I was expecting to see. In fact, he didn't seem very different from me. He was Jewish and sounded like he was from New York, and I wondered if this guy could really tell me something new. But after spending the first ten minutes of the lecture judging the package, I decided to start listening to what he was saying.

Within moments it was clear that Joseph Goldstein understood something about genuine freedom and happiness and how to get there. I saw for the first time the possibility of not being a slave to my neurotic thoughts and fears. By the end of the class, I knew I had found a sure road to happiness, and I was determined to follow it.

Joseph talked a lot about one of the basic teachings of the Buddha—the recognition that everything we experience in life is impermanent. No matter how good things are, they will change. Well, that's for sure, I thought. That's the story of my life. We don't get what we want and feel frustrated. We get what we don't want and feel upset. Or we get what we want and then find out it doesn't quite satisfy us in the way we thought it would. We find that the pleasure of the gold shivers lasts for a few moments, then fades away. As those famous "philosophers," the Rolling Stones, so profoundly put it: "I can't get no satisfaction."

Because everything changes, no circumstance, experience, or object can give us lasting happiness. Our bodies change, our minds change, the seasons change. Yet we try to hold on to pleasure, youth, summertime, happiness. As Joseph puts it, trying to hold on to anything in an ever-changing reality is like holding tight to a rope you're sliding down. All you get is rope burn. And the more you hold on, the more you suffer.

What is the way out of this predicament? Awakening joy isn't about fulfilling goals or changing particular circumstances. It's about training the mind and heart to live in a way that allows us to be truly happy with our life as it is right now. Not that we stop aspiring to grow and change in positive ways, or that we remain in harmful situations, but we begin to find the joy inside us right where we are. As you work with the practices offered here, you will discover that happiness is not a place you arrive at but rather the result of training your mind to ride with ease and flexibility the roller coaster of life.

DECIDING TO BE HAPPY

Vickie was hoping for a miracle. For five years she had been living with chronic pain, unrelieved by anything doctors and healers had been able to offer. By the time we spoke, her disappointment had spiraled down into severe bouts of depression. "Often I break down and cry just from trying to get through the day," she told me. Vickie had come to talk about whether or not she should enroll in an Awakening Joy course. "But I just can't believe it's possible for me to be happy," she said.

Recently her situation had gotten even harder. Friends who had been trying to help for years had begun to drift away, afraid of being pulled into the black hole of Vickie's despair. "And my boyfriend has real doubts about our future," she said through tears. "I know he loves me and feels a lot of compassion for me, but he says he wonders if I haven't given up on life."

"You're going through so much, Vickie," I said softly. "But I've seen other people going through really hard times make major changes when they decide to. I think you can do it."

Despite her doubts, Vickie decided to enroll in the course. The very first meeting of the group proved to be a critical turning point for her. As usual I opened the course by asking participants to get in touch with their intention to bring more happiness into their lives. The evening was spent exploring this uplifting prospect, and by the time the class ended, the room was filled with enthusiasm and promise. Some participants lingered to talk with friends, and others came up to ask questions or make comments. I noticed Vickie sitting quietly at the side of the room, and when the others had left, I went over to see if she was okay.

"I just don't see how this will work for me, given my physical condition," she began. "I can't even conceive of what it would be like to be joyful."

"I understand how you can feel that way," I said, taking a seat next to her. "And don't try to be any different from how you are at this moment. But I think the most important ingredient in changing your situation is letting yourself open to the possibility of finding joy in your life. That needs to happen before you can get clear on your intention."

I knew there had to be a way to help her realize she had the capacity to enjoy her life. I had seen so many people, including myself, turn their lives around once they had embraced that possibility.

"Vickie, are there ever any moments in your life when you're enjoying something?" I asked her.

She replied, a little hesitantly, "Yes . . .when I play with my three-year-old niece."

"Can you right now bring to mind an image of playing with your niece?&...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Charles English:

The book *Awakening Joy: 10 Steps to Happiness* gives you the sense of being enjoy for your spare time. You can use to make your capable considerably more increase. Book can to get your best friend when you getting pressure or having big problem together with your subject. If you can make looking at a book *Awakening Joy: 10 Steps to Happiness* to be your habit, you can get considerably more advantages, like add your personal capable, increase your knowledge about a few or all subjects. You can know everything if you like open and read a e-book *Awakening Joy: 10 Steps to Happiness*. Kinds of book are several. It means that, science reserve or encyclopedia or some others. So , how do you think about this reserve?

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Bernard Lewis:

Playing with family inside a park, coming to see the ocean world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. A single activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition of knowledge. Even you love Awakening Joy: 10 Steps to Happiness, you are able to enjoy both. It is fine combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout people. What? Still don't buy it, oh come on its referred to as reading friends.

Treva Ritter:

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