

2-14-2008

Episode III of the Infinite Potential Series. Opening wide the eye of the heart.

Dagne: Welcome to Episode III of the Infinite Potential Series. Opening wide the eye of the heart. Episodes I & II discussing Radical Life Extension - slowing the aging process and threats to humanity's existence were both exciting and stressful. How do we have good, better than good, wonderful lives in spite of the worldwide crisis in consciousness, the chaos and turmoil as the old world order fades and something new is being born?

A: I assert there are learning experiences that, like a rising tide, has the potential to lift all our ships. And for those who (get the hang of this mindfulness concept) become aware enough - the tide transforms to a creative wind of self actualization beneath our wings. There are simple, powerful, established principles. Self knowledge tools hidden in plain view. Overlooked Jewels just lying around.

D: If these concepts are so obvious why don't more people apply them?

A: Part of it is conditioning. It is hard to break free of cultural trances. Using media to condition people increases power and profit.

D: How does the ordinary human being transform the quality of day to day life? How do we even begin to talk about it?

A: One good way might be to recognize that there is a science and art to bringing about healthy change. Self regulation is part of it. Self regulation includes stress science and to learn it and practice it costs nothing. Actually it is profitable. The good news is that the rate of change for all of us is increasing. That is also the bad news. That means we need to learn excellent self regulation skills and we need to apply them on a full time, top priority, emergency basis.

D: You have been presenting the notion of radical or extreme self regulation and stress management training for a long time.

A: Excellent self regulation skills are necessary in order to reduce suffering, accumulate energy, make thinking more coherent, clarify the mind and increase creativity. Don't you think?

D: Of course, but sounds like hard work. It should also be fun.

A: It can be. But I think doing the best one can to learn and apply change, that is self regulation mind body strategies is choiceless. What is the alternative? In Episodes I and II we have tried to set the stage for what I think is, perhaps, the greatest adventure of mind, body, spirit a human being can have. Self regulation leads to self knowledge which unfolds life changing potential.

D: Everyone wants to understand how to better handle the crises that come to us all. A lot of people find understanding their own minds painfully difficult.

A: We all have become discouraged, even depressed at times because getting results with our own minds seems so complicated, illusive. It is possible to help some people discover actions and ways to work which can produce breakthroughs - often amazingly fast. Also, we learn in The Process...

D: How far can we go in Episode III?

A: We can make a productive, start. If we move too fast some may feel overwhelmed and lost.

D: Too slow and some may feel bored.

A: It's a delicate dance. We must use language carefully so we all understand the meanings of words that are key to the process of mindfulness - of consciousness. English is a young language and scientists working on consciousness are defining and redefining words that we use all the time but often misunderstand - and assume we know the meanings of. Words like happiness, consciousness, thinking, attention, creativity, meditation, contemplation, mindfulness, mindfitness, awareness, self regulation, stress science, spirituality even words like atheism, agnosticism and religious have different meanings to many people. We can prevent much misunderstanding and gain lots of insight if we are clear about our definitions of words.

Older, more mature languages such as Sanskrit, Tibetan, Pali, Greek, Chinese, Aramaic, Hebrew and others have words for describing subtle qualities of consciousness - of mind - which are difficult to translate into English. Scientists and others are working to bring those words and concepts into English and other modern languages. This process is a most beautiful art, science and technology.

D: The word is not the thing and the description is not the described.

A: Yet words are necessary. We can't assume everyone understands them in the same way.

D: You say self regulation and stress management is a critically necessary foundation for improving the quality of life. Some might not agree. Can you explain that better?

A: Let me answer briefly and then I'd like to focus on just one critically important word. After that we will probably be out of time for Episode III. We will go more deeply in Episode IV.

D: What word would you like to start with?

A: How about happiness?

D: Great. Now why is radical self regulation and stress management so important?

A: To increase the quality of life one must increase the quality of consciousness. Enhancing consciousness takes tremendous energy. A bucket full of holes wastes all the water you pour into it. If a person is not practicing self regulation and stress management competently then they are like a bucket full of holes and cannot accumulate the quantity and quality of energy necessary to enhance their own mental capabilities - consciousness. Paradoxically, low energy causes psychesthesia which means over thinking and disassociation. Furthermore, psychesthetic thoughts tend to be incoherent and fearful which further drives unhealthy stress and blocks creativity and awareness.

Conversely, reducing the maladaptive stress response allows energy to build, the brain to run quieter leading to more coherent thinking. In addition, the alpha theta brain wave mix gets richer causing an increase in creative imagery. Self regulation increases awareness, mindfulness which increases ability to watch thinking more clearly. This causes thinking to become even more coherent. Using Maslow's stages of actualization, I believe we tend to self actualize in proportion to how well we watch ourselves think. So, in a sense, all a person has to do is quiet the voluntary nervous system (muscles), which leads to balancing the autonomic system (emotions) which further leads to quieting the central nervous system which leads to the stabilization of attention which leads to ...

D: Learning how to transform the moments of life. Mindfulness?

A: Perfect. Being a serial transformer of one's own reality.

D: What role does faith play?

A: For some people their belief, religious, agnostic or atheistic can be a powerful form of self regulation and stress management.

D: Krishnamurti once said, "**As we are concerned with the total development of the student and not of any one particular aspect, attention which is all inclusive becomes important. This total development is not conceptual - that is, there is no blueprint of the totality of the human mind. The more the mind uses of itself, the greater is its potentiality. The capacity of the mind is infinite.**"

A: That's inspirational.

D: We'll come back to self regulation later but now what is happiness? How do we understand it? Is it an illusion?

A: Your joie de vie is one of the greatest gifts life has given me. Through happiness and sorrow, you are the happiest person I've ever known. So what do you think?

D: I'm so grateful for my life but I was trying to speak for our listeners.

A: In our culture most people like to learn through the medium of science. For example, Martin Seligman one of the most influential psychologists has studied happiness for decades. He is a Fourth Wave psychologist who is advancing the field called Positive Psychology. Since the forties psychology has been almost completely focused on treating disorders. The medical model. To psychology's credit these treatments have reduced the total tonnage of suffering in the world.

However, Seligman wants psychologists and educators like us to help people who are more or less functional to focus on unfolding hidden potentials - to increase creativity, the joy in their lives. Rather than helping people go from say a -5 to a -2 he wants us to think in terms of helping people go from a +2 to a +6. Instead of focusing on what's wrong with you and trying to fix it, let's focus on what's right with you and amplify that. To increase the total tonnage of happiness in the world.

D: But what, exactly is happiness?

A: Happiness is a vague term for many things. Seligman describes three major kinds of happiness which are workable in today's world. It is interesting that they correlate well with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and stages of actualization.

D: You mentioned him before. Who is he?

A: A famous psychologist who inspired Seligman. Abraham Maslow taught that humans can actualize their potential and codified some of the stages of actualization which can also be thought about as stages or levels or dimensions of consciousness.

D: Decades ago you began suggesting that teaching self regulation to people who were already functional could bring about a greater benefit to society than working with the sick ones.

A: Ouch! that sounds pretty cold hearted. Healing the sick is critically important as well. I would have been dead long ago several times over if it were not for expert and timely medical care. As you, know your medical skills saved my life at least once. But I think we have to get both jobs done. The idea is that raising the consciousness of the relatively strong is the best way to raise the consciousness of the electorate and thereby bring improved benefits to everyone including those who are in trouble. For decades I focused on the clinical applications of biofeedback and self regulation and it was a wonderful way to earn a living. But now we have the opportunity to go back to our first love.

Positive psychology, life and performance enhancement training is an even greater challenge than clinical treatment. It has been encouraging to see many psychologists and scientists come to

similar perspectives. Seligman, for example, has spread these concepts throughout psychology and education with his foundation, books, conferences, website, etc.

D: You mentioned three kinds of happiness.

A: I think I could make a case for a fourth level.

D: Ways of improving one's own mind have been learned by countless people in times past. But somehow mindfulness skills have to be discovered anew within the context of one's own life and culture - as though for the first time ever. The wheel getting rediscovered over and over.

A: The fact that we humans can enhance our consciousness and pursue our view of happiness is one of the most interesting, challenging and beautiful aspects of being alive - the essence of being a human being. Upgrading our own mind/bodies is easy to desire but challenging to do. Within the last few decades most scientists including avowed atheists such as Sir Francis Crick and Christopher Koch as well as those of mystical or religious orientations have come to consider the emerging science of consciousness (which includes neuroscience) the most important and most complicated science of our time.

One of the science writers, John Horgan said something like "compared to the science of consciousness, particle physics is like a 10 piece jig saw puzzle of Snow White." Leading scientific neurophilosophers including Penrose, Einstein, Bohm, Hammeroff, et al seem to believe that neuroscience, arguably all sciences, emerge from the far more immense and subtler field of consciousness. The debate rages as to what consciousness is and how it arises. However, there is already a great deal known about what ordinary people can do to improve qualities of mind including emotions.

D: Happiness?

A: Atta girl. Keep me on track. I tend to wander off.

D: Happiness!!!! Please.

A: **The first kind of happiness could be called the pleasant life** and consists of having as many positive emotions as you can and learning how to strengthen them. At least six skills have been documented which can help build and amplify positive emotions. Seligman calls this the pleasant life, the Hollywood view of happiness, "the Debbie Reynolds smiley, giggly" view of happiness.

D: He is being a bit unfair. She's had plenty of tough times. Besides our younger audience might not know who she is.

A: That's right. None the less, there is this upbeat, popular, sometimes superficial notion of happiness. It works for many people who are not yet motivated to go deeper. Of course, suffering and conflict inevitably comes and one must learn more and go deeper than settling for the "pleasant life".

D: Hopefully, learning how to transform suffering into something else - wisdom, compassion, a sense of humor. Not taking ourselves too seriously.

A: Do you think I take myself too seriously?

D: Oh no. Not you dear!

A: There is much more to life than pleasure and pleasantness. Yet lots of people are caught up in the pursuit of this form of happiness.

D: Then tough times comes in every life, and we have to go deeper inside ourselves while increasing awareness outside at the same time.

A: The notion that there is never supposed to be depression and pain and sorrow and fear in life is ridiculous. It happens to all of us. It is part of being a human being.

D: It is what one does with emotional trauma and adversity that makes the difference in life isn't it? So, what's the 2nd form of happiness?

A: **The Greeks had a concept called Eudaimonia.** A superficial translation is the good life, the flourishing life. This could be seen as a **second stage of happiness** which takes a lot of common sense and contact with reality and continuous learning. People like Thomas Jefferson and Aristotle and Plato had Eudaimonia in mind when they referred to the pursuit of happiness. They talked about the pleasures of contemplation and good conversation. They were not talking about raw feeling, thrills, orgasms, smiling and giggling a lot - though they all have their place. They were talking about what Mike Csikszentmihalyi calls "Flow". When one has a good conversation, when one contemplates, meditates well, when one is in eudaimonia you are, at least at that moment, experiencing the good life. There is less self-consciousness, one is one with the music. There is a timeless quality. I've termed this fourth dimensional consciousness because of the shift in time and space orientation and enhanced multi dimensional sensitivity.

D: It seems so simple, so obvious - the good life. Why is it so difficult for most to grasp - to learn?

A: Probably unhealthy conditioning. Faulty programs running around in the brain.

D: So one must decondition oneself?

A: Yes. But it might be better if we go a little more slowly as reducing unhealthy conditioning is difficult and mysterious for most people. Although, reducing unhealthy conditioning sometimes happens fast and relatively easily if certain insights are achieved - if the mind is effectively used. But it takes what I call Profound Attention. High quality, sustained attention. Which by itself improves consciousness.

D: And thinking. And creativity. And energy. Sustained attention is one of the principles underlying the MindFitness Training, isn't it?

A: Yes. We begin very simply, basically and then try to move at whatever speed is appropriate for each individual. Beginning with making sure the learner has excellent skills for reducing unhealthy, maladaptive stress.

D: There is healthy stress?

A: It is called eustress - from the Greek euphoria. Stress means change. Life is change so life is stress. But some change is good for you and some change is bad for you. My career in biofeedback was largely devoted to learning the best, fastest ways to reduce unhealthy stress or change and increase healthy stress or change.

D: So stress management - at least very skillful reduction of unhealthy stress leads to the good, the flourishing life - eudaimonia?

A: I say radical or extreme stress science and management definitely does. The good life emerges as one learns to practice what Csikszentmihalyi calls flow. One must discover what his or her signature strengths are - that is self knowledge. Then, apply those strengths - using them more in work, romance, friendships, play, and parenting. Apparently, the more you deploy your highest strengths the more flow you get in life. I think of this quality of flow as being a property of what I call fourth dimensional consciousness.

We all have suffering and pain and adversity. Eudaimonia implies considerable skill at transforming adversity, depression, sorrow, anger, fear - somehow- into the creative process - into living ever more creatively. Which transforms the quality of daily life. I assert this is skill learning.

D: It is encouraging to discover that science, psychology is really working on a positive psychology.

A: Did you know that the DSM has added a classification of strengths and virtues - sort of the opposite of the classification of the insanities?

D: What is the DSM?

A: It's the diagnostic manual used by psychologists and other professionals. The DSM now lists six virtues which are supported across virtually all cultures and these break down into 24 strengths. There is a wisdom and knowledge cluster, a courage cluster, a cluster for virtues like love and humanity, a justice cluster, a temperance, moderation cluster and finally a spirituality, transcendence cluster. Seligman has questionnaires on his website that have been devised to help individuals gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses.

D: There is a third kind of happiness?

A: **The third kind of happiness correlates** with a rather high order of actualization and I think is a natural outcome of living the good life, eudaimonia. There is a hunger to go further. The power to go even further seems to be fueled by the virtually inevitable increase of energy and resources eudaimonia generates. There is inevitably a sense of gratitude.

D: It seems to me gratitude further increases energy and creativity.

A: One discovers one is part of something much larger than oneself. An even deeper meaning emerges out of the immensity of life.

D: And death. Death really is part of life isn't it?

A: Clearly. This deeper meaning in life can have many manifestations including "prepackaged" ones like organized religion, political parties, etc. And then there are non prepackaged ones like teaching and bringing change of some sort. This is what we are trying to do. There is usually a feeling of service that somehow brings great meaning and profound happiness. You feel truly needed.

D: One feels more passionate. The melody needs the note as the note needs the melody.

A: Yes. It goes way beyond just doing it for the money. One who has come this far probably doesn't get up in the morning totally focused on making more money; it's more likely in service of something much larger. A lawyer can be a lawyer only so he can make a half million dollars per year. This is not a particularly meaningful life. This lawyer can, on the other hand, be a lawyer in service of good counsel, fairness, and justice. That's an example of a non prepackaged form of meaning.

D: And sometimes she might still make a half million a year.

A: Sometimes, but it may be more difficult. Positive psychology is leading to a sea change in psychology and education - from a therapeutic model to a coaching model. The therapeutic model is about finding out what's wrong with you and fixing what is broken. The coaching model is about finding out what is right with you - something you may not be aware of - and getting you to use it more and more.

D: What role do drugs play in improving the mind?

A: Drugs are so complicated. What is a drug? In general the technique most used to determine the effectiveness of a drug are the changes a drug produces in brain wave patterns. Gambling, alcohol, many illegal drugs, sexuality, music, sports, produce as much or greater changes in brain wave patterns than most prescribed drugs. Because time is short, let's focus on what we usually mean by legal drugs - particularly those that must be prescribed by an MD as treatment for mental problems.

D: Many people feel their drugs or medications make them feel happier.

A: Seligman points out that there are clearly some drug short cuts for bringing about the pleasant life. But he feels if there are short cuts for bringing about the good life - eudaimonia they are probably not drug related. And he thinks high levels of meaningfulness require mind powers that are way beyond what drugs can do.

D: What about psychogens, alcohol, marihuana, cocaine, etc. Some feel they can stimulate the creative process.

A: That is a huge question which I would like to look into in a later Episode. Staying with prescribed drugs for now, there are two kinds of medications. There are palliatives, cosmetics like quinine for malaria which suppresses the symptoms for as long as you take them. When you stop taking quinine the malaria returns full force. Then there are curative drugs like antibiotics for bacterial infection. When you stop taking those the bacteria are dead and don't recur.

Seligman says the dirty little secret of biological psychiatry is that every single drug in the psychopharmia is palliative. That is they are all symptom suppressers, and when you stop taking them you are back at square one. For example, serotonin and the earlier tricyclic antidepressants work about 65% of the time. Interestingly, the two major forms of psychotherapy for depression - cognitive therapy and interpersonal therapy - are a tie. They work about 65% of the time. The difference is in relapse and recurrence. In psychotherapy you actually learn a set of skills that you remember, so three years later when depression comes back you can apply those skills again. But if you had serotonin or tricyclic antidepressants, three years later when it comes back it comes back in full force.

So that's part one - the psychoactive drugs are palliative only, not curative....so the question is, are we likely to find drugs that work on the pleasant life, the good life and the meaningful life? Probably yes for the pleasant life. Obviously there are drugs that can affect positive emotions. Richard Davidson and other researchers are beginning to identify parts of the brain that influence emotion. There are already recreational drugs some of which I have experimented with. Antidepressants don't usually stimulate pleasure but recreational drugs do. The drug companies have been exploiting this for a long time. Clearly there are drug shortcuts to pleasure.

But eudaimonia - flow - the good life probably doesn't have short cuts unless we call profound learning experiences a short cut. There is this notion that the more one uses the brain the greater its capacity. And no one can prove so far that its capacity is not relatively infinite. Profound learning can be fast - in a flash as insight. So that's what contemplation and meditation are all about. I don't see a shortcut to learning flow. We have to use our highest strengths in order to enter into eudaimonia. I doubt that there are drugs that can bring this about. Of course, that is controversial. Unless, we are talking about nootropics.

D: Nootropics?

A: Smart Drugs. The third form of happiness, which is bringing more meaning into your life requires knowing yourself even better and using your strengths in the service of something you believe is larger than you are. There are clearly drugs which can enhance sensual pleasure - at least temporarily and there seems to be a pharmacology of positive emotion. But it is unlikely there'll be an interesting pharmacology of flow or eudaimonia and I agree with Seligman's notion that a true pharmacology of meaning seems impossible. Unless we are talking about vitamins, nootropics and the like.

I assert the secret to eudaimonia, flow and bringing ever deeper meaning to life naturally unfolds from living mindfully. The greater percentage of time one can be mindful the greater the natural unfolding of higher orders of happiness. Living mindfully is the goal of Mindfitness. Learning how to do this is what you and I mean by contemplation and meditation. But to make these principles usable and understandable for more people I think requires innovative use of language and creative coaching. That is what we and others are trying to do.

D: Earlier, you mentioned that you think there might even be a fourth form of happiness.

A: I don't think there is any purpose in discussing it at this point. Maybe at a later Episode.

D: Why not now?

A: We have so much, maybe several episodes to go to do even a minimal job with Eudaimonia and the meaningful life - something much larger than oneself. After all, we are focused on being practical. That means anchoring the basics first.

D: Does working on the Infinite Potential Series add meaning to your life?

A: It does.

D: How so?

A: Two ways. First I get to research, absorb myself in learning about the mind, my own mind - the bigger Mind. Second, this is a chance to be of service to something bigger than I am - infinitely bigger. What about you?

D: You do the work and research.

A: You make my life work so all I have to do is what I love to do - this is play - as the Greeks would say, Layla.

D: Thanks for the acknowledgment and I'd like to thank our audience for listening. We will go further with Episode IV. Until then relax as much as you can and use your signature strengths to unfold the flourishing life for yourself. May you find yourself in flow - Eudaimonia.

A: Thanks for the help, Dagne.

D: Thank you, Adam.

Copyright
Adam Crane 2008