



THE
NEUROPSYCHOLOGY
OF HAPPINESS

*I believe that if the connection
of mind, brain, and body are not understood,
the magic of alignment cannot unlock your
ultimate happiness and potential.
They all must be considered—the psychology,
the neurology, and the physiology.
And what I believe even more is that it isn't
simple, but we can make it so.*

I NACTION.

Procrastination.

Isolation.

Those are a deadly combination. At a time when it is the world's standard to experience them, those things unify, and they cut me deep. It is not only me; the whole world is on a chopping board.

I stop.

I stop being me, I stop doing the work.

I fade into amnesia.

I don't remember progress.

The only things that hold me are anxiety, debilitating fear, and spinning walls. Unintentionally ignored, I am withering into the realization that I am irrelevant, no one cares, and I do not matter.

I disengage.

I let go from the world, from my vision, from my Self.

During the 2020 lockdowns but before Self-isolation was deadly, the time to "stay home and stay safe" was actually amazing, for me at least.

I had time to myself to get my Self ahead of the game, and I didn't really miss needing to be social. I just finally had some much-needed me time. I went inward, asked deep questions, prioritized health and Self-development, and got clear about how to adapt in a world I was failing to recognize.

I developed a new business plan for an intelligence company and was overly excited about the adventure ahead of me. It almost felt Selfish when everyone was just talking about how much they were

suffering. I think we all were being pushed to financial fears, physical limits, and most of all, psychological cliff edges.

I was meditating every day, water fasting, and I managed to write and Self-publish *The Quarantine Handbook* in just eleven days. All in all I was basking in the cane-field countryside of Barbados and didn't really have a complaint in the world. I got quality time with my father for the first time since his kidney transplant. I got time with the new metallic stallion of a dog, Hugo, who—still in his puppy years—could be mistaken for a rideable animal with his noteworthy height. I got time with the fresh breeze and empathic sunshine and took in the sound of the cockatoo barking “kiss kiss.”

Then, lockdown ended.

Society trickled back to functionality, and I wanted to execute on my vision. No one had time to listen. Honestly no one even really grasped my genius idea to innovate how we perceive and experience intelligence. I was adamant that I could liberate the intellect and enhance the efficacy of the everyday human. Perhaps I was and still am ahead of my time. Perhaps people were just scrambling to survive and had zero fucks to give about anything other than keeping their heads above turbulent waters. Fewer people around me were thriving and more were moving from struggling to suffering, and it was the wrong time to acquaint them with my ambitions.

Then I became one of them.

I became the first-place winner of suffering. It's called being suicidal. It was not my first rodeo, so I knew the difference between a bad day and never wanting to live another one. I remember the pain I felt to be living—living as my Self and feeling transparent, as if people looked straight through me.

I did it with such grace, so quietly, so hidden so as not to interrupt the busy souls.

Until I didn't.

I screamed, I cried, I deciphered the engineering of blades glued into shaving razors.

I chipped away at anything I had left in me that was thriving. I let my emotions bleed out until I felt nothing. At least when I felt nothing I didn't host the disappointment of being unloved, unseen, and unheard.

It is so much better to feel nothing at all, than to suffer in pain.

I spent longer hours in bed, slept more, felt emotionally heavier and heavier as days came and went. I skipped workouts and traded reading for Netflix, which just became background noise. I stopped using social media and didn't invest in my relationships, because what did I matter to anyone anyway? Everyone has their plate full; don't ask them to eat your shit.

I had a pity party, invited every destructive thought I could guest-list, and right there in the dark, we raved.

We raved like we wanted to die.

It was hauntingly dark. Without connection I wilted in the loneliness of being this created version of Self that I hated, and I assumed the world hated. I grew to believe it. I thought it was all true. Even in a room full of family, I didn't feel important, valid, worthy of anyone's attention because I felt ignored.

I am a genius, see me, hear me, believe in me. I craved that support and without it, the light went out. A glorious failure with a vision so mighty it would bring Goliath to his knees.

So we raved in the darkness. We raved like it would take days to slow us. Sweating in Self-loathing I laid in the fetal position and barfed at the thought of hosting my demons with such hospitality the

way I had been. Get out, but stay. You are the only ones talking to me. In my quiet studio apartment, I needed silence from the thunder of my internal demolition.

My dad was so good at seeing me in all my glorious potential, so when I left the countryside to set up my little studio apartment, I was left with my Self.

I am not really sure why it cut so deep. Feeling invisible I guess made me feel worthless.

The only way out was in. I had to take control, and while I knew I couldn't be fake about what I was feeling, I thought maybe I could do things that would make me feel better. Rather than try to get rid of the crushing thoughts that pinned me down, I used my little might and tried to adjust my focus. I understood that taking action would create a biological sense of happiness simply by releasing happy chemicals. So I focused on my body instead of my mind.

Let Me Layman It for You

The body responds to instructions from the brain and the brain listens to the mind. If my mind was compromised, perhaps I could just get my body to take the action without the motivation of the mind. Maybe I just had to give up on feeling good before taking action.

If I could just work out, then my body would feel good because of the biological response to that action. That was the hardest part, because you don't feel like doing anything. I knew all the things I was meant to do, but there just seemed to be this huge barrier between where I got lost and taking one step in front of me to find relief.

I felt like getting in a ring with my demons, obliterating them for the pain they had inflicted, so I acted as if this workout was liberation.

It was a fight for freedom.

I've never been one to opt for medication. I didn't want that for myself, especially since reading in various articles that up to 50 percent of people on antidepressants receive little or no benefit. This was most recently documented in "An Overview of Treatment-Resistant Depression" published by VeryWellMind.com in November 2020, written by editor in chief Amy Morin, who is an author and psychotherapist. The article was reviewed by Steven Gans, who's served as a Clinical Challenge editor for the Harvard Review of Psychiatry and teaches at Massachusetts General Hospital. To me, those were not the most encouraging stats to push chemicals into my body, but that was just my personal decision, and each to their own. I know that studies are now looking at if people being prescribed antidepressants are actually even depressed. That might not be the case, and it's an even more encouraging reason for me to keep digging into the Self, esteem, and other factors that impact mood.

It did get me to thinking if meds were used for brain disorders, and I felt like my depression was actually emotionally rooted symptoms and nonclinical, then I could figure this out. I just needed to get from A to B and realized it had everything to do with the interconnectedness of the mind, brain, and body.

As we saw in the last chapter, some causes of depression stem from unresolved emotional trauma, Self-defeating mental habits, or lack of life vision and purpose. This could be why almost half the people on medication will not be relieved of their depression, because they need to figure out what's happening in their mind and with their Self.

Research by Julia Friederike Sowislo and Ulrich Orth (2013) explored if low Self-esteem predicted depression and anxiety. Their conclusion was that to protect your mood, you should focus on boosting Self-esteem. This supported my belief that low Self-esteem is a

high-risk factor for depression, and that seemed like a great place to focus. I was encouraged by the extensive longitudinal studies published in Cambridge University Press that aimed to treat depressive symptoms with cognitive behavioral group therapy that focused on enhancing Self-esteem.

Self-esteem is normally determined at a young age. If you develop a certain low level as a child and never rectify it, it stays stable in that place. I assume it leads to a predisposition to depression. I was bullied as a kid. I was smart, but inside I can't say I was confident, loved, or even liked. I guess this episode of depression was a reflection of that inner child and her unresolved trauma.

Reckoning and Rewards

The thing is that our happiness is tuned to the body's reward system, which controls incentive, salience, motivation, and desire. Depression, I discovered, is also related to this reward system, and it's sort of like a glitch in your motivation and willingness to use energy and effort to experience a reward—an utter loss of interest.

The part of the brain that deals with motor and reward (the ventral striatum) is connected to the area of the brain that deals with Self-knowledge (the medial prefrontal cortex) and that connection (via a frontostriatal circuit) is related to Self-esteem. Our Self-esteem, Self-knowledge, and our state of desire, satisfaction, and happiness are interconnected.

As I burrowed further down my rabbit hole, the complexity of depression, much like a Japanese single malt, profoundly distilled itself into something remarkable. I started to see this big scary topic condense into a powerful theory. The concept of Self, the Affective Self, and Self-esteem were the core to healing depression.