

Resurrecting Happiness

We all—always—have the choice to be happy or unhappy. It's a choice of mood, of attitude. Yes, that's true even in today's stress and anxiety. Being unhappy never makes any situation better.

But sometimes the grinding difficulties of life can capture us within the pull of despair. It's a feeling that creeps up quietly, like an event horizon pulling cosmic matter into a black hole. Once you're caught, you can't conceive of ever getting out.

I've got a two-minute "imagination exercise" to lift your spirits and reclaim your ability to be happy.

For two minutes, you're going to sit with your eyes closed and listen to the following music:

Igor Stravinsky, The Firebird Suite, Finale London Symphony Orchestra, Leopold Stokowski, conductor (excerpt, 0:00 – 1:35) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWQa8ZdAeIM>
[use this performance (from whatever music source), because other performances probably won't work]

- The emotional atmosphere/environment, of this music is Salvation—Hope. *Relentless and uplifting.*
- **Sit up straight!** Don't slouch. (I'll tell you why that's so important at the end.)
- Imagine your closed eyes are looking straight ahead of you.
- See another "you" walking forward on slightly rising ground toward a magical portal of alchemical Fire (like the Firebird itself, and this picture) to your future. [Artist: Sam Gilliam]



- Feel this "miracle of hope" bathing that future you in an infusion of electric, magic particles.
- Also feel it building up in your own body here in the chair.
- Breathe deeper, slower, feel these particles of hope and delight coursing through your blood.
- You only need to listen to first 95 seconds of this recording—the music changes right after (you'll hear it).
- Stop the music. Stand up. Take a slow, deep breath and silently say, "Yes, I'm ready."

Happiness starts with saying “Yes!” instead of “no.” In a way, happiness is “standing up for yourself.” It’s related to the original Greek meaning of ecstasy—the ecstatic experience:

- εκστασις = standing outside oneself
- Ex = out of stasis = a standing still (from *histanoi* = to stand)

To get any benefit from happiness—**to be fed by happiness**—we first need to rise above our self-imposed gloom, those many automatic ways we’ve elected to be miserable and unhappy. Today’s stay-at-home restrictions, health concerns and difficulties are certainly exceptional, but we all have many routes to indulging our unhappiness.

*“Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur’d like him, like him with friends possess’d,
Desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least.
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
from sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven’s gate;...”*

Listen to this music and do the exercise. It can lift you from your sullen earth just like Shakespeare’s lark.

One last thing: let me give you a very quick exercise to show you how shockingly transformative it is to sit up straight!

- Sit at your computer with your physical body in its usual “work” posture: slightly hunched over, stomach muscles relaxed, ribcage dropped, neck a little too far forward toward the screen, line of vision on a slight diagonal downward.
- Say out loud to the computer screen, “I’m happy.” (Don’t *act*! Just say, “I’m happy.”)
- Now, sit up straight (Mom is right) with your spine as fully vertical as you can make it, look straight ahead instead of at the screen, and again say, “I’m happy.”
- Go back and forth between these two physical positions until you can feel the difference in mood and attitude that this simple alteration can make.

Don’t believe anything I say! Try it for yourself. If something clicks—if you gain some insight or revelation—then it’s yours and you can have it for the rest of your life.