



The Bliss Experiment: 28 Days to Personal Transformation

By Sean Meshorer

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A cross between *The Power of Now* and *The Happiness Project*, *The Bliss Experiment* reveals how to tap into the innate state of inner joy that resides in all of us: the state of bliss.

HAPPINESS IS GOOD. BLISS IS BETTER.

You only need a moment of bliss to benefit the rest of your life. We have a higher standard of living and more ways to instantaneously fulfill every desire than ever before. Then why are we unhappy? Because happiness is fleeting. Bliss is transformative.

In *The Bliss Experiment*, leading spiritual teacher and New Thought minister Sean Meshorer, who suffers from chronic pain, shares the exercises and ideas that help him and countless others live life to the fullest. This is the one essential book that distills and unifies seemingly competing practices, philosophies, religions, and psychologies. You'll read dozens of stories of real people learning from everyday situations, backed by more than five hundred scientific studies.

Bliss helps ease stress, anxiety, and depression. It makes people more successful, better able to see and seize opportunities, and build or improve relationships. Give *The Bliss Experiment* twenty-eight days of dedicated attention, and you will see results too.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Read it and see what I saw: the deep way that Sean Meshorer understands how to uncover greater happiness, awareness, and spiritual success within yourself."

--Frederic Luskin, Ph.D. Director of the Stanford Forgiveness Projects and author of "Forgive for Good".

"Not only does Sean Meshorer reveal that the organic essence of every individual's existence is bliss, there is no need to move to a Himalayan cave to experience it! The spiritual practices he teaches have proven in countless lives that in this now moment bliss can become our natural way of living, that we already have within us all the causes of bliss." --Michael Bernard Beckwith, author of "Spiritual Liberation: Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential"

"Blissful fulfillment and well-being is made accessible by this timely book by Sean Meshorer, providing us with the necessary tools and spiritual techniques to transcend anxiety and despair and find--within ourselves and our lives-- what we are genuinely seeking. Along with his month-long transformation-thru-attention program, here you'll discover excellent stories and anecdotes, wisdom and delight. Don't miss this portal to the treasure trove of deep happiness now. Help yourself!" ---Lama Surya Das, author of national bestseller "Awakening the Buddha Within"

""The Bliss Experiment" puts it all together--the inspiration, the science, and the common sense it takes to dedicate ourselves to a life of joy. For those who are ready to choose smiles instead of tears, this book is really great." --Marianne Williamson, "New York Times" bestselling author

"If you are seeking to discover peace and joy in these historic and challenging times, "The Bliss Experiment" provides the essential knowledge and tools." --Gary E. Schwartz, PhD, author of "The Energy Healing Experiments"

"In clear, concise chapters, [Meshorer] brings together concepts like forgiveness, gratitude, living in the present, meditation and the power of service above self...[This] book will have broad appeal." -"Kirkus Reviews"

About the Author

Sean Meshorer is an inspirational twenty-first century speaker, teacher, and spiritual coach based in Los Angeles. He graduated from Stanford in 1993 with a degree in Philosophy and Religious Studies. He spent fifteen years meditating, studying, practicing, and living at Ananda, the renowned ashram and network of spiritual communities headquartered in Northern California. Sean formerly served as president and publisher of Crystal Clarity Publishers and is now the spiritual director of Ananda Los Angeles. Visit SeanMeshorer.com.

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CHAPTER 1

From Pleasure to Bliss: The Happiness Scale

Do not look for rest in any pleasure, because you were not created for pleasure: You were created for spiritual JOY. And if you do not know the difference between pleasure and spiritual joy, you have not yet begun to live.

—Thomas Merton, *American contemplative monk (1915–68)*

Let's begin by surveying our landscape and orienting ourselves in it. By doing so, we can understand the larger framework in which we begin our journey to finding bliss.

Happiness, meaning, and truth can mean different things to different people. Happiness in particular has several different components. The different types of happiness are:

- numbness,
- pleasure,
- relief (false happiness),
- everyday happiness, and
- bliss.

I find it helpful to think of these five aspects of happiness not as discrete experiences—each inhabiting its own little world—but rather as varying *degrees of the same impulse*; different states of consciousness on the same continuum. The most important level of all, bliss, is not only the least understood but also so seldom experienced that most of us don't even realize it exists. Our entire human journey can be thought of as the adventure from one end of the happiness scale to the other: from pleasure to bliss.

The better we can understand each of these components and how they relate to one another, the greater our clarity of mind and ability to navigate our journey toward bliss successfully.

The Story

Jane came to my classes because she was intrigued by the idea that she could learn to consciously induce what had been a lifetime of apparently random moments of deep bliss, often followed by feelings of despair as they dissolved. From a young age, she experienced jaw-dropping moments of awe; it felt like her everyday world fell away, revealing a field of pure awareness in which she could see not only herself but also see how she was connected to every atom of creation. Sometimes this revelatory moment would be accompanied by an intense wave of energy that started at the base of her spine and swept its way up her body to the top of her head. The feeling was so intense that she felt like her mind and body couldn't possibly contain it, that she might burst apart.

As quickly as these experiences came, they vanished. Jane tried talking to her Protestant minister about them, but he seemed alarmed by the confession. He thought she might need a doctor. She once confided in a devout Catholic friend of hers, only to be told that she might be possessed by something “satanic.” Eventually she stopped discussing it and even came to resent these “attacks” as frightening and confusing intrusions.

Jane's adult life grew increasingly hedonistic. She spent most of her free time dating, partying, going to concerts, and engaging in a moderate amount of drinking and drug usage. Although she occasionally went to

church or read spiritual books, mostly she felt this was a waste of time. None of the conventionally religious teachers or followers she knew had ever helped her or really seemed to offer much in the way of deep understanding.

After our first class together, Jane walked up to me, excited. She told me that for years she had been wondering what, exactly, was happening to her. From my description, she was now sure that she had been experiencing a “wave of bliss.” More importantly, she was thrilled to hear that it was indeed possible to learn how to more consciously harness and work with these experiences.

I had Jane complete the Happiness Scale exercise at the end of this chapter. Afterward, we discussed the results. It was clear that while Jane would occasionally have these incredible feelings of awe and connection, she spent most of her daily life working, dating, partying, and occasionally doing some volunteer work for an environmental group. She admitted that she spent the bulk of her time pursuing pleasures and, from time to time, a bit of everyday happiness. She had little experience with any kind of spiritual practice or discipline, including meditation, although she had been to a few yoga classes. She didn’t regularly spend time with people who were actively developing their spiritual lives.

At first Jane was a little defensive. She didn’t see what possible connection there could be between how she spent her time and the randomness of these blissful experiences. She pointed out that she had been experiencing these moments of bliss since childhood, long before her life had turned hedonistic. She also observed that the relative frequency of her bliss experiences never particularly diminished as an adult, despite her hard-partying ways.

Notwithstanding her initial resistance, as the weeks went by, Jane made an effort to spend less time pursuing pleasure and more time consciously practicing the techniques explained in this book. Two months after completing my class, Jane emailed me with exciting news: she’d had another bliss experience, only this time she was able to work with it, go deeper into it, and experience it more fully than ever before. She didn’t feel confused or depressed afterward. For the first time, she felt as if she knew what she was doing and where she was going. She knew that she has a long way to go, but she was also happier than ever before and more certain of her spiritual potential than she’d ever thought possible.

The Spirit

As mentioned, there are five types, or degrees, of happiness, which I have arranged on a progressive scale (see illustration on the following page): numbness, pleasure, false happiness, everyday happiness, and bliss. The lowest form of happiness is numbness; the highest is bliss. Understanding these levels and where we are concentrating most of our time and effort is essential to discovering bliss.

The Happiness Scale

Let’s go through the scale, from left to right.

Numbness

It may seem odd that numbness is on this scale at all. What does numbness have to do with happiness? Well, for many of us, being numb represents a positive step forward. Sometimes we are in so much pain—physically, mentally, or spiritually—that feeling nothing is an improvement. This is one reason that we abuse alcohol and drugs, or why some people continually watch television or play video games. These are ways of distracting us, even if only tenuously or intermittently.

After a year or so of being in intense chronic pain, I finally had to quit my publishing job. When not shuttling from one doctor to the next, I spent most of my time at home, often unable to get out of bed. The pain was excruciating and relentless, twenty-four hours per day. During those dark days, though I tried to do whatever spiritual practices I could, I inevitably found myself spending a lot of my time surfing the Internet, watching lots of DVDs (I've never had television, cable, or satellite TV in my adult life), and consulting with my doctors to find medications that could relieve, or at least lessen, the agony I felt. Distracting myself in this way was a form of numbness. If I hadn't previously experienced bliss, I might have believed that this was as close to happiness as I was capable.

One needn't be only in physical pain to strive for the comparative happiness of being anesthetized. Countless people who have suffered through physical, sexual, or emotional abuse also resort to all kinds of numbing tactics—*anything* to blot out the pain. Virtually all alcoholics and drug addicts can attest to this being one of the original motivations for their substance abuse.

Pleasure

Once we discover successful numbing techniques, we often feel emboldened enough to add a little pleasure to our numbness. As appealing as numbness may be in contrast to pain, none of us considers it a good long-term strategy. We all want to feel something, to be *alive*. Thus, we begin pursuing, perhaps cautiously at first, activities that help us break through our barriers. Easy pleasures such as sex, shopping, eating, travel, or otherwise pampering the body are a logical next step. In addition, certain drugs such as GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate), cocaine, and ecstasy are used more for pleasure enhancement than for numbing. At least these activities allow us to *feel* something, however primitive or rudimentary those feelings might be.

Unfortunately, as we'll explore in depth over the next few chapters, seeking pleasure is not a successful long-term happiness strategy. Physiologically, our body has clear limits to how much pleasure we can enjoy before it lapses back first into numbness, then even into full-blown agony. What is true physically is doubly true spiritually. Not only is pleasure fleeting, too much of it irrevocably leads to severely negative consequences.

Pleasure moves over us like a wave. For a wave to crest, it requires an equal-sized trough, or depression, just before and after that peak. Every wave is really a set: one peak and one trough. So it is with the waves of pleasure. The wave comes, gives us a temporary peak experience or excitement, then recedes, leaving an equally severe depression in its wake. The higher the peak, the lower the trough. It's a fact that applies equally to physics and spirituality.

False Happiness

There's an old joke: "Why do I keep hitting myself with a hammer?" Answer: "Because it feels so good when I stop!"

False happiness is that feeling we experience when we have *temporarily* fulfilled our desires. It's akin to the relief we feel after having scratched an itch that was driving us crazy. Imagine pinching your arm as hard as possible. Now release it. "Aaahhh, that feels better!" we might sigh. "Thank goodness *that's* over with!" This is often what we feel in that moment when we have fulfilled a particularly intense desire, whether for a shiny new car, in sex, or whenever any kind of longing is fulfilled.

There's a moment, often fleeting, when we feel satiated. Our most recent desire has been fulfilled, but our minds haven't yet concocted the next desire to take its place. If we are unaware of the falsity of this kind of

happiness, we might even mistake it for contentment. Really, though, we are merely experiencing the calm before the storm; our next wave of desires is quietly gathering force. Usually we don't have to wait long before the next tsunami of desire comes crashing through our consciousness.

Everyday Happiness

What I call everyday happiness is a genuine type of happiness; a legitimate and important stepping-stone on the way to bliss. This is the type of happiness that most psychologists—particularly those in the positive-psychology movement—dwell upon as our final goal. Working on those practices, activities, and states of being that bring us to everyday happiness is a good thing. Finding everyday happiness involves a variety of positive traits, including gratitude, optimism, serving others, experiencing a sense of connection with the world around us, and having at least a small sense of purpose or meaning. From a physiological level, we can even say that being happy in an everyday sense requires achieving “balanced brain chemistry.” If we were to perform a brain scan or draw blood on someone who was happy in this sense, we would very likely find the “right” regions of their brain lit up, or their balance of the mood-regulating brain chemicals serotonin, norepinephrine, endorphins, and other brain chemicals were “just right.”

Pursuing strategies that raise our level of everyday happiness is essential to finding the bliss within. Often, until we have located this deeper level of bliss, everyday happiness is the best we can do—and that's certainly good enough to keep us going. But ultimately, this kind of happiness isn't anywhere near enough. In fact, it's so woefully incomplete that those who trick themselves into being satisfied with everyday happiness eventually discover that even this can feel hollow.

It's here that we introduce a radical departure from most psychologists and self-help authors. What they won't tell you—*can't* tell you because they haven't experienced it themselves or studied it in a laboratory—is that there is something far beyond everyday happiness. Each of us has within us the capacity for infinite, ever-new, all-encompassing bliss.

Bliss

Bliss is the only true, permanent form of happiness. Everyday happiness is subject to fluctuation; even positive psychologists warn that we can't experience everyday happiness *all* of the time.

We covered a basic explanation of bliss in the preface. We'll continually explore and expand our understanding of bliss as we progress through each chapter, topic, and practice. Bliss is also the direct and exclusive focus of chapters 22 through 26. One of the principal qualities of bliss is that it surpasses the capacity of our human languages to fully capture and express. As such, one of the best ways to advance our understanding is not through formal definitions but as an unfolding revelation that comes into clearer focus as we relate it to the full range of our challenges and experiences. For now, then, I'll add only this:

Bliss is like white light. Just as pure light is the totality of all color, bliss is the conglomeration of all positive qualities. When seen through the prism of spiritual awareness, the subcomponents of bliss are joy, unconditional love, inner peace, power, connectedness, awe, and wisdom. Bliss cannot even be *attained*, really. The soul simply realizes that bliss simply *is*. It is what remains after everything external and fleeting disappears.

Comparing and Contrasting

We can already start to see how very different bliss is from pleasure or everyday happiness. Pleasure is based

on the senses. For example, we cannot imagine feeling pleasure without the ability to see, hear, touch, taste, or smell. One can feel bliss even if all five senses were impaired. People may describe certain feelings of relief as “blissful,” but, in fact, it is only an emotional release and therefore superficial. Bliss is *not* an emotion, for our emotions fluctuate constantly and are usually triggered by changes in circumstance. Happiness in the regular sense is also outer directed. While it may include higher-order fulfillments such as warm relationships or serving others, it stills requires external situations and relationships to reach fruition. Bliss doesn’t require any kind of outer relationship with the world—not even a positive one. You could be locked in a box, devoid of all human contact, and still experience it.

Another crucial difference: happiness can be pursued; there are concrete steps we can take to feel happier. Happiness, to some extent, requires *action* on our part. Bliss, on the other hand, is a state of *being*. Accessing the bliss within us requires nonaction, of learning how to *be* rather than to *do*. It is about stripping away all that is *not bliss*.

A True Story

Nine hundred years ago, during the Sukhothai period in Thailand, a ten-foot-high statue of a seated Buddha was cast in solid gold. The statue weighed over five and a half tons, the largest of its kind in the world. Today you can see it on display at Wat Traimit (Temple of the Golden Buddha) in Bangkok. The gleaming, beautiful, and powerful statue captivates and inspires all who approach it. The statue, however, was found only in the 1950s. The true story of how it disappeared and was eventually rediscovered is as fascinating as the work itself.

When the Burmese invaded Thailand in the late eighteenth century, Buddhist monks covered it in plaster in order to conceal and protect it from the invaders. Only a few people knew that it was made from solid gold. When these monks died, the secret was lost. In 1957 the temple housing the Buddha statue needed renovation. While the apparently worthless plaster statue was being moved to a new temple in Bangkok, it slipped from a crane and fell into the mud. A temple monk, who had dreamed that the statue was divinely inspired, went to visit it. Through a crack in the plaster, he saw a glint of gold and soon discovered that the statue was solid gold.

We, too, are made of the solid gold of spirit. Our underlying nature is pure bliss. However, after years of mistakes and neglect, we have forgotten that beneath our surface lies an abundant reservoir of bliss. And like that plaster-covered statue, discovering this is not so much a process of building and adding but of stripping away all that impedes us. Once we peel away our frayed and dull surface, we experience the gleaming bliss of our pure being. All of the bliss that we could ever need is already inside us, just waiting to come to the surface.

Heading in the Right Direction

Few of us dedicate all of our time to pursuing or experiencing just one of the main types of happiness: numbness, pleasure, everyday happiness, or bliss. For most of us, our lives are a mixture of all four, with occasional moments of false happiness occurring between desires. To a degree, this is understandable and acceptable. We needn’t spend *all* of our time pursuing only bliss. Most of us aren’t ready for that kind of single-minded dedication.

The short-term goal is to ensure that we spend at least a portion of our time in the everyday happiness and bliss spectrums of the Happiness Scale. Just bringing these into our consciousness even a little more than they are right now can engender enormous, positive change. Once we’ve had even a little experience of bliss,

we'll naturally gravitate toward it anyway.

Using the example of my own life, as already mentioned, there have been many times when I was in such excruciating physical pain that I was entirely content just to find a way to feel nothing; to achieve a kind of numbness. In addition, there are also many small pleasures I enjoy, such as having a great meal at a top-flight restaurant. It's difficult for most of us to live entirely at the bliss end of this scale. The point is to ensure that we are at least spending *some* of our time digging for bliss. If we make a conscious, regular commitment to do this, we will naturally find ourselves living on the bliss end of the spectrum with greater frequency and consistency.

But it should be a natural, organic process. It cannot be forced. If we force ourselves too far outside of what is real for us at the moment, or beyond our current spiritual capabilities, then we set ourselves up not only for disappointment and disillusionment but also for a terrible rebound effect in which we may find ourselves more deeply enmeshed in the pursuits of numbness and pleasure than ever. Be gentle and patient with yourself: concentrate on uncovering the bliss within only as it feels natural to do so.

The Experiment: Balancing Your Happiness Scale

Note: You can perform this exercise by either writing or drawing your observations in your Bliss Journal or by mentally tabulating your results.

1. Review the Happiness Scale. Think about all of your life's activities over the recent past.
2. Approximately what percentage of your time, thoughts, or efforts have you spent pursuing numbness, pleasure, everyday happiness, and bliss? Assign a percentage to each. (Note: False Happiness is not usually something that we directly pursue. It's more of an accidental way-station, a place in which we briefly find ourselves when one desire has been satiated but our minds haven't yet created a new one in its place. It's not a state that we should consciously choose. As such, we won't include False Happiness as part of this exercise.)
3. As you reflect upon it, do you feel that you might be spending too much time in one area, particularly at the numbness or pleasure end of the scale? Does it feel like you're allocating the right amount of time—for you—to each pursuit?
4. Do you want to change how much time you allocate to achieving everyday happiness or bliss?
5. What is the right percentage of time or energy allocations for you? For example, you might feel guided to spend 25 percent of your time on each of the four. Or you might spend 25 percent on bliss, 50 percent on everyday happiness, and 12.5 percent each on numbness and pleasure? Come up with a distribution that feels intuitively right for you. You may alter it later.

Online

To view a brief video, "Bliss and Superconsciousness," go to <http://youtu.be/XPyw4dSEypc>.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Tonya Hooper:

This The Bliss Experiment: 28 Days to Personal Transformation book is simply not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book will be information inside this book incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper anyone read a lot of information you will get. This kind of The Bliss Experiment: 28 Days to Personal Transformation without we know teach the one who looking at it become critical in contemplating and analyzing. Don't always be worry The Bliss Experiment: 28 Days to Personal Transformation can bring once you are and not make your handbag space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it within your lovely laptop even cellphone. This The Bliss Experiment: 28 Days to Personal Transformation having good arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not feel uninterested in reading.

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