

Happiness & Fulfilment - with Robert Mack

Very very warm welcome to another live action for Happiness event It's fantastic to have so many of you joining us from all around the world and what a delight it is to be joined today by Robert Mack Robert Thank you so much for being here Thanks so much for having me I'm so excited to be here It's uh it's really exciting to spend this time together I'm looking forward to sharing your inspiring ideas and work with this community Uh And as always it's gonna be a community event So it's lovely to see so many people already welcoming each other on the chat from everywhere around the world Uh Let's keep it friendly constructive and relevant and kind as we always do folks And after I've had a conversation with Robert for half an hour or so on today's topic of happiness and fulfillment you'll then have a chance to ask questions So please please do use the Q and A function to post your question or if you see someone else's question you love then upvote it and we'll hopefully get a chance to come to that later on And we're also gonna have a few interactive things as we often do to keep you engaged and we're looking forward to hearing your responses to that But Robert maybe you you could start us off I mean you're an author you're a positive psychologist you do a lot of coaching and helping people around their happiness and well being Maybe you could say a bit more about your background and and how you got to being here the long scenic route path uh and path mark you know I am probably the least likely person in the world in one sense to be a happiness coach because I was so deeply miserable and depressed and uh suicidal for so long Um So it's ironic to me that I would be here talking about happiness Um And that I'd be feeling so happy because that wasn't always the case in my life I mean for the better part of 25 26 years I was really deeply unhappy and and like I said suicidal Yeah And I think that's really relevant and I mean I'm I'm always grateful to see people's honesty and what you find with a topic like that is it very often encourages us to talk about the the opposite of that Really And I guess maybe that's an interesting place for us to start today because here we are in a world that's got so much suffering Actually if we're honest you know whether it's looking at war in Europe uh now or what the journey we've been through in a pandemic in the last few years or indeed just the general challenges of living life as a human being a parent a friend a a partner or a colleague There's a lot that makes life hard Is it even relevant to be talking about happiness Is this some utopian vision or is it actually the the very stuff of life we're talking about here What a great question I without

question And I say this from the deepest or sort of authentic place in my heart I can't imagine anything more helpful at this particular point in time you know during this particular age you know um it's easy to get lost in the chaos confusion conflict and the suffering of the world Very understandably So lots of us are empath right And I've always I've always been an empath and so it's easy for me to get lost in that And I also am crystal clear that if we want to help anyone else who is drowning our drowning too does not help right Our suffering too doesn't help those who are suffering in order to be of true help and assistance to people in the world We want to be able to access that which they're having trouble accessing So if it's peace or if it's love or it's joy we want to be that change that we want to see in the world that we want to see in other people there are of course appropriate ways to do it You know we want to meet people where they are but it's more important now than ever that if we want to live in a happy peaceful loving world that we be happy peaceful and loving ourselves um it's just critical it was sad And so I guess as we look around us um in modern society there's a sort of slightly inauthentic you know materialistic version of happiness It's about sort of having more earning more consuming sort of joy and pleasure And what I like about the title we've got this you know for this event about happiness and fulfillment is it sort of hints at something a bit deeper and richer than that And I was reminded of a phrase that Marty Seligman uh the the founder of Positive Psychology um used called Authentic Happiness I don't know Does that does that speak to you Because I think that's what we're trying to talk about here isn't it Yes absolutely I mean it definitely does I studied Martin Seligmann's work before I matriculated into that Masters of Applied Positive Psychology program and then got to study underneath them So I'm very familiar with authentic happiness is both a book and an experience And I of course very sort of familiar with the opposite of that either inauthentic happiness or very authentic unhappiness And so I would say you're absolutely right I think uh these days there's lots of talk about toxic possi sort of positivity and there's lots of talk about a happiness that is maybe saccharine or inauthentic But what we're talking about here and what I really love diving into is this deeper fuller honest experience of happiness that I sometimes call peaceful aliveness It's a peaceful aliveness and our life Peacefulness that I believe we all have access to all the time but we don't always know we have access to it and we certainly don't feel like we have access to it So yes Um The term authentic happiness speaks to me uh deeply and truly Mm Well before we can dive into some of the sources of that

authentic happiness and and also you know get the community to share on that I feel like we all we sort of need to address the elephant in the room to some extent which is that there are quite a lot of things that get in the way of our happiness whether it's ourselves or the situations we find ourselves in Uh And I wondered if we could maybe start in a sort of rather unhappy place But let's start honestly and authentically by asking people to share some of the things that really sort of drain them or get in the way of the happiness I think you've got a particular way you refer to those things What do you call them Yeah Happiness valleys or happiness deserts Right They're just the void of any real happiness or inspiration or joy and sometimes love or peace Uh So your happiness valleys or happiness deserts So I see some people have already shown this on the chat But if you'd like to and again we're not trying to start on a downer here but I think it's important to be authentic So I'm seeing people sharing death illness um chronic pain addiction cancer anxiety physical pain world politics indecision bullying family problems grief technology avoiding COVID constant negativity difficult relationships financial pressures boredom Uh war Wow loneliness Uh Not being able to let go of past events Can't sleep poor health workplace challenges being busy divorce noise pollution catastrophizing depression Wow I mean what a list Robert how are you feeling as you see that sort of human experience Really Well um that all of that like clearly there's a very self aware uh sort of audience and participants Uh here today I will say that with very few exceptions I have at some point in my life felt depressed or unhappy about all of that all of that even as little as six or seven years of age Um So it's certainly understandable um that we would feel less than happy or joyful if we're going through any of those experiences Hm Well thank you so much for sharing those everyone And I think you know now we've held space for some of the things we're dealing with we can hopefully talk a bit about um positive ways forward Not that we can get rid of that stuff A lot of that stuff is things we can't change whether it's about a health diagnosis or a work situation loss of a loved one but we can still choose how we respond So I think maybe the the what you suggested as a nice follow on from that Robert was what what would you call the opposite of a happiness valley or a happiness uh desert Yeah they would be our happiness islands right They're just this these like little beautiful sweet spots in our lives They're usually places or activities or things that make us feel inspired or uplifted Excited to be alive for their own sake We just love them for their own sake So yeah our happiness islands Ok That's lovely So let's share some of our happiness

islands Everyone uh feel free again to engage in the chat I'm seeing my allotment Uh My sister's hugs my garden art bird song friends nature exercise reading grandchildren hiking singing Oh I was singing in a choir last night I very much agree with that one My beautiful little boy my puppy hearing birds uh the beach creating cup of coffee with friends looking at the sea on a sunny day stopping and breathing dancing relaxing singing human connection being asleep cats friends flowers pets mindfulness Uh I don't I think I saw cycling there that would certainly be one of mine playing yoga music hiking these happiness webinars Thank you so much to whoever said that That's lovely to hear children's laughter Gosh that's a lovely one And so much more I'm I'm feeling really uplifted saying that this what what's on your mind Robert Oh my goodness Totally It's like I would love to schedule all of us to schedule more of those happiness islands into our daily existence in life and schedule out of our life as many of those happiness values as possible Um but so many of the things that people share here I mean for sure there's resonance for me around I mean all these things it's like animals and toddler sleeping and big smiles on people's faces like just love it I mean it's amazing how just a few words can make you feel uplifted Um because there's something there that resonates So so how does this link you know how do these happiness is and why does this matter or how does it link to like positive psychology and and how happiness maybe can be a source of strength in our lives not just as a sort of pleasurable experience but maybe helping us be better at life and be better humans and be better for each other Totally Um so positive psychology is really a science right It's a time tested face salad empirical science and study of what makes life worth worth living It's really the science of happiness So science um the science of happiness of course um is a science first and foremost but it's also an art So it's something you have to customize and tailor fit for yourself in your own life Uh None of us really are living walking talking averages right We're all each and each of us is in individual And so we wanna make sure that we're authentic in our happiness journey And so the Happiness Islands let us get in touch with what we genuinely truly feel inspired by uplifted by or energized by the science of positive psychology really tells us where if we were to gamble with respect to happiness where do we want to gamble Right So there's lots of talk and positive psychology and the way I would sort of simplify it is that happiness is the greatest success because it's the reason we want success you know no matter what we want to achieve accomplish or acquire we want it really only because we think we'll feel better for having it right A feeling that we're

called kind of ultimately after So happiness is the greatest success but it also leads to success And on the other side the things that we think of as success so successful life conditions and circumstancess even health of the body great relationships you know great kids those things believe it or not don't really lead to lasting meaningful and abiding happiness that we're all ultimately after Right So success doesn't lead to happiness Happiness does lead to success and happiness is the greatest success Um But the Happiness Islands are one little variable that we want to take into account I love that And I love the fact that while you've been talking there've been more happiness is just popping up gardening poetry sunshine people are still sharing them So that's that's great Um I've heard you talk about about sort of four different stages So obviously what we want to do and I'm sure the audience are keen here to do is to put this into practice So not only can we identify the things we already do but what more can we do to build this into our lives in an authentic lasting way You've talked about four different stages If you might sort of take us through though then how we can use that Absolutely So the first stage generally in our happiness journey is all about happy actions or happy activities So those are the Happiness islands right So we're wanting to schedule into our life more of our happiness islands and we're wanting to reverse engineer out of our life most or as many as we can happiness values or deserts right So that means outsource delegate reduce eliminate automate or regulate as many of your values or deserts as human humanly possible So that's that's step one Step two is really a lovely fit with what we do with a happiness because as I'm sure you've seen we have these monthly themes and and calendars and daily actions which are basically little things you can try on a daily basis to do that Um but I love how you're gonna build from there So ok we've got some habits we've got rid of some of the unhappiness We've got some things that give us a bit of a boost What's the next uh stage Yeah So sort of the sec second stage is sort of happy people right Or at least people that aspire to be happy And so the one sort of I'd say most meaningful contribution that of psychology has to offer to this conversation is that other people matter and they matter a great deal of relationships matter not just or even mainly romantic relationships but social support in general And so you're wanting to do what you can to schedule into your life more of the happy people or the supportive people or the loving people and you're wanting to really reverse engineer out of your life the people that don't really have an aspiration to either be happy or generally aren't very happy Um The surprising thing about happiness is that the

happiest person generally doesn't pull the least happy person up It's the least happy person that pulls the happy person down in terms of their happiness And so other people matter a great deal with respect to happiness and unhappiness One of the things I love in this community is the kindness that I see The people recognizing that a lot of their own happiness comes from helping others And you know that we all want to cultivate better relationships But actually relationships can be really really hard can't they Especially with some of our nearest and dearest and loved ones I mean that a thing that made a big difference for me was learning to to be a better I'm not gonna say a good but a better listener sort of getting out of my the way of what I wanna say and actually really tuning into the other person's needs Um But I'm instead of work in progress what are some of your tips for for how to really sort of cultivate good relationships and help sort of create happier people It's such a great question I mean and and this is where the research gets really interesting too and I'll share my personal experience on top of it But happy people are kinder people but kind people are happier people It's a positive upward spiral between happiness and kindness right Happy people donate more money and time and energy to social causes they care about and to individuals in need But also those kind charitable individuals become happier as a result of that right Um So yeah they um feed each other in really powerful ways with respect to relationships I'm a firm believer that what I mostly wanted to bring to an experience is unconditional regard You know I have infinite weaknesses countless weaknesses Uh judgment hasn't tended to be one of them I don't know It's sometimes even gotten in the way I think maybe of my life because I'm not a good judge of character so to speak but it's not a priority for me Um as much as holding space or being a sort of paragon of unconditional regard or non judgment unconditional love We just kind of letting people be who they are rather than trying to change them Is that kind of what you're saying Yeah I don't have any interest in changing anyone I don't know what's best for anyone I don't know what's best for me I'm clear about that Um So I just let people be who they're being and show up in the way they want to show up and then I decide how I'm gonna participate in that or not Mm That's very powerful I think we can spend a whole hour talking about just that But we talked about two of your statement the actions and activities people and relationships you know other people matter I love that phrase Where is the what's the third what's next in your little journey So the third piece is just happy thoughts right And that's really about telling better feeling stories based in truth about everything and

everybody in your life starting with yourself right So instead of betting thoughts only based on whether or not they're true We also want to bet bet thoughts and conversations based also on whether or not they're helpful supportive in us feeling what we want to feel or achieving what we want to achieve There are lots of things that are true in the world but focusing on them won't make you happier and you won't necessarily benefit anyone by doing so either Um So it's about telling better feelings based in truth really It's about heavy plots So so one of the things I've been surprised by in the work we've done with action for happiness over 10 years now is how many really kind generous thoughtful people actually have really really I would say toxic uh sort of inner voices you know they're kind and warm on the outside and yet they're saying to themselves and I find myself doing this to myself saying like you're not good enough you're an idiot you messed that up You're not you're not enough in some way And I've been really shocked to see how common that is I mean in some ways it's quite humanizing to know that we all deal with that to some extent But you know if if if there's someone here listening today uh who's going through that I'm not good enough How can we I mean that's a we may know that's not true but how do we shift that story in our head That hits me right in the heart I mean that was really the crux of what I struggled with when I was so deeply depressed and suicidal still had the suicide test marks on my wrist because I had this I have a friend that calls it your inner crackhead and it's just that little demon inside that little self critical voice And we all struggle with that at certain points and that's not our fault Part of it is sort of nature right We're born and wired with the brain that cares mostly about survival and not only about happiness but if you survive the chance of you being happy is much better but there's also the nurture part right We're often you know born into a society in the world and families um that are that are critical and we internalize that self criticism so you can turn that around There's no question about it You just have to want to turn it around more than anything else You have to want to be happy and at peace and to feel love and self love more than you want anything else more than you even want to be Right Right That's just critical And if you can have that kind of commitment where you want happiness above all else you'll find that you start to turn it around a lot more quickly than you could otherwise Hm Yeah I find it really helpful sort of I don't really believe in mantras so much but I find the thing I say to myself is you're doing ok you're ok as you are It's not like you're fine It's not like you're perfect but it's also not that you're messing up You're an idiot You've let people down It's just

sort of like you're ok you're doing the best you can Uh And and I find that really like this sort of disarms a lot of the inner critic I love that I also used a self love journal which was like every day I would just pull it out two or three things that I genuinely liked and loved about myself And every night I try to come up with something new Oftentimes I couldn't come up very much at all but I still tried it And if you can just be consistent with that you can literally rewire your brain to do it much less effortful much more easily and much more Enjoyably in about 22 to 66 days So yes either practice works The key is to privatize consistency over intensity So let's keep moving because I'm really enjoying this So we've had actions we've had people we've had thoughts You said there were four Where where do we go from here Yeah So happy actions happy people happy thoughts And the final one is happy no thoughts right Positive no thoughts And so what you discover what I discovered in my happiness journey is that even when I'm doing the happiest activity I'm with the most loving or supportive people I am working on telling a better feeling story based in truth And I'm trying to think happier positive thoughts There still can be unhappiness underneath there You can still often feel depressed or stressed or anxious And so what I discovered was that I was working really hard at this happiness thing And while I wanted to continue doing the happy things and big spending time with happier supportive or loving people and entertaining the happier story I also realized that I could find a much more direct path to happiness by being still and silent in moments right That I didn't need to always think all the time I saw somebody in the chat earlier speak about overthinking as a happiness value or desert And there's no question about it Most of us humans are over thinkers and over analyzers and we self ruminate entirely too much We think it's processing but we're mostly just repeating reliving and pre living all of the potential problems or fears that we could or have experienced in our life Yeah I love that call to sort of stillness I slightly reluctantly at first but now many many years ago sort of began a meditation practice which is a sort of uh my particular way of trying to turn off the thoughts of the wrong thing but be at peace with the thoughts and then just sort of like find a quieter space and I think there's something about this word acceptance which is we there's lots we can't change but we can't at least be at peace with how things are even if they're imperfect Is that what you found has developed for you Absolutely Like you know that moment right before you slip off to sleep at night where you're so tired that you don't really want to move and you've sort of forgotten about your fears even your desires for forgetting about world

everybody in the world you forget about yourself That micro moment before you step off to sleep your mind is just so quiet and in that quiet in that stillness in silence is a blissful sort of sublimely blissful experience of peace or peaceful aliveness That experience is something we can have all the time We're certainly much more free and regularly that we're having Now simply by noticing that you have thoughts but you're not your thoughts So can you just observe or notice the thoughts you're having without getting so caught up in all of them or any of them Can you just sort of watch them the way you watch clouds in the sky Not overinvest just notice and then bring your focus and attention back to your body back to the place inside that is always perfectly at peace And at first it might be a space or place in your body it might simply be about breathing from the stomach But you'll discover that if you can focus more on the experience of the body as opposed to the explanations in the brain you'll feel more peacefully alive happier more joyful and loving without nearly as much effort And over time you get better and better at it and it becomes automatic Of course that's I think why so many mindfulness practices encourage us to focus our attention on the breath or on the body because it helps us help disarm some of those thought patterns I think modern society doesn't help us here We don't really have a non doing mode do we There's a lot of screens and attention and you know and the next generation struggle I think even more than we do I find for me when I'm out on my bicycle I cycle everywhere That is my kind of meditation on two wheels when my brain isn't doing anything in particular apart from just kind of getting me from A to B and trying not to crash Um Yeah So what what's your way of finding happy no forwards Do you have a particular practice I I love that a lot of the happiness is actually if you'll notice it are precisely that It's like being in nature It's like being with kids It's like being with animals it's riding the bicycle all those things allow us to access that flow state It is really a state of less discursive thought If not no discursive thought Right So for me same deal I love exercise I love being out in nature Um I love uh what I call practice the presence of God Sometimes I just call it micro meditation but it's like just breathing from the stomach for the joy of it Like it's my last breath ever You know that's been one of my most uh enjoyable and I guess effective practices Um but for me it's mostly the exercise and uh of course I love reading but that doesn't give me a bit more about the last breath ever because at 11 level that sounds a bit sort of morbid But actually you said it's very joyful What what's going on there Yeah So I you know I used to of course be tortured by this thought of death

and uh it drove me to actually suicide because I didn't want to suffer so much and I've come to I guess discover that so much of that was just overthinking and that if I'm really in my body and if I'm really in the moment and I simply pretend pretend like this is the last breath the last moment we'll ever have on this planet and be sincere about it and then try to milk or juice this one moment this one breath for as much joy as you can possibly squeeze out of it And you can do that best simply from breathing from the by breathing from the stomach letting all your thoughts go and just trying to simply and purely enjoy just being just being and breathing That micro meditation sounds so small and so paltry but you can do it and practice it all day long no matter what else you're doing You're in conversation with people especially if they're boring You're swiffer you're folding clothes Um But yes a micro meditation It's one of my favorite tools I feel like this is all bringing us towards the topic of um that we've named today's event about happiness and fulfillment I feel that a lot of this is a journey towards fulfillment It's sort of finding things that make us happy getting rid of some of the unhappy sources and then going a bit deeper So let's talk a bit about fulfillment Um You know some of us are after a kind of experiential sort of pleasurable form of happiness But actually um what I think many of us realize is a lot of happiness comes from a a sense of contribution and connection and being part of something bigger How does that how do you see fulfillment in that sense Yeah it's it's a great point you make Um I think in the beginning of my happiness journey it seemed like happiness was either a lifestyle status at first and then it was maybe an activity state or state of activity And then you go beyond that and you realize maybe it's a state of relationship and then you're like that's not that either because the same person that used to make me so happy now makes me miserable or vice versa And you graduate like maybe happiness a state of it's a state of thought or a state of mood But then you even graduate from that and realize maybe happiness is just a state of being it's just a state of being And so it includes not just pleasurable experiences and pleasurable or pleasant emotions But it can include also really unpleasant or unpleasurable emotions and moves that there's something within us that's thoughtless worthless faceless and formless that I simply call awareness or consciousness itself that is aware that we have a mind but we're not a mind we have a body but we're not a body that thoughtless worthless awareness When we recognize it provides a deep rich authentic experience of being that I would describe as fulfillment Now it's easy to get caught up in semantics and argue about which word should be

referring to which experience And so it's not the word that matters so much It's the experience that the word is pointing to that matters so much And so I might call it success and you might call it blue pearls and somebody else might call fulfillment But at the end of the day the kind of happiness I think we're talking about here certainly that I'm talking about is the kind of happiness that even includes and allows for moments or experiences of depression or sadness on the surface But a recognition at a deeper level that underneath all of that is perfect peace and perfect bliss and perfect love It's sort of like an ocean If you only focus on the surface it's gonna be lots of tumultuous experiences If you can dive deep enough there's only the experience of perfect peace underneath the surface of the water I find that really moving and profound and it sort of hints at a sort of deeper spiritual conversation I mean I know many in this community may have their own faith and many others are sort of agnostic or have no particular religious conviction But I I do sense that in some ways what you're hinting at here is also brings up for me not only an inner peace but a sort of sense of connectedness Not not I don't not not necessarily in a relational sense but the fact that there is something really precious about life and being alive And we are we have some kind of shared common humanity common life force that that is within us and whether we're religious or not there's something quite um reflective about that and powerful and making a sort of again feel part of something bigger you just nailed it right So ultimately at the end of the day the one thing we know from the science is part of psychology but just psychology in general And also probably our personal experiences is that when when we get outside of ourselves right And we're able to contribute in meaningful ways to other people's lives or the world we not only help them feel better but we feel better too right And this deeper recognition of what we might call just the simple naked awareness of your own existence or life intelligence whatever it is that hangs the earth on nothing is also within us And so our recognition that that same life energy is within everyone else as well allows us to feel a connectedness and a love and a connection with other people People that we know and also people that we don't know I sometimes just call that love but really it's an expression of your happiness at the deepest level It's an expression of fulfillment at the deepest level And so you're absolutely right about that mark whether you approach it from this sort of deeper place of feeling deep you know truly fulfilled on the inside and then sharing that or recognizing that um with other people or you hit it from the top and do what you can to support others um in meaningful

ways and contribute to the world and to other people's um sort of happiness or well being it both sort of feeds and serves the same purpose So I would love us to hear a little bit from the community Again I find it very moving to see all the kind of the the sources of unhappiness and the Happiness Islands Uh Maybe we could ask a question about fulfillment So turning back to you everyone in the chat uh how would you define a sense of fulfillment for yourself As Robert said it you know it's quite personal but it you know uh it could be about our connection to nature or to each other or to a spiritual belief or to a cause or to a a particular root to inner peace So let's see what comes up being a piece of myself making someone else's life easier heartfelt connectedness I love that phrase feeling value genuine relationships peace purpose every day embodiment in a calm um freedom helping others meditation walking on a nice day feeling free in my head being loved feeling aligned being the best version of myself kindness using my skills to make a contribution memories of positive experiences compassion feeling appreciated helping others learning every day Um Contentedness Wow you people are awesome Yes Quite incredible actually And they just keep coming in I mean it's incredible the diversity um in experience there and how well people speak to this right We all have an intuitive and uh direct hit around what it means to feel fulfilled And so it's indicative that there's something there already that knows and recognizes fulfillment when it you know experiences it um I wanna get on to the great questions from the audience soon Robert I'm still loving the fact that there's all these fulfilling uh ideas coming past Um I like this one doing the best that I can and then letting go I think it's really powerful It's a lovely combination of sort of striving and acceptance all all brought into one there Really nice Um There are lots of us I would say right now but I don't want to keep making out that this is the worst time ever because of course life has always been hard and probably always be hard as a as as long as there are humans alive But there are people right now who are really struggling with loss with uncertainty with grief with maybe maybe even sort of depression anxiety difficult feelings maybe not sure if they can carry on Um You know it's it's quite easy for us to talk about think happy thoughts and try for a fulfillment But of course it can be sometimes really hard to just even take a positive step forward in those difficult situations if you I mean it sounds like you've been there yourself Robert So what what can you share in terms of you know how to take that next step Yeah Um So first and foremost uh there are people in the world who have solved the very problem that you're struggling with the most So

whether it's depression whether it could be finances it might be relationships it might be something it might be health issues There are people in the world who have dedicated their entire lives not only to solving that problem for themselves but solving for others So reach out to anybody and everybody and to every resource and any resource that you can find that feels supportive or could be supportive to you That's the first thing like you don't need to do this thing alone And that's the beauty and value of being a part of such an incredible community like this That's number one And number two is part of that is just remembering that you're not alone ever in it And there are much more people that are familiar with the experience of depression and unhappiness and deep dysphoria and suicidal ideation than you probably will ever know Um Because most of those folks don't speak to it I didn't speak to it for a long long time I didn't share with even the closest people Um you know that love me the most Um So please know that So those are the first two most important things Um And then there's a ton of signs that sort of let us know where we might lean uh into if uh we desired Uh But I say those are the first two most important steps Thank you And I would add that you know if you are struggling at the moment please do reach out for help There are so many people there to to help and support And if you haven't already joined the action of Happiness app community you go to any of the app stores download our app loads of great ideas and inspiration links to where you can get support but also just a really friendly community people sort of helping each other with friendly suggestions and ideas Um So you get a bit of a feel of community we've got here today but on a daily basis in your pocket um That's uh that's great Robert It's been really um yeah great exploring this stuff Let's get on to some of these these questions then because there's some really interesting stuff coming up Um how our minds are something which I find quite a challenge actually and really really thought provoking So the thing about happy people suggests that we might want to sort of edit out the people who aren't creating happiness in our lives you know that the toxic people who are bringing us down but she's made the point Doesn't that also mean giving up on some people in our lives who might actually need happiness and and our empathy and our kindness the most absolutely love that so much And so the key point there is is this person wanting aspiring to feel better right And so we just use these words like happy people just to make it simple But the idea is people who are either supporting or trying to support you and or themselves in being happy and being happier Some people don't seem to ever have any interest being happy at all and they just

want to make you miserable Those are the people you wanna be careful um about and be careful around and it doesn't mean you have to cut anybody out of your life at all It just means that you want to secure your own oxygen mask first before attempting to secure the oxygen mask of others When I was really struggling with depression and suicidal ideation I did not have the psychological physical or emotional or spiritual bandwidth to hold space for anybody else I was already spiraling And so me in my drowning trying to save somebody else who was drowned and was disastrous for us both And so it's not that I cut people out of my life necessarily But what I did do is I made our interactions sweeter and shorter And I was able to love people from a distance in a way that I couldn't otherwise And so we can support people in all kinds of ways We don't only support people by being up in their business all day every day and trying to pull them out of the depression Sometimes we sort of support people best by sending them as a resource and then finding our center again and then coming back right And so you do want to be intentional and selective but it doesn't mean ever putting anyone outside of your heart Um let's just be clear about that It's just about making sure that you are in a safe secure stable strong place so that you can continue to support um others in the world And that means some self care Hm I'm reminded of that phrase about the kind of oxygen mask principle on a on a plane You know you you can't really help others unless you've also kind of put your own mask on first So something about this is about being in a better place to be more help of others because you've kind of been able to look after your own mental well-being first That's right I mean you ultimately want in need you know you want to be the happiness or peace or love that and you want to be able to access that consistently especially when people in your life aren't able to access it So if you can't be that consistently you need to take some space or take some time step aside take a break come back you know once you've sort of replenished and restored and refreshed yourself in that way Um That's mostly what it means Um And it also means be careful You know there are lots of people that um maybe unwittingly unconsciously unintentionally are toxic and that will not be good for your happiness Hm Um The question that's currently sitting at the most up voted uh on our list and please do vote folks for any questions you see that you like is from Clifford And I just wanted to first of all say thanks to Clifford because Clifford's been to quite a lot of these events and regularly ask questions But it's reminded me something I forgot to say at the start of it which is you are our 50th guest on this event series uh since lockdown started and we moved

to doing these online events We've had 50 fantastic guests So thank you for marking this special occasion for us And uh yeah we've been joined by I think 240,000 people live since we started this event So please uh and have these lovely community encounters So thank you to everyone who's here tonight who's been before and if it's your first time please do come back and if it's your 40th time whatever uh let's keep this going But Clifford asked so I've now lost his question So Clifford says quite a poignant thing really which is why does it happen that whenever something makes me happy a little while later I'm overwhelmed with a sudden sadness Is that a feeling you've experienced Yeah So this is such a powerful and poignant question Um There is a type of happiness we might call dualistic happiness This is where the pleasure is balanced by the pain And every time you have experience of pleasure you experience the pain it's the hangover effect right And so we wanna be careful of that And so we're gonna have that experience any time we chase pain or try to avoid or chase pleasure or try to avoid pain we're gonna experience the other side of that Um In time there's another kind of happiness and I'd call it the true happiness which is a non dual kind of happiness that doesn't require this contrast effect this like ebb and flow experience all the time It honors that and allows for that experience But underneath that sort of between beyond above and below that is this peaceful alive kindness that always knows all is really well right So that's the kind of happiness that I speak to We start with this sort of dualistic experience of happiness where pleasure is bounced by pain and caused by benefits But you'll notice that as you deepen and continue to deepen in your happiness practice you'll come to a place where you'll experience more consistently this non dualistic non dual joy or peaceful aliveness that doesn't just come visit for a while and leave It's there in a lasting meaningful and abiding way and you can't escape it because it's not only within you it's who and what you truly are right It's your true nature So that's the kind of it's like such a great question because that is an important distinction And and of course you know emotionally life is a bit of a roller coaster and um you know pushing away our negative emotions doesn't really help us We sort of noticing them accepting them and moving on is probably more helpful Um But this sort of bridges to a question from Andy which I think is really interesting as well So Andy's asked how does the expectation of having happiness uh uh actually cause us suffering or does it actually cause us suffering And I think there is a a point you've already touched on here which is this this bit of toxic positivity We're like we should be happy It's your right to be happy And if

you're not feeling happy it's not your fault or uh life's gone wrong in some way But as you've pointed out it's not realistic you know life's full of trauma and loss and you know so so I think I think Andy's on to a good point that modern society almost puts a pressure on us to like have the perfect life But that isn't really what happens is about how how do you see that That's uh beautifully said um you know pain physical pain is inevitable but psychological emotional even what we might call spiritual suffering is always optional right So so so that means that we have a lot more control than we think we do There's the experience itself and then our thoughts about the experience right Our judgments about the experience the vast majority if not all of the suffering right that exists on the planet is maybe initially seems precipitated by some painful experience or event but it is maintained and sustained by this discursive thinking this overthinking by a mind that simply can't sit still and be quiet for a while Right And so in other words the point is is that most of the suffering we experience comes as a result of reliving an experience that we had in the past or pre living an experience we might have in the future right Every moment only really needs lived once Nothing wrong with you know a little rumination nothing wrong with a little bit of reflection nothing wrong with savoring experiences But you want to be real careful to sort of discern between that which is pain right And that which is suffering and suffering We have a lot more control over um than we do pain Hm What's that Um Kate has asked a question back to people again How can I stop other people affecting my happiness My happy bubble seems too easy to burst And she's also said a big thank you to you Um And how much she's loved this talk But I I've got a thought on this which is because it's something I struggle with I find that if I feel like I've let someone down I really it really affects my happiness But what what are your thoughts on how how because we are relational beings aren't we We do care about our connection to others and that can be a a bubble bursting experience Yeah So I'm gonna say something and I'm gonna um please assume positive intent here Ok I'm coming from the heart Um I struggled with that a ton I mean most of my life really you know I think that probably all of us here have struggled with that and I've come to the recognition that part of my job in this world is to disappoint everyone as quickly as humanly possible right Like my expectations are my job your expectations are your job and the faster I can disappoint you and remind you of that in soft ways I don't need to teach and preach right But if I can remind you of that by not people pleasing right And by showing you through my living shining example that I

can be happy no matter what or peace no matter what or self loving or loving no matter what then I'm going to provide the perfect opportunity to learn for you to learn to do the same in our people pleasing right What we often do is we actually do a great injustice and disservice to other people because we lead them away from the source of peace love and happiness that exists within them all the time So when you're successful and you're people pleasing you're encouraging someone you're training someone you're teaching someone to depend on you for their peace love and happiness and that's a great injustice and disservice that we do Um because that is not going to serve them when we're not around we can't get to the phone when something happens and we just can't be available So yes it's a very tough thing Part of what I've realized is that in your experience with people one of the things that's worked for me is to keep always part of my attention inside So I never give 100% of my attention to anyone if I can remember to do so I you know trip up all the time and I'm human So I I definitely do but I always set an intention to keep part of my attention inside myself in that place where there is peaceful aliveness or perfect peace at all times right One simple way to do that is just to simply breathe in the stomach as often as you can no matter who you're with or what you're doing But especially when you're with someone who's challenging or depressed or unhappy Wow Yeah I I I've sometimes talked about myself as a recovering people pleaser still a work in progress One thing I found really helpful was I I found that if I have if I feel like I've been criticized in some way that to me translates as I'm a bad person I've let someone down and I tend to go on the defensive to try and prove how I'm not that bad person And so I I turn sometimes what is just someone else expressing that their pain that they're going through into a perceived like I've let them down and then sort of defending myself And I could almost like create a conflict where there isn't any and a really wise phrase that's sent me there is behind every criticism There is a wish to tune into the wish not the criticism So like when my partner says something that I might think of as a critique I think well what's her need here Not how am I being criticized here And then I don't necessarily act on that need I can do But at least I'm aware that it's more about where she's at than where I'm at I mean I'm just using that as an example and I find that really liberating because it's like ok there's the stuff that's my stuff and the stuff that's someone else's stuff And I have a little bit more choice than I thought I had here Is that making any sense Oh it makes total sense It's extraordinary You're absolutely right Resentment is really envy doesn't look like that but it but it is right And so

sometimes we get criticized for things that like you said people want or wish uh that they had or could do or whatnot And so just beautifully said um I couldn't agree with you more Um um We've got a question here from Diane which is a topic you've touched on already about depression But I think it's something that people you know want to know more about and many in this community will have had personal experience or have loved ones that are dealing with you know difficult state of mental health And Dynasty said depression seems to run in the family in her case for generations It feels like a never ending struggle for my near and extended family Have you got any advice Yeah So I will say to support what she's saying there you know scientists come up have come up with a happiness formula $H = S + C + B$ The S is genetic set point So 50% of our happiness is actually wired we're wired for it It's genetic it's DNA code now different from height or eye color Our happiness wiring is perfectly malleable and changeable can be improved right So this unhappy gene and depression sort of depressed gene that you feel like you might have um is not something you cannot change In fact you can change it and you can change it dr uh dramatically and significantly So that's the first thing um most important thing to remember Um The second thing is that you know and can you remind me of the question again Mark that's the new one I just moved it off screen now But it was it was just acknowledging that depression is something that uh she and her loved ones have been dealing with and just asking for advice And I think you know we've already talked about some things there reaching out for help I think actually you know finding your happiness islands focusing on relationships that support you uh trying to sort of change your relationship with difficult thoughts and then getting into positions of non thinking you know those four stages you took us through seem potentially helpful But of course nobody nobody ever chooses to be depressed You can't just wish yourself out of it It's a very you know clearly defined medical condition in many cases that that actually requires proper you know clinical support in many cases as well Absolutely And I will back that up and and and say in addition to that that I had an advantage sometimes we don't see it this way and I didn't see it this way when you're so deeply depressed And like I was I was suicidal that you get to a place where you'd rather I was I was literally like I'd rather either die or live blissfully ever after There's no I had la sometimes that laser focus is very very helpful So the great thing and the beautiful thing about being depressed is that you're crystal clear that happiness or joy matters more than anything else in the world If you double

down on that that's the most important thing then you have this laser focus and that laser focus is power right There's real power in that kind of simplicity And then when you prioritize that above everything and everybody else the journey becomes easier That being said you wanna start with a lay low hanging fruit you know don't start with the most difficult practice or whatever practice it is that resonates with you personally that helps you start there for me it was moving I literally just need to move and change environments I actually had a job I didn't like I quit the job I thought any of these things is better than going down this other path which is suicidal So I I did all these things they were for me low hanging fruit And then what happens is you take this one step you know we all want to see the whole staircase but you just need to see this see see and take the one step in front of you There's something right now that you know for sure would make you feel just a little bit better It's like maybe it's going to the gym maybe it's calling the counselor or therapist maybe it's picking up that book again that you can like but that bored of but you pick that one thing that you know for sure it could help you a little And then before you know it the entire staircase begins to light up on its own So that's a critical part of it The other part of it and I'll stop here is that you don't want to judge your progress based on how you feel every day Because for me it was like two steps forward and then it would feel like 1000 steps back And so I would say oh I'm not getting anywhere some of it But once I put that aside and said you know what I'm just gonna continue putting 1 ft in front of the other and I'll check back in in a couple of months You know I'm not gonna I'm just gonna do my best some days My best mean taking a nap you find that you make a lot more progress a lot more quickly when you stop planting a seed and then Uprooting it to see if the plant is growing Thank you Robert Um Just to add to that I mean we will send some links out and I'll follow up email tomorrow with resources where you can go and seek extra help and support And for many people you know if you're in a state of depression actually being able to have maybe even a pharmaceutical intervention Uh therapeutic intervention is the beginning of the ability to just cope with day to day life and find the energy to do that one step forward But I've also I I like to I remember that some of what we might think of as life's basics do really help here and wherever we are on the sort of well-being spectrum getting trying to get good sleep trying to you know eat a sort of healthy balanced diet trying to stay physically active trying to find little moments of connection being willing to ask for help when needed They seem kind of simple but actually those those are the

foundations I think to sort of take steps forward Oh Mark I just love that so much You know we you know we we know for certain that depression often really we call learned helplessness but it's a total lack of motivation nothing feels worth doing And you don't often have the energy to do even the simplest things And then you can start to judge yourself or condemn yourself for that Please don't do that You know And if you do do that forgive yourself for the judgment of the condemnation And like you said my mom when I was really going through a tough time she would always say honey would you just go outside and take a walk And I would say mom how's that gonna help How's taking a walk gonna fix all my problems I'm nowhere in my career and I have no relationship and all these things And she said honey just do it for me It's fine I muster up the energy and I go for my walk and I would honestly genuinely feel better but she'd have to remind me every day So please know that we all get how hard it is and how difficult it is to find the motivation And if you can just start with some of those foundational things that Mark mentioned you'd be surprised if you can remain consistent how much progress you'll make over time Hm Thank you Um Sharo has got an interesting question here um which comes back to your point about connectedness So um the question is when I'm feeling down I feel like I should keep away from other people How can I overcome this And I think I I actually think this is something that COVID and the pandemic and our lockdown responses hasn't helped which is we've sort of got out of the habit of connecting I mean I've found when I've got back into social situations that I'm just feel it feels a bit more alien and and like there's a there's a lot of people I think you sort of slipped through the net A lot of people who are no longer going to school a lot of people who are now disconnected in their communities Um And so it becomes a sort of self fulfilling property Like if you're feeling low you don't reach out you then miss that boost of connection I I really feel that she so any any tips on how to kind of overcome that that reticence like when we're feeling low to to reach out Yeah it's such a common experience Um Most of us um when you're in a low mood you wanna to distrust your low mood you wanna distrust yourself when you're in a low mood because it um colors every experience that you have and often the things that will be most helpful are the things you're least interested in doing or at least believe can help you Right And so I would say without question um connecting with other people when you're in a low mood not always but if you're depressed and you're spiraling and you know you're really struggling I know I'm an introvert I was voted most shy in my high

school class The last thing I would want to do even when I'm feeling good sometimes is connect with people and especially when I'm depressed But that's the one thing or one of the many things that you most need to do even a little you don't have to do it in person Maybe it's a text conversation maybe it's over the phone maybe it's joining a group like this and keeping your video off or whatever it is right You can sort of customize it for yourself in a way that's a little more common for you But I do agree There's something really powerful about being in the presence of people or animals or small Children You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to talk about Um and you don't have to do anything you want to do but you will find that if you can learn to distrust your low mood a little and do some of these things that science has proven and our lives have proven can be helpful You'll find yourself feeling better over time I've never heard that before I really like the idea of distrusting your low mood sort of because you're getting you're getting like fake news Really aren't you From your emotional environment You're getting like a sense that things are less good than they are or that you can't change something You it becomes a self reinforcing sort of bubble that you're in in a way It's such a great metaphor mark I love that It is fake news It's like self propaganda it's propaganda that you you know pull in yourself And so you want to be careful of that Um We can all be guilty of that Um But particularly when you're in a low mood you'll find that everything looks poor everything looks bad about me and my associate the other day that says don't believe everything you think And I think that's particularly relevant when you're in that sort of self critical mode Thank you That's inspiring Um Judy who I know is another regular uh with act of happiness um activities has said um I'm a business coach and with the backdrop of COVID and Ukraine and my work I feel as if I have compassion fatigue when it comes to listening to friends when they open up and I think this is I mean thank you Judy for raising that And I think it's something we see in the health service a lot particularly people who are dealing with a lot of suffering it can be really overwhelming and you kind of we almost risk dehumanizing and sort of disconnecting from people suffering like seeing one death or loss is overwhelming but when it's 10,000 you sort of just sort of turn off a bit Um so I I think there's I don't think there's a simple answer here But what do you think about compassion Fatigue Oh it's that's a that's a real thing No question about it I've probably never been more swamped in my life Um business wise as I have been during COVID I'm uh both really sad about that because I don't like people suffering and I'm also grateful that

I could be of any assistance at all And most of the coaches and therapists and other helping professionals I know nurses and doctors and um massage therapists are feeling lots of that Um No question about it Right That's leading to a lot of the burnout So um it's real Yes And um there is a way um first of all you want to honor that and so you want to set some boundaries you wanna make sure you're taking care of yourself first and foremost because if you don't take care of yourself first and foremost and we lose you you know because you're burned out then we also lose everyone who is leaning on you for support and help right So you gotta take care of yourself 1st 2nd it kind of comes back to this point around um holding space for people and being in the conversation but not being lost in the conversation right So you can be in a conversation but not be lost in the conversation You wanna always maintain awareness and contact with that place inside that is full of perfect peace That's how that's why it's so critical You know it's easy to try to get in there and do too much You know as a coach my 1st 15 years I was getting in there and trying to do too much I'm trying to pull them out of the depression I'm trying to change their mind I'm trying to persuade them to do this other thing This is too much It's like if I can just sit and remain resting in this deep peace and presence the situation often changes all by itself The person comes to realizations all by themselves right And it also means so it means both things right It means both doing this inside out thing but it also means taking this outside in approach where you say you know today I'm exhausted I just need to rest I need to nap and maybe tomorrow too maybe the next month as well Until you feel good again we're running out of time Sadly Robert it's been such a joy spending time with you Thank you everyone for all the questions that you've asked Thank you for being part of this Thank you for everyone who made a small donation to action for happiness to help support these events If you've enjoyed this and you haven't had a chance to do that already there'll be a link in our follow up email so please do to contribute and help to keep this community alive Um Robert we're so grateful for your time I'm gonna share in the follow up email tomorrow links to your website and your fantastic book Um But I wondered if I could invite you to sort of sum up how you're feeling now maybe leave us with a final thought Yeah I feel so grateful I mean I just feel so deeply grateful I am so grateful for you Mark I mean I have shivers right now I feel emotional about it I struggled so much in my life because I couldn't have this conversation There was no one I could have this conversation with and that was just as much up to me as it was anyone else So I don't blame anyone for

that So thank you and thank you for everybody participating and that it is part of this incredible community because it's what we need most in this world for each other But also for other people who aren't even connect to the community So that's the first thing I'll say And the other thing I'll simply say is that it's an extraordinary life if you don't overthink it ok it's an extraordinary life if you don't overthink it So do what you can to practice whatever principle resonates with you most deeply It can just be one thing one thing can take you all the way home Um for me it's the exercise piece and it's the daily habits but most of all it's just having moments here and there where I don't think where I just show up and for five minutes or for five seconds I'm just like an idiot or like a small child or like a you know an animal I just and just enjoy being period just joy being right So you don't need to think your way through life And if you've noticed life has its own logic anyway So it's an extraordinary life if you don't overthink it What a beautiful note to end on Robert Thank you so much Thank you to everyone all around the world who's joined us and been part of this today So grateful Keep up the inspiring work and look forward to staying in touch My pleasure Thank you much Yeah