

*Includes The Powerful
"I Already Have It, I Already Am It"
Technique*

Unleash Your Inner Strength

by Eric Falcon

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Unleash Your Inner Strength! E-Book, First Edition

Table of Contents

PART I. Unleash Emotional Strength

1. Our Ultimate Quest: Empowering Emotions.....	3
2. The "I Already Have It, I Already Am It" Technique.....	6
3. Our Inner Obstacles to Feeling Good.....	10

PART II. Unleash Spiritual Strength

4. Rejuvenation and Renewal.....	16
5. Seeking the Inner Path.....	18

Chapter One

Our Ultimate Quest: Empowering Emotional States

I have a question for you - **What would your life look like if you could have everything exactly the way you desired it to be?** What is your vision or dream of a perfect life?

While everyone's ideal life scenario is different, some desires that are common to most of us include a healthy and attractive body, a romantic partner and family that love and respect us, financial abundance, and a home in our favorite geographical location.

Regarding work, the ultimate dream for some people is to own a successful business, while for others it's to have a fulfilling career making use of their artistic or musical talents, or making a major contribution toward important causes in the world like raising environmental awareness or ending social injustices. The dream of others is to be retired and free to travel the world, or else to play and relax on a beautiful tropical island, or perhaps in Las Vegas, for the remainder of their lives.

Every one of us has aspirations and visions of our ideal life; and many of us are patiently working on bringing our goals and dreams to fruition and making them a reality.

But here's another question I'd like to ask – **whenever any of our desires or wishes are fulfilled, what does this ultimately give us?** In other words, what is the thing that we really seek at the deepest level by pursuing possessions, achievements, or desirable circumstances?

The honest answer to this question is the same for everyone regardless of the specific desire or dream – **what we really seek are emotional states, such as fulfillment, happiness, freedom, joy, etc.** The ultimate value of any desirable achievement, possession, or circumstance is the emotional state which they bring us.

The essential thing which everyone is striving for in life is a sustained feeling or emotion!

With this in mind, let's take a few moments for a closer look at the topic of emotions.

Nearly always the various emotional states we experience throughout our lives occur for us in a 'passive' context. In other words, our emotions are not proactively chosen by us, but rather we mostly experience our emotions as subconscious reactions - either in response to an internal thought or a memory that occurs to us passively, or to an external event or circumstance.

The sudden memory that occurs in our minds of a past trauma makes us feel depressed or distracted...we become intimidated or anxious at the thought of an upcoming exam...a compliment we hear from someone makes us feel proud...we feel grateful when we receive a gift from a loved one...the championship victory of our favorite team makes us joyful and we

feel like celebrating. These common situations are all examples of the 'passive' context for experiencing emotions – the type of context which we are most familiar with.

But an alternative context for experiencing emotions exists, which rarely gets considered by most people – the 'proactive' context. Emotions occur in a proactive context by us actively creating or invoking them inside of ourselves.

Here's a quick demonstration of this: Wherever you are right now, take five seconds to stop and invoke an emotion of gratitude within yourself. Actively feel inside yourself a deep-seated feeling of thankfulness to your Creator, for some happy experience that you can remember from your past, or for a desirable person or circumstance in your life now.

Notice how quickly and easily you were able to create an emotional state – assisted by choosing a particular object of focus. In this case, I asked you to focus on something that you were grateful for. **This is a basic psychological principle - what we focus on determines how we feel.**

Besides our object of focus, there are two other major factors which determine our emotional state. One is the **state of our physical bodies** and the other is **the language we use to label the circumstances and events in our lives.**

The state of our physical bodies includes our posture, breathing, and facial expressions, as well as our nutrition status, hydration status, and level of rest, among other factors. A change in any of these factors can noticeably affect our emotional condition at any given moment.

Try this and see – the next time you feel a bit stressed, do the following: Take a deep breath in and let it out. Straighten your spine, bring your shoulders back and down, and lift your head and gaze up slightly. Continue breathing deeply and fully. Notice the difference in how this makes you feel. Most people experience increased feelings of calmness and confidence, by making the small changes in their physical state that I just described.

A third factor which determines our emotional state is the language which we use to describe and label our experiences and life circumstances. Actually the words and labels we use are less consequential than the meanings beneath those words. For example, you're sitting on a plane at the departure gate waiting to take off when the pilot announces there'll be a one hour delay due to a recently discovered mechanical problem. Your initial thoughts center on the inconvenience and boredom that the delay will mean to you. "This is pitiful," you pronounce to yourself, as feelings of anger and humiliation begin to set in.

A few moments later, however, it occurs to you that the delay could actually be a blessing in disguise, since the timely discovery may have averted a potential crash and the death of everyone on board. You take in a deep breath and let it out as a silent sigh; now feeling grateful and relieved. You then recline in your seat and pull out a novel or get some much needed rest.

Notice how the same event can lead to two very different emotional states, merely based upon the type of meaning that we give to it. Luckily, the meaning of any and all circumstances in our lives is solely ours to determine. For example, the choice is up to us to define whether any unpleasant or difficult situation we encounter is either a curse...or a gift. And the decision that we make then markedly influences how we feel about it; for example, either defeated and discouraged...or empowered and hopeful.

Returning to my earlier statement, what humans seek above all else are emotional states - happiness, fulfillment, fun, joy, etc. The good news is that we can choose to actively invoke these emotional states inside of ourselves at will - by making simple changes in our focus, our physical state, or our language, as I have just discussed. **Here are a few suggestions for applying this insight to your everyday life:**

a. Everyone has down time during the week - driving in a car, waiting in a line, relaxing on the couch at home, etc. **Use some of your down time to begin to practice invoking empowering emotions inside of yourself, whenever can you think of it.** For example, use the exercise I gave above to periodically invoke the feeling of gratitude within yourself - it's a very healing and rejuvenating emotional state, for your body, mind, and spirit.

b. If you observe a daily period of prayer or meditation, **devote a few extra minutes of your quiet time to practice invoking feelings of inner joy or confidence.** You could, for example, spend a few minutes focusing on a memory of a time when you felt especially happy or confident - perhaps in childhood, or later. This exercise is great for developing the character qualities of resiliency and inner strength, if you're in need of these, which I think we all are!

c. **Celebrate - for no good reason! Whenever you receive good news of any kind, regardless of how small or big, invoke feelings of exaggerated happiness within yourself.** Even celebrate outlandishly, whenever you have the energy for it. Do it when you're alone, of course - if the risk of being hauled off to the funny farm concerns you! An exaggerated expression of celebration, such as physically jumping for joy, shouting, or doing a crazy victory dance, floods the body with endorphins - which is one of the best things you can do for your emotional and mental health. When you let yourself celebrate periodically at the slightest provocation - you'll realize, as I have, that this practice raises your overall baseline level of inner happiness and contentment. As a result, you'll discover that figuring out successful solutions to the various problems that come along in life is much easier, compared to when your habitual emotional state is characterized by chronic boredom, anxiety, or aggravation.

Chapter Two

The "I Already Have It, I Already Am It" Technique

What are your most important one or two goals or desires at the present time? Well, whatever your desires may be, here's a unique psychological tool that can help you acquire them, which you probably haven't heard of before: *Celebrate your victories in advance!*

What do I mean by this? **Begin to practice feeling in your body the way you would feel if you had the circumstances or personal qualities which you desire or wish for *already*.** I call this the "I Already Have It, I Already Am It" mentality or technique.

Here's a brief exercise to help you implement this: Use your imagination to travel ahead out into the future - travel far enough out so that you can come to a stop just beyond the point in time when what you desire has already occurred or has already been achieved.

From this future vantage point in time, turn around now and look back, behind you, in your mind's eye; see that the outcome or goal which you had been desperately seeking has already come to pass. Now here's the most valuable step. **Cultivate inside of yourself the feeling of knowing that you already have the outcome or goal which you desire!**

How *happy* would you be knowing that you have attained your goal? Feel that happiness now ahead of time inside yourself...How *grateful* would you be knowing that you have achieved your outcome? Feel that gratitude now ahead of time...How much *elation and exhilaration* would you feel knowing that you now have what you desire? Feel that elation and exhilaration inside your body now...How *excited* would you be and how much would you *celebrate*? Feel that excitement now and celebrate like that now...

At this point, if you're still reading this article, you must be saying to yourself "This sounds a little nutty; why should I even bother to try any of this?" That's a legitimate question - I'm aware of how unconventional what I'm discussing is. So, I owe you a list of benefits:

Firstly, from a medical perspective, engaging in an imagination practice like 'feeling as if you already have what you want' and the resulting feelings of joy and gratitude that can accompany it, are associated with the release of endorphins in your body. Endorphins are chemicals made in the brain that are natural pain and stress fighters; increasing their release by the brain is one of the best things that you can do for your emotional and mental health.

A second benefit of the technique of 'feeling as if you already have what you want' is that it helps to foster what I call an 'abundance mentality', about the things that are the most important to us in life; namely, feelings of emotional and spiritual fulfillment. The realization that we can actively invoke emotions of joy and fulfillment within ourselves at any time, dispels the false notion that we need to wait until we've crossed some imaginary goal line in order to

experience these feelings. That paradigm is fine in the world of games and sports - the winner of a race feels elated and gets to celebrate, while the loser feels discouraged and dejected.

The problem occurs for us *in the real world* when we unconsciously begin to believe that joy and elation are in short supply somehow, and therefore we should only get to experience these feelings under certain conditions - such as when we've received something special or done something deserving. This is the 'scarcity mentality', which lies at the opposite end of the spectrum of the 'abundance mentality', and which relies upon a limited and distorted perception of reality.

But let's admit it - **there exists an abundance of joy, elation, gratitude, fulfillment and all other empowering emotions inside of us - which are freely available to us anytime we choose to invoke these feelings within ourselves.** So when we cultivate an 'abundance mentality' about this matter, we're simply aligning our beliefs with what is actually true. We need not go through life any longer with the false idea that we have to *wait* to experience fulfillment *until after* we've achieved certain specific personal qualities, possessions, or external circumstances.

Another important benefit of the practice of *celebrating our victories in advance* is that *it has direct effects* in the real world. **The habitual emotional states and beliefs which we harbor play a direct role in influencing the experiences in our lives. Here's what I mean: our long-standing feelings and beliefs tend to *draw to us* the kinds of circumstances and events that are in resonance with our inner states of being.**

The person who believes there are *opportunities* to be found in every one of life's *obstacles* usually experiences a far more satisfying and rewarding quality of life in the long run, compared to the person who believes there are mainly *obstacles* to be found in each of his life's *opportunities*.

This phenomenon I'm referring to has been summed up in the common phrase "**like attracts like.**" Everything in the universe is made up of energy, including our thoughts and feelings. The energies of the thoughts and feelings inside of us, according to something known as 'the law of attraction', tend to attract into our lives the energies that are their equivalents outside of us - in the form of events and experiences.

This is why some psychologists believe that people with a chronically negative attitude towards life tend to draw to themselves predominately negative experiences over time, or at least they find the negatives in all their positive circumstances. Conversely, people with a chronically positive attitude towards life tend to draw to themselves predominately positive experiences over time, or else they find the positives in any negative circumstances that occur to them. Of course there may be huge ups or downs in anyone's life, but this describes the overall picture - wouldn't you agree?

"The law of attraction" is both a metaphysical and a spiritual principle that has been studied and written about for ages, as well as taught by many spiritual teachers and scholars. **Put**

simply, our thoughts, beliefs, and feelings affect our surroundings and affect our lives; but feelings have the potential for the greatest effects *by far* among these three, hence they're the major focus of my writings.

Feelings arise from, and reside, within us at a deeper level than many of our thoughts and beliefs. Feelings, therefore, can be a much stronger and persistent form of energy than either of these two. Many of our thoughts tend to be superficial as well as fleeting, in nature. And while beliefs are considered more enduring than thoughts - the beliefs that we hold within us which are the strongest, reside inside of us in the form of feelings.

In addition, feelings are directly related to our strong intentions and prayers. It has been speculated that when people pray, it's the *feelings* that accompany our prayers which ultimately communicate our intentions to the Divine, and which also potentiate the effects of our prayers.

With all of this in mind, let's return to the technique that I've been discussing since the outset - that of '*feeling as if you already have what you want.*' Speaking in the book of Mark, Jesus teaches, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (11:24, NIV). Notice that the past tense is used in the phrase "believe that you *have received it* [italics mine]," conveying that our perspective should be one of looking back on the desired event or circumstance, in our imagination, ***as if it has already occurred.***

Gregg Braden, the author of *The Divine Matrix* and *The Spontaneous Healing of Belief*, has extensively investigated the effects of people's chronic emotional states upon the results and outcomes of their prayers and intentions. Braden's findings have verified his core teaching and claim that to be the most effective at receiving our desired results and outcomes we must **"...feel a clear and powerful feeling as if our prayers have already been answered."**

Finally, it must be acknowledged that, in a world of innumerable variables and interacting forces and wills, sometimes we may not get precisely the thing that we desire or aim for, *at the time* that we want it. This is where the skill of *flexibility* is important.

When we place the development of our spirit and our character as the highest priority in our lives, not the attainment of any particular possession, achievement, or circumstance, it gives us the flexibility to find value in any outcome that we end up with - even if it's not the exact thing that we aimed for or wished for.

Spiritual growth, maturity, and life lessons are just a few of the many valuable benefits that we can derive from any experience, if we're determined to, regardless of how unexpected, undesirable, or possibly even painful the experience may initially be.

And at some point afterwards, with the help of grace we'll be able to smile, feel joy, and express gratitude towards our Creator for what we've learned and for how much we've grown from the experience. **So, with properly ordered priorities in life, *our final degree of fulfillment***

and happiness can always be the same regardless of whether we achieve the specific outcome that we initially aimed for, or not!

It's important to be aware that **what we really seek at the deepest level in our pursuit of possessions, achievements, and desirable circumstances are the emotional states that we believe these things will bring us: emotions such as fulfillment, happiness, freedom, joy, etc.** It's also important to realize that *we don't need to wait* until we've achieved any particular possession or circumstance in order to be able to experience empowering emotional states. *We can experience these empowering emotions now, merely by invoking them within ourselves.*

So remember to *celebrate your victories in advance*...and keep doing so all along your journey towards your desires and goals. **And even if you don't always attain the precise external outcomes that you initially desired or wished for, in the end you will have experienced an abundance of the good feelings and emotions that you were *really* seeking underneath it all, anyway!**

Chapter Three

Our *Internal Obstacles* to Feeling Good

We spend a great deal of our lives in pursuit of desirable circumstances, possessions, and achievements, yet **what we really seek at the deepest level are the *emotional states*, such as fulfillment or happiness, that we believe these things will bring us.**

Something we probably all know, but usually forget to acknowledge however, is that **we have the power to consciously evoke any emotional state within ourselves, whenever we choose to.** This is what's known as the '*proactive*' context for experiencing emotions.

In contrast to this is the far more common '*passive*' context for experiencing emotions – we're more used to emotions arising within us as primarily *passive reactions to stimuli*. When stimuli occur, such as external circumstances or internal thoughts, various kinds of emotions passively and spontaneously arise in us in response, depending on the severity or impact of the events or thoughts.

However, it's possible to experience emotions in a *proactive* manner - it's as simple as making the choice to do so. **We can affect a change in how we feel as quickly as we're able to consciously change the object of our mental focus.**

Here's a quick demonstration of this: Wherever you are right now, take five seconds to stop and invoke an emotion of *gratitude* within yourself...Actively feel inside yourself a deep-seated feeling of *thankfulness* to God or to the universe, for some happy experience that you can remember from your past, or for a desirable circumstance in your life now...

Okay, now come back. If you participated in this demo, **notice how quickly and easily that you were able to create an emotional state - assisted by choosing a particular object of focus. You can just as easily invoke in yourself any other empowering emotion, such as fulfillment, determination, confidence, joy, freedom, etc, merely by bringing to mind a strong enough memory from your past, or a thought from your imagination, which corresponds to the emotional state you wish to experience.**

Let's face it, the ultimate value of any desirable possession, achievement, or circumstance is found in the emotional states they inspire in us: happiness, freedom, fun, joy, etc.

The good news is that **we don't have to wait until we've acquired or attained any particular possession or circumstance in order to experience empowering emotional states. We can experience these emotions anytime we desire, simply by invoking them within ourselves.**

The practice of proactively invoking positive emotions in ourselves is a special and unique human capability; *the reward* of proactively feeling good *is in the act itself*. It is simultaneously both a means and an end. It is superior to any pill and has no negative side effects.

Yet, as great as *proactively invoking positive emotions* is, there are several strong psychological factors which prevent most people from engaging in it regularly, unfortunately. I believe I've identified four of the most common psychological barriers that inhibit people from proactively cultivating empowering emotions within themselves. As I briefly examine these factors, I'll dispel the misperceptions that are inherent in each of them. The four factors are:

- a. Lack of '*deservedness*'
- b. Lack of '*permission*'
- c. The "*It seems awkward*" factor
- d. The "*It seems inauthentic and contrived*" factor

a. Lack of '*deservedness*' The basic unconscious belief most of us have regarding '*deservedness*' goes something like this: "*When people do good things, only then do they deserve to feel good. And when people do bad things, they not only don't deserve to feel good, but they should feel bad...or they should be made to feel bad.*" For the most part, this is a useful belief that helps us conceive of how social groups and societies in general can remain civil and avoid degenerating into lawlessness.

As we were growing up and learning to fit in socially, we often unconsciously used good and bad feelings as rewards and punishments for ourselves - psychologists say we internalize the values of our parents, teachers, and peers in this manner. As adults we often still continue to do this. Embarrassment, humiliation, regret, self-condemnation, etc. - these emotions all arise from, at least in part, our internal beliefs about acceptable and unacceptable societal behavior.

We run into a conflict with this internal belief *if we attempt to proactively invoke good feelings in ourselves when we lack something that makes us feel like we deserve to experience those good feelings* - such as something special that we've received or something deserving that we know we've done. Furthermore, when the slightest memory enters our minds of something undeserving that we've done in the past, there's a part of us that quickly summons up a sour feeling within us - remember, it's that internal reward and punishment thing, which most of us have deeply ingrained inside of us.

But given the many great benefits of the practice of invoking positive emotions in ourselves, it is worth the effort to break out of the limits of our beliefs about deservedness, which needlessly inhibit us emotionally.

First of all, realize that the world will not fall apart if people start letting themselves feel good without a reason, or without having done something special to deserve it. It might even help the world to be a better place, actually - don't people tend to behave a little better and treat others a little nicer when they're feeling good, compared to when they're not...? Sometimes unconscious beliefs can become tangled up in our minds and result in a distorted conclusion about reality, like this one.

Secondly, simply decide to no longer let the issue of 'deservedness vs undeservedness' be a major factor that dictates when you're allowed to feel good. We must develop the flexibility to let go of self-made psychological limitations, in situations where they fail to serve our best interests, or the best interests of anyone else for that matter.

Lastly, determine to completely forgive yourself for all of your past mistakes. Also, acknowledge and then release all feelings of regret and self-condemnation, whenever you sense these arising within you. Additionally, make a commitment to apply forgiveness to yourself liberally for any future mistakes. *Resolve to learn whatever insights or life lessons you can, throughout your life, from all of your mistakes and setbacks. Focus on learning, rather than on self-condemning, always.*

b. Lack of 'permission' We unconsciously seek out subtle cues from others around us that let us know what things are socially permissible and what things aren't. We're all familiar with the concept of peer pressure - while it's usually most evident among teenagers in high school, the phenomenon extends far into adulthood for most people. The social groups we choose to identify with can influence everything from our clothing styles, behaviors, mannerisms, and language, to our attitudes and beliefs.

An internal conflict can arise in us when we wish to adopt a new empowering habit or behavior, which is not commonly practiced, or favorably acknowledged, by our peers, our social group, or our society. It can feel somehow as if we lack permission, when we attempt to implement a new and unconventional attitude or behavior.

The way to overcome this mental reservation is to, first of all, recognize it. Simply identifying and exposing a limiting or disempowering belief begins to lessen its control over us. Then, *decide to acknowledge and stay focused primarily on the positive benefits of the new habit or behavior you'd like to acquire* - e.g., proactively invoking empowering emotions.

Secondly, make a commitment to begin to take more responsibility for, and active control over, your attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Realize that you no longer need to unconsciously seek for permission from external sources, to believe and act in ways you know are healthy and self-empowering - instead, give it to yourself.

Finally, if hearing it stated directly from someone can be of help, then here it is from me: "I give you permission to proactively invoke positive emotions in yourself, whenever you'd like to."

c. The "It seems awkward" factor Awkwardness and discomfort typically arise whenever we attempt something that's completely new or different than what we're used to. So also, the practice of proactively invoking positive emotions can generate discomfort and internal resistance if this isn't something that we're accustomed to yet.

The way to overcome this initial awkwardness and discomfort is through good old-fashioned perseverance, patience, and repeated practice. With time and conditioning, what seemed awkward and uncomfortable at first can begin to feel normal and natural.

Our greatest opportunities for personal and spiritual development usually exist outside of our comfort zones. We have to be willing to venture into uncomfortable areas on occasion, and try new things which might feel uncomfortable at first, if we wish to grow and mature as persons and become all that we're capable of being.

Learning to create more joy and happiness in our lives, in ways that are sustainable, *and not always dependent on external circumstances*, is an important step of growth and maturity for any human being. Teaching others whom we love how to do this is another significant step, as well.

d. *The "It seems inauthentic and contrived" factor* Another major psychological barrier that many of us have regarding proactively invoking positive emotions is that "it sometimes feels inauthentic and contrived."

If proactively creating positive emotions in yourself like joy or gratitude initially feels 'artificial' or 'contrived' to you, realize that this is likely *just another part of the general discomfort that typically can accompany something new and unfamiliar that you're trying out for the first time.*

For most of your life you have probably only been accustomed to experiencing emotions in a *passive context - as spontaneous reactions to external circumstances or internal thoughts.* As a result, '*spontaneous*' is likely equated with *normal and natural* to you; *anything else, therefore, feels 'artificial' and 'contrived.'*

This is due simply to an unconscious belief that many of us have adopted over time, however; *we can just as easily adopt a different attitude towards the concept of proactively invoking emotions, if we choose to.*

Regardless of how different or uncomfortable it can initially seem to invoke empowering emotions in ourselves, *we can decide to focus on the many benefits that this practice has to offer, and determine that it is worth the effort to move beyond any initial feelings of hesitation that arise.*

Here's something else to consider: *most of us think that we know ourselves far better than we actually do.* Nearly every one of us however acquires certain social masks, emotional armor, and defensive attitudes and behaviors over the years, which can obscure who we really are - beneath all those layers of protection. Distinguishing between what is really part of our authentic selves and what isn't, is not as straightforward as it might seem to be.

Feelings can serve as psychological barriers of protection, as well - and some of us can become so accustomed to feelings of chronic boredom, anxiety, or frustration that we may begin to

"own" these emotional states and associate them with our identities. Any significant departure from the baseline emotional states that we've become accustomed to can potentially seem to be 'inauthentic,' 'artificial,' and 'contrived' in our minds.

I'm not advocating years of psychotherapy to unmask and shed all the superficial layers of your personality which might exist, but at least realize that humans are complex creatures and very few of us know ourselves as well as we assume we do.

In matters like this where we realize our discernment and judgment may be obscured or unreliable, it becomes important for us to turn to *life principles* to help guide our choices and actions. In addition, looking to our trusted *role models and mentors*, who can serve as examples, can be helpful as well.

When pilots fly through clouds or stormy weather, they know to trust their instruments for accurate guidance and information, rather than to rely on information coming from their senses and perceptions, which can be distorted and misleading. Likewise, we can learn to trust in the *principles that we've committed to in advance*, as well turn to the examples of our role models and mentors, for guidance in situations when our perceptions and judgments may potentially be compromised and in doubt.

An important guiding principle, taught by great spiritual teachers and sages for centuries, is that the kind of happiness and fulfillment which comes from within ourselves, independent of external circumstances, is the kind that is the most enduring, most 'authentic,' and most worthy of seeking in life.

Reliance on this ancient principle can serve to reassure and empower us in our practice of creating good feelings in ourselves, and it can also help us move past our discomfort and hesitation, as well as any sense of 'inauthenticity,' which may arise in our initial attempts at this.

I don't recommend that we ever ignore or suppress our 'reactive,' or disempowering, feelings that arise spontaneously in us. Rather, when a disempowering reactive feeling arises in us *we can choose to merely stay aware of it; as well as choose to not indulge in, 'stay stuck in,' or amplify it.*

Throughout life there are occasions when we find ourselves experiencing reactive feelings such as anger, discouragement, or anxiousness, in response to events, circumstances, and thoughts. Whenever such reactive feelings may appear, our initial approach can be to simply notice them, accept them fully, and allow them to occur. Also, as we remain present, it can help to remember to breathe deeply and fully.

After these reactive feelings have run their natural course, we can then let them simply fall away, naturally and easily on their own. Our role is to learn to avoid indulging in, or amplifying,

these kinds of feelings when they arise and as they run their course. Afterwards, we can then gradually and steadily begin to allow feelings of joy and gratitude into our lives again.

You may have heard the aphorism, "Happiness is everyone's birthright." I like to believe this is true; but whether it's true or not, the fact of the matter is that you alone are the one who determines, or allows, the feelings that you experience in your life; just as you alone are the one who determines your attitude in life. Furthermore, *no one and nothing can ever make us feel a certain way, nor ever take any feeling away from us...unless we permit it, of course.*

You can choose to continue going through life allowing your attitudes and emotions to be solely determined by the circumstances of the moment. *Or you can learn to invoke in yourself feelings of happiness, strength, and empowerment periodically, regardless of the external circumstances.* Like in many areas of life, you can choose the role of the victim or you can choose to take responsibility and ownership wherever possible. Life will accommodate either choice.

In the final analysis, we're each largely responsible for our own happiness or unhappiness. Unhappiness is largely self-imposed; *so is happiness.*

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist who spent three years in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. After his release, Frankl proclaimed to the world that *our ability to determine our own attitude*, regardless of the external circumstances, is unique among human qualities, since it *is the sole thing we possess that can never be taken from us.* We can have everything else stripped from us, except this.

Frankl found this out first-hand, since during his imprisonment he was stripped of his social position, wealth, home, possessions, family, and freedom; as well as even basic necessities like access to proper food, water, and shelter. Despite this all, he was able to observe, "We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances..."

We each have the keys to our own heaven and our own hell - *the keys are the choices we make regarding our attitudes and the choices we make regarding our feelings. The knowledge that we can choose our feelings as well as our attitudes, independent of our external circumstances, is the greatest and most important key of all.*

Happiness...is the choice I wish to make despite
the obstacles that might sometimes be strewn in my path...

Chapter Four

Rejuvenation and Renewal

Since we are more than just physical bodies it's critical that we take time to nourish and cultivate our minds and souls just as we do our bodies, for optimum energy, vitality, and renewal, as well as ultimate fulfillment in our lives.

There are many ways to do this.

One of the most important ways is to take periodic breaks from your usual routine and **get out near or into nature** - anywhere there are trees, plants, or bodies of water nearby.

Whenever you have the opportunity, go walking, hiking, jogging, camping, and boating out in **woods, forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, and along the ocean's edge.**

Additionally, **minimize your exposure to media that promotes mental turmoil and spiritual disharmony**, such as many kinds of talk-radio shows and television shows, as well as violent movies.

It's okay to read the headlines of the paper and stay aware of current events, but do you really need to absorb all of the gory details of the latest murders, bombings, robberies, crime-sprees and other toxic events in the newspaper or on the radio or TV news?

A regular mental diet of these things can lead to increased amounts of daily stress as well as increased tensions (e.g., arguments, etc) at home and work, and may even be a main contributor to insomnia or poor sleep, if you have this problem.

Whenever possible, substitute your mental input of violent and toxic media reports with **stimulating music, optimistic thoughts, and CD's & audio recordings of inspirational and motivational speakers.**

Another good way to renew and care for your soul is to attend a religious service or a weekly group study of the Scriptures or other inspiring books. Also, taking some time each day to read a small portion of an **inspirational book** on your own is a further great way to stay out of the doldrums and keep your spirits lifted.

Furthermore, consider adding some form of **yoga, Tai Chi, or Qigong** class to your weekly schedule. These simple, beneficial ancient practices will not only re-energize you but will also improve your physical flexibility, balance, and sleep. This may contribute to the healing of chronic ailments, as well as enhance mental and spiritual balance, along with feelings of contentment, in your life.

Last but certainly not least, I believe that **daily prayer and meditation** should be a part of everyone's life - which can do nothing but good things for you. Pick up a few books on these subjects and educate yourself, then get started!

Chapter Five

Seeking the "Inner Path"

I came across a story in the news recently about Ray Williams, a former NBA player and captain of the New York Knicks, who is now homeless in Florida and sleeps in his car each night. The recent Boston Globe interview done with Ray revealed a man filled with deflated hopes, resignation, and discontentment. I began to wonder what factors could lead someone from a realm of wealth, opportunities, and the adulation of NBA fans to a place of such chronic unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life.

When I was younger one of my aspirations was to be a professional athlete - most of all I dreamed of playing in the NFL. I had the belief that if I made it as a pro ballplayer I would gain the ultimate things in life which I strove for – lasting happiness, peace of mind, and self-esteem. I believed that these inner states were the natural byproducts of things like great athletic talent, fame, and affluence. The time came when I realized that being a professional athlete was not in my future – as you might imagine, I felt like my self-worth took a hit at that point.

Although the news story about Ray Williams didn't appear to isolate any one single factor that keyed his downfall and led to his present discontented state, nonetheless the article reminds me of an important life lesson I've learned the hard way over the years, which is this - **we err whenever we associate true happiness, self-esteem, or fulfillment with external factors and outward circumstances – such as physical characteristics, social status, possessions, or achievements.**

Most of us are familiar with the long list of celebrities who suffered from chronic unhappiness and dissatisfaction with their lives - examples include John Belushi, Jimi Hendrix, Kurt Cobain, and Heath Ledger, just to name a few. These stars possessed good looks, talent, riches, fame, and massive success in their chosen fields – however their self-destruction tells us that neither their status nor their achievements necessarily provided them with lasting fulfillment.

So, if true happiness in life is not found in external factors then where should we look for it? I recommend we seek it in the one place which is often the easiest to overlook – within ourselves. The 'inner path' is where both science and spirituality tell us true fulfillment and contentment exist.

Abraham Maslow was a pioneer in the field of transpersonal psychology who scientifically studied people with high levels of happiness and self-esteem in their lives – he termed them “self-actualizing people.” Maslow found that one of the defining characteristics of these self-actualizers is that they are “independent of the good opinion of others.” In other words, they don't allow their inner contentment or sense of self-worth to be dependent upon the acceptance or attention of others, but rather they seek fulfillment and validation from within, by practices such as cultivating self-acceptance and personal integrity.

What I refer to as the **'inner path'** encompasses any practice that provides a means for inner growth and renewal, as well as contribution to others.

For many people, personal growth and renewal are cultivated by **spiritual practices** such as **prayer, meditation, affirmations, attending religious services, or the reading of Scriptures or other inspirational books**. Many people also can find a sense of personal renewal and fulfillment in more **physically-based practices** which take the form of pursuits like, for example, **long-distance biking or running, Tai Chi, Qigong, yoga, gardening, or spending time in nature** through hiking, camping, or boating.

Additionally, practices that focus on service and contribution to others are also a vital component of the 'inner path' for everyone, I believe, and not only make our world a better place to live but instill self-worth in the giver, as well. Such practices include **volunteering time to help those in need, tithing, and supporting charitable causes**.

Making your 'inner path' a central feature in your life doesn't mean necessarily forsaking or changing your current dreams, goals, or career aspirations. Actually, when you tend to your inner needs properly you'll be empowered more than ever to strive for excellence in all you do. The spiritual sages and teachers of the past have always taught what modern psychologists and scientists now have verified, the primal importance of **the 'inner path' – finding happiness and fulfillment apart from achievements or external circumstances**. Essentially what it boils down to is conducting a healthy ordering of your priorities and seeing life from its proper perspective. **Remember, success is not the key to cultivating happiness; cultivating happiness is the key to success.**

For more resources available from Eric Falcon, please visit:

www.UnleashYourInnerStrength.com