



Beyond Anxiety and Psych Meds

If you are stuck in Chicago you can't get to another place if you don't know where it is you are going and you don't have directions, right? Unfortunately, recognizing the high point of mental health has been mysterious. Health pros don't measure the best in mental health like the Olympic judges gauge and reward the highpoint of physical abilities...So how do we identify where we are going and visualize a model of optimal mental health? Let's map the territory to help you get clearer about where you are and where you want to go.

The Full Spectrum of Mental Health

Inability to function in work and family -> **Functioning but unhappy** -> **Happy** -> **Joyful** -> **Bliss-full**

Bliss-full: True spiritual masters are models of optimal mental health. They experience an "ever-new bliss" and omniscience. A Self-realized person is fully immersed in the knowing she is the Soul, in essence, a spark of the divine, profoundly connected at all times. Christ described this as a feeling that, "surpasses all understanding" bringing endless peace. People who reach this state also have a profound desire to be of service to help others out of their suffering. They have an extraordinary control over their own energy, manifest tremendous discernment, clarity of mind, ethics, and creative inspiration.

Joyful: You have experiences of being, primarily, a Soul. This means you are not as identified with your body and ego. You might be fascinated with spiritual healing, channeling, and other spiritual phenomena at this level.

Happy: You, as ego, feel identified with being a body and you have achieved some pleasure(s) that you want. This feeling is usually quickly replaced by desiring yet another pleasure. (Eat one potato chip and you want more, right?)

Most of us have experienced the bottom rungs of the ladder sometime: **an Inability to function** that might show up as deep depression or anxiety. **Functioning but unhappy** is a mix of impulses and judgments (in relationships, work, etc.) Prejudice, intolerance, egotism, self-hatred, addiction and drama live on these levels.

Where Are You Headed, Ma'am?



Before we go on, two questions:

1. Where do you now put yourself on this spectrum? Happy?
2. Where would you truly like to be on the spectrum?

OK. Now you know where you are and the direction you would like to go. That's a big step! Maybe you'll make a firm commitment as you learn more about the goal that's available to you.

10 Ways to Optimize Mental Health

1. *Develop some form of self-discipline* and hone your ability to concentrate. First this will improve your self-awareness and help you to monitor where you are on the map. Secondly, the more you increase your ability to concentrate, the more progress you can make. Your ability to stay focused is the gasoline and energy to keep moving. Persevere. Don't forget the goal.
2. *The "Auntie Em Formula":* Look at the life style choices you have in place. Be sure you are getting adequate rest, a well-balanced diet, and exercise. Choose a form of exercise you really like and will enjoy doing. Research has

recently shown that these three factors are more effective than psychiatric drugs for treating mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

3. If you are having problems with *digestion or allergic reactions*, consult a qualified health provider. These sensitivities can lead to feelings of lethargy, muddy thinking, and decreased motivation. An **orthomolecular psychiatrist** will give you a blood test to get more information about allergies and gut sensitivities, and determine your need for naturally occurring micro-nutrients. Your system can be fortified in this way, replacing the need for psychiatric medication and having to weather their side effects.
4. *Detox: Toxic substances* in the body—including bacteria, virus, funguses, etc. can deplete us and also cause emotional responses like depression and anxiety. A health care provider can test you for heavy metals, and environmental toxins—also suggest ways to build up and rebalance your system. Some alternative medical practitioners have quick ways to test for toxic substances, as well as give effective treatments.
5. Chronic pain or chronic emotional unhappiness can be modified with *Mindfulness Practices*. This is not to say there is a guarantee that the chronic pain will totally vanish. Through mindfulness, people of all ages can learn to have more self control and develop less identification with the body's natural impulses to run after what feels good, or resist what hurts. One glimmers the Soul and finds more sources of joy as a result of mindfulness.
6. *Drink in sources of inspiration*: YouTube offers free videos. Your library can get you books for free, on loan. If you want to go for “Bliss-full” then I recommend reading “Autobiography of a Yogi” and searching for videos about Yogananda on YouTube or through Google. His organization, the Self-Realization Fellowship, offers daily lessons for a modest price, without any need to separate yourself from your religion or cultural heritage.
7. *For addictions* (alcohol, drugs, food, sex, anger, etc): 12 step programs are known to have some of the most effective techniques for helping. Ideally, you will reach the recognition that “I am the Soul that has a weakness for ____, fill in the blanks”. Our progress does not stop when we can admit “I am an addict” and take responsibility for the pain we caused ourselves and others.
8. *Practice Forgiveness*: Holding resentments against others is one of the most formidable obstacles to finding peace of mind and can result in chronically contracted muscles, physical and mental pain for you and less peace in the world for all of us. Check out books, CDs and talks about practicing forgiveness: Try: [jackkornfield.org/audiosets/#Forgiveness Meditation](http://jackkornfield.org/audiosets/#ForgivenessMeditation)

9. *Guided Meditation and Music:* The neuroscientist Eben Alexander, MD had a near death experience recently and wondered how he could again experience the bliss he tasted during that episode. Binaural beats used with stereo headphones stimulate brain entrainment, instant relaxation, emotional balance, healing and well-being and heightened states of consciousness. This is a dependable relaxation tool for resolving depression and anxiety and provides support to make meditation easy.
10. *Strengthen empathy and practice compassionate action:* Competition and fighting increase feelings of being separate. Empathy and cooperation create more connection with what unifies us all, whatever you call that (e.g. God, Spirit, the Big Warm-Fuzzy, Getting Closer to Joy). When we feel more connected we feel less anxious and depressed. Harry Palmer, author of the Avatar materials, created a wonderful meditation to say silently when waiting in line or hanging out: It should be done on strangers, unobtrusively, from some distance. Try to do all five steps on the same person.

Step 1 With attention on the person, repeat to yourself: "Just like me, this person is seeking some happiness for his/her life."

Step 2 With attention on the person, repeat to yourself: "Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in his/her life."

Step 3 With attention on the person, repeat to yourself: "Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness, and despair."

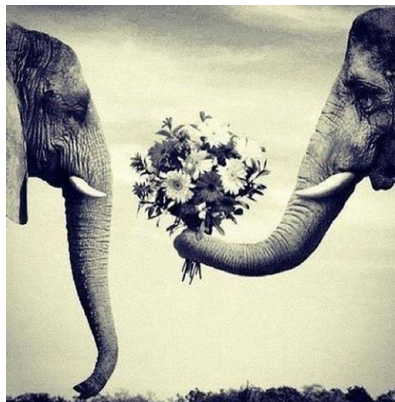
Step 4 With attention on the person, repeat to yourself: "Just like me, this person is seeking to fulfill his/her needs."

Step 5 With attention on the person, repeat to yourself: "Just like me, this person is learning about life."

Two Variations: Focus on someone you love.

Couples and family members can use this to increase understanding

You can use it on old enemies and antagonists still present in your memories.



Stay Connected

The above 10 ways to optimize mental health are quick starts. Stay tuned to IMHU.org. We will be interviewing experts so you can go deeper in your understanding of how to optimize mental health and get to know excellent integrative practitioners. Watch for our upcoming audio-video library starring our 20+ faculty.

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