

## The quest for intention

During the recent Autumn Retreat, we began by listing the principles that experts have shown to be most effective in reducing or eliminating the primary opposition to personal happiness. To settle on a single term for all types of internal suffering, we used the word *anguish*, which was meant to cover a wide spectrum that includes basic discontentment, day-to-day stress and anxiety to profound sorrow, rage, despair and hopelessness.

The experts who deal with these kinds of problems—from the health sciences, including psychiatrists and psychologists, to well-being therapists and gurus, to philosophers, to spiritual and religious guides—consistently point to three key factors that reduce anguish for everyone: creativity, service and physicality. We spent a good portion of the first couple days delineating these techniques as envisioned by the experts. Below is a brief synopsis.

Creativity is, of course, the ability to create. But, in the sense of a method meant to reduce anguish, creativity needs to be applied on a consistent basis through specific acts of creation. That could be on traditional platforms, such as painting, writing and singing, or through subtler creations, such as the design of one's day, choice of activities with our children and friends, or through inventive projects. A sense of exploration and play, as well as perceiving some evolution in the creation are essential components for creativity to become effective as a technique for relieving anguish.

Service is a practical term for the idea of devotion. As technique, experts advise two primary means of expression: helping others, especially those who are suffering more than we are, and engaging and fulfilling our faith. The first is easy enough to apply; the only real requisite is that the service is given to those who we feel truly deserve it. The underlying empathy and interest is already in place to some degree. The latter is more complex, involving a cause, idea, ideal or being that appeals to our imagination and values. Both of these, helping others and fulfilling faith, integrate our minds, emotions and actions into a sense of personal purpose, giving us reason, meaning and direction.

The third principle, physicality, was the easiest to identify and describe. The basic idea, and definition of the word itself, is simply that we place greater emphasis on our physical being. Yes, that probably includes some kind of sane exercise program, but the specialists see it as considerably more explicit than that. Learning to develop patterns that relieve anguish necessitates awareness of the impact of common choices, such as how we breathe, how we sit and stand, how long we sleep, what and how much we eat, how to

recuperate energy, and even how much time we need in solitude or in proximity to nature. Breathing techniques, for example, can reduce anxiety or even physical agony in seconds.

As with all information given by experts—most of which is easy enough to find—understanding the facts was the easiest part of the equation. The retreat was largely designed from the start with the intention to practice and experiment with the above methods so as to know how they actually function personally for each individual. By diving into the subjects, through various presentations, conversations and exercises, it quickly became clear that any progress that might be made hinged on something deeper and more mysterious. Understanding, and even agreeing, lacked sufficient power to cause real discovery. Somehow, the subject itself, relieving anguish and achieving sustainable happiness, was not compelling enough to cause real discovery.

Which brought us to the question, “How does one find enough motivation to actually transform knowledge into action?” Or, perhaps simpler and clearer, “Why do it?”

As strange as it may seem, I found myself in the position of negotiating with people in an effort to convince them that happiness itself was a worthy enough objective to apply oneself with a deeper intention than usual. And, for me, that was the pivotal issue, finding enough genuine intention to leave behind discontentment, unhealthy addictions, preference for conflict and, yes, anguish. (I leave to your imagination the implications for relational, social, political, environmental and religious issues.)

Genuine intention is something we generally don't have a lot of information about or support for. In our pursuit to privately “win” the game of life at any cost, genuine intention and the qualities that extend from it, such as sincerity, integrity, compassion and humility, are often cynically viewed as expressions of ignorance and even stupidity, increasing the likelihood that we'll lose the game. Is it possible that our difficulty in finding sufficient motivation to resolve anguish itself stems from an inability to perceive a reason to do it?

Much of the rest of the retreat was directed toward the quest for intention. Motivation, an immediately recognizable reason to apply oneself, we identified as the most superficial or juvenile version of intention—you do this and you get paid for it. We also discovered a second, richer dimension of motivation that we called *moral imagination*, applying effort or sacrifice for beings we care about and love—you don't get paid, but they do. And the third dimension, genuine purity of intention, was reserved for the truly creative in service—you pay.

Or, to make it more succinct for the negotiations within ourselves: If we won't apply what we know so as to relieve anguish for ourselves because that's not sufficiently motivating, perhaps we might do it because those we care for will benefit from it and learn how to do it themselves from our actions. And, if that's not motivating enough, perhaps we'd do it because we realize there's the need. That is, just because it's right to do so.

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I suppose we all have the freedom and right to determine whether or not happiness is a worthy enough objective. However, even with the awful appeal of anguish, unworthiness, inertia and conflict, certainly someone is worthy of it. It's not too difficult to take a look around and realize that there is, in fact, the need.

Darrell Calkins  
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## Comments

Thank you for your comments about the previous issue of CobaltSaffron. Excerpts from a few responses we received:

“Thanks to the whole team for all the work done. This gives yet another dimension to the newsletters. Thank you also for the rich and intense testimonials, these thoughts. Once I finished the first reading of the newsletter, I felt a magnificent and powerful energy coming from it. This newsletter also answered a question that I (re)asked myself five minutes earlier (and that keeps running through my head for a while now). It underlined the importance of ‘forgetting oneself’ for a superior interest, ‘forgetting oneself’ which is requisite for true creation to come to birth (what a big word, I feel that I don’t perceive all its meanings), to give birth to something strong and powerful. Now starts (or continues) a reflection on ‘forgetting oneself’.”

G.V., *Belgium*.

“I want you to know how very much I look forward to your newsletter. I share it with my circle of friends and suspect others do so as well, so while your direct mailing list is small, there's likely an unseen multiplier effect as folks share and discuss it with those with whom they are close. By its very nature publishing can be disheartening. With writing, it's create, put it out there, then let out a deep breath, sip on a cup of tea and hope my finger tapping doesn't drive anyone crazy. I wanted to share a few practical ways you can use your website (great design, by the way) to develop some quantitative, measurable ‘How're-We-Doing’ data. Start by increasing the site's content by creating a newsletter archive and posting the pdf's of past issues. This would be especially useful for us newcomers since they are often referred to. My final suggestion requires a bit more labor (sorry!) but it will be of the greatest value to you and your readers: creating an online discussion forum with multiple topic areas. Readers could interact in a more timely way and it would enable you to meet their differing needs long-term (since over time, the range between experience levels will only continue to widen). The forum could be open to all visitors to read, but to post, one would have to register as a subscriber. I appreciate Karen and Isabelle, Christian and John coming forward with your invitation to share and look forward to doing so in the future on ‘meatier’ topics.”

P.H., *Alaska*.

“I find the newsletters magical! Often, when I am questioning how to unravel a knot, it arrives to guide me, to help me ask the right questions, to calm me... like a good genie. Also, a big thanks particularly to the translators who give me an easier access to it.”

V.V., *Belgium*.

“I have just read your last newsletter ‘Views from the wings’. Reading it made me feel as if I had been watching a beautiful painting or reading some refreshing lines from a haiku (despite the length of each text, each contribution felt like one line in one haiku). It is good to be reminded that it takes much more than it appears to create these newsletters and it is great to hear about the internal process of each of you as if we were seeing a person in front of us and being able to go inside the complexity of their mind. Again thanks to everybody to sustain and create such beauty. Hey I feel inspired!”

R.R., *England*.

### Upcoming events:

#### *The Magic in the Essentials*

25 & 26 November, 2006, Cologne - Germany

#### *San Francisco seminar*

17 & 18 February, 2007, San Francisco - USA

#### *RETREAT TO THE SOURCE*

22 - 29 April, 2007, Gascony - France

## CobaltSaffron

### A FREE INTERACTIVE NEWSLETTER

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We welcome questions, comments and complaints.

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PAGE 4

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