

THE **5** SECRETS TO

# Deep AND Lasting Happiness

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# THE 5 SECRETS TO DEEP AND LASTING HAPPINESS

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***“When you’re happy for no reason, you bring your happiness to your life experiences rather than try to extract your happiness from them.”***

*– Marci Shimoff*

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## **INTRODUCTION: My Rocky Road to a Happy Life**

The lights are on and the cameras are rolling. I’m sitting in Studio 1A at Rockefeller Plaza on the set of the Today Show. Hundreds of people are peering in from outside as I’m sharing the secrets of happiness with Meredith Vieira and millions of early morning TV viewers across America.

After the show is over, I reflect on the extraordinary life I get to lead traveling the world sharing happiness in more than 40 countries. I feel happy waking up each morning, but it certainly wasn’t always that way...

I’ve had quite a rocky road to happiness (you’ll hear more about that later), and I’ve spent many years trying to uncover the secrets to happiness. I’ve interviewed scores of happiness experts and hundreds of people who are living from the state I call “happy for no reason.”

As a result, I’ve discovered some remarkable things that have transformed people’s lives—including my own. And I’m excited to share these with you.

Congratulations on taking the time to invest in yourself and your happiness. I’m thrilled to be on this journey with you!

I believe it’s not an accident that you’re reading this book. Something called you to this. Your soul knows that it’s your time to live the life that you deserve and were meant to live...a happy and fulfilling life.



Let me ask you a question I've asked hundreds of thousands of people around the world: Would you like to wake up tomorrow morning feeling happier?

Though I can't hear your answer, I know you're saying. "Yes, of course!" because *everyone* says yes. No one says, "Gee, I hope I wake up tomorrow feeling really miserable." We all want happiness.

Aristotle said that happiness is the goal of all goals; it's the whole aim and purpose of human existence. I agree with Aristotle.

Well, I have some bad news and some good news for you about happiness.

First, the bad news: Unhappiness is an epidemic today—one out of four women in the U.S. is on anti-depressants. We have more wealth and comfort than ever, yet we're unhappier than ever.

But here's the good news: Science has cracked the happiness code. We now know what it takes to be happier—and it's something everyone can do. Personally, I think this breakthrough should be headline news as it's the one thing we humans have always wanted to know. It should be taught in schools and universities and in our homes. It's truly THE game-changer!

But before we go any further, I'd like you to stop for a moment and reflect on why you're interested in this book:

- ☞ Maybe you've had some success in your life, but you still feel a little empty inside—like something's still missing or you just know there's more happiness, joy, and love that you could be experiencing.
- ☞ Maybe your relationships aren't what you want them to be, and you're longing for a more fulfilling connection with your partner or your friends or family.
- ☞ Maybe you're looking for "the one" and you're frustrated that he or she hasn't shown up yet.
- ☞ Maybe you just feel stuck or anxious or worried, or perhaps you're working really hard but it's not creating the well-being you want to feel.
- ☞ Maybe you want to help your children become happier.
- ☞ Maybe you feel tired or overwhelmed or have health challenges, and you want to get your energy and mojo back.
- ☞ Or maybe you're already pretty happy and just want to take it to the next level...



Here's the truth—it doesn't matter why you're reading this. Happiness is actually a universal "cure" for all of the situations listed above.

You see, we have it backwards! We work hard for the success we think will bring us happiness, but it's the other way around. It's happiness that *brings* us more success—in every area of our life.

Here are just a few of the fringe benefits of being happy:

— Happier people make more money: an average of one million dollars more over their lifetime.

— Happier people are healthier; they're thirty percent less likely to get sick.

— Happier people live longer: an average of nine years longer.

— Happier people have more fulfilling relationships.

— Happier people have a better likelihood of raising happier children.

So, read on and see how you can take your life to the next level by learning how to get happier now!

## My Story

*L*et me start by telling you what led me to teach happiness.

The question I'm always asked on TV and radio interviews is this: "Marci, you seem so happy. Were you always this way?"

My answer is "No way!" Actually, I think I was born depressed. I'm easy to spot in my family photos: I'm the one who's not smiling.

Even as a child, life was just overwhelming for me. I had a great family and every reason to be happy, yet I walked around with a dark cloud around me.

Fortunately, I had a powerful happiness mentor: my father, the happiest person I've ever known. Each morning of his 91 years, he woke up with a big smile on his face. His motto was,



“Every day that I’m breathing is a good day.”

Once, when I was about 19, he and I were driving down the road together, and I asked him, “Dad, what’s your best advice for life?”

He looked at me and said, “Honey, just be happy!”

I threw my arms up in the air in frustration and said, “Oh, Dad, that’s easy for you to say. You were born that way. I wasn’t! What do I do?”

He looked at me again and said four more words, “Honey, I don’t know.”

That’s when I realized that since I wasn’t one of those people like my dad who were just born happy, I had to figure out for myself what I could do to be happier.

At first, I did what many people do: I set goals for what I wanted in my life, and I figured that when I reached those goals, I’d be happy. I had five goals:

**Goal #1:** A successful career helping people

**Goal #2:** A great husband or life partner

**Goal #3:** A community of wonderful friends

**Goal #4:** A comfortable home

**Goal #5:** A body like Halle Berry’s

I always say I got four out of the five! I never had Halle Berry’s body—though I do have a healthy body, for which I’m very grateful.

For years I worked really, really hard to get all my ducks in a row, so I would have those five things—so I could finally be happy. What happened instead was a huge “A-ha” moment.

It was June of 1998, and it certainly looked like everything in my life was working. Three of my books were in the top five on *The New York Times*’ bestseller list, and I had been hired to speak to a group of 8,000 people in Chicago. After my speech, there was a line of people all the way around the building waiting for me to sign their books. That night, I autographed 5,432 books. My client had hired a massage therapist to work on my hand every few minutes, so I could keep on signing. I felt like an author rock star!

After autographing the last book, I went up to the penthouse suite they had booked for me, and I walked over to the windows and just stood there, taking in the beautiful, panoramic view of Lake Michigan. But after a minute, I got a lump in my throat. I turned away from the window, fell onto the bed, and burst into tears. *I had everything I thought I needed to be happy, and I still wasn’t.*





I could no longer fool myself into thinking that the next thing was going to bring it to me. I could see so clearly that I'd get something and be happier for a while, but then it would fade away. So I'd go after the next thing and be happier for a while, and then it would fade away again. This would happen over and over. And I thought, that's the hamster wheel most of us are on!

So, in that moment, I decided I was going to do everything I could to find out how I could be truly happy. Not just "happy because....," but "happy no matter what!"

I started by diving into the field of positive psychology. I read all the studies about happiness and interviewed a lot of the researchers. And then I interviewed people who were unconditionally happy.

And here's what I discovered: The only difference between happy people and everyone else is that happy people have different habits.

What's more, I found that anyone can practice these "happiness habits" to raise their happiness level.

Back in my high school days, I would have given myself a D+ in happiness. Now, thanks to practicing the happiness habits, I give myself an A. I'm still practicing—things happen that still challenge me—but I have a deep sense of inner happiness and peace. And I know this is possible for you, too.

So let's get started!

## Discovering Your Happiness Set-Point

*L*et me share with you what I found to be the most exciting piece of happiness research. Learning this was my big "aha" moment. I thought, *So that's why I wasn't happy even though I had all the things I thought would make me happy!*

Here it is: Scientists have found that we all have a “happiness set-point.” This set-point is like a thermostat setting: no matter what happens to us, whether good or bad, we tend to hover around a certain pre-set level of happiness, our set-point, unless we do something to change it.

When you get something you think you want, you may be happier for a little while, but within a year, you’ll likely return to your original happiness set-point. Even people who win the lottery—that “golden ticket” to happiness—will return to their original happiness level within about a year.

So the real key to happiness is raising our happiness set-point. And to find out how to raise our set-point, let’s first look at how it’s determined.

- ☞ A whopping 50% of your happiness set-point is genetic. You’re born with it; it’s determined by your DNA.
- ☞ Just 10% is determined by the outward circumstances of your life. It’s ironic: this is such a small piece of the pie, yet it’s what everyone is working hard to improve so they can be happier! No wonder that doesn’t work.
- ☞ The other 40% is determined by your habits of thoughts and behavior— that’s the piece you can do the most about to raise your happiness set-point.

And, let’s take this a step further. There are scientists in the field of epigenetics who say that our genes (50% of our happiness set-point) can be influenced or changed by changing our habits. So, that means that **a total of up to 90% of our happiness set-point can be influenced by changing our habits.**

Now *that* is exciting.

All we have to do is change some of our habits to raise our happiness set-point. And that is a whole lot easier than trying to have the perfect house, job, partner, kids, and body so that our lives will look perfect!

It’s not our conditions, it’s our habits that make the difference in our happiness.

In this book, I’ll share with you five top habits—the secrets that happy people know. See which of these you already are doing well with, and which might need some more of your attention.

Each chapter provides one of the key secrets to living a happier life. Together, they provide a master formula for experiencing authentic and lasting happiness

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***“Happiness resides not in possessions and not in gold;  
the feeling of happiness dwells in the soul.” – Democritus***

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SECRET #1:

# Savoring the Sweet



## SECRET #1: Savoring the Sweet

# 60,000!

*D*id you know that's the number of thoughts we generally have during a day—60,000! No wonder we're so tired at the end of the day.

Research also shows that approximately **95%** of those thoughts keep repeating day after day, and on top of that, **80%** of those thoughts are *negative*. Yikes!

When John Milton wrote, "The mind...can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven," he wasn't joking!

You've probably noticed that, in every moment of the day, the quality of your experience is affected by the quality of your thoughts. If there's a lot of negative thoughts running around in your head, it can be really hard to stay happy.

Why do we have this tendency for what psychologists call the "negativity bias?" We inherited it from our caveman ancestors, whose survival depended on their skill at dodging danger. As a result, the earliest human brains were wired to pay attention to the negative.

The problem is that times have changed. We no longer have to be alert to saber-toothed tigers around every corner, yet we still often walk around stressed out, in fight or flight mode. When we're unhappy, we're often unaware that we're in the habit of mainly noticing all the bad stuff.

My colleague Rick Hanson calls this the velcro/teflon syndrome. He says, "The brain is like Velcro for the negative experiences, but like Teflon for the positive ones." Yep, the negative ones tend to stick to us, but the positive ones just slide right off.

Take a moment and think about your own life. If you get ten compliments in a day and one criticism, what do you tend to remember? The criticism, right? We tend to notice bad weather more than good weather . . . and then there's the time our partner forgot our anniversary seven years ago. You get the idea.



Happy people have usually reversed this tendency. For them, the positives stick like velcro and the negatives slide off like teflon. This is the essence of Secret #1: Savor the Sweet.

But don't worry, even if your thoughts have been focused on the bad stuff...I have good news for you. There's hope for rewiring your brain for happiness. The brain has a quality called neural plasticity, which means that it can change itself by creating new neural pathways and overwriting the old ones throughout your life. Unlike an old dog, your brain actually can learn new tricks. Phew!

So, exactly how can you rewire your brain for happiness? Here are two steps:

### 1. Look for the Good

The first step to creating new neural pathways for happiness is to be on the lookout for the good throughout your day. You might see it in a stranger holding the door for you or feel it at the end of a productive day. You may hear it in the sound of your child's giggle or smell it in a newly bloomed flower. The good is all around you if you look for it.

Happy people see the good right in front of them all day long. Once you start looking for the good, it becomes easier and easier to see because you keep building more neural pathways for the search.

This practice works because it's based on the ancient truth, "*What you put your attention on grows stronger in your life.*" When you're focusing on the positive, that's what you'll get more of.

### Play the Happiness Game



I learned a little game from Adelle, one of the unconditionally happy people I interviewed for *Happy for No Reason*, that helps build a practice of looking for the good. Adelle pretends she's on the Academy Awards Committee and she has to give out five awards every day. For example, she might see a little fluffy white dog in the park and give it the *Cutest Dog of the Day Award* (just in her own mind!). She might see a gorgeous sunset and give it the *Most Beautiful Sunset of the Month Award* or come across a great waitress and give her the *Best Waitress of the Year Award*.

Adelle makes sure she always gives away at least five awards a day, and it keeps her alert to all the good that's around her.

I suggest you practice this game for the next few weeks and see what happens. Here are the simple steps to follow:

1. Throughout your day, be on the lookout for who or what deserves an Academy Award.
2. Be creative. If you're noticing a uniquely colored flower, it could get the "Most Unusual Colored Flower of the Day" award. Look for extraordinary smiles, good service, or brilliant solutions to everyday challenges.
3. Find at least 5 people or things to give an award to every day. You don't have to tell the person. There's really no limit to the type or number of awards you can give in a day.
4. Play this game with people around you. If you have kids, share it with them—kids love playing this! You can play this with your co-workers, your friends or your partner.



Being in the mindset of finding worthy recipients and giving out the daily awards will help you build more neural pathways for happiness.

## **2. Savor the Good**

Once you've gotten the hang of looking for and noticing the good, you can take it to the next level by savoring the good. Savoring simply means taking the time and space to let an experience really sink in—such as thoroughly enjoying that last delicious bite of dessert rather than gobbling it down, or a stopping the car and getting out to witness the last minutes of a spectacular sunset.

The longer that experience is held in your awareness and the more emotionally stimulating it is, the more neural pathways you'll build.

Research shows that it takes at least 20 seconds for a positive experience to stick long enough to create a new neural pathway in the brain, which is much longer than it takes for a negative to take hold. That's why the practice of savoring is important. You want your positive experiences to stick!

So when you notice something good, spend at least twenty seconds basking in the moment, savoring the good feelings of that experience. Stop and fully take in the breathtaking sight of a starry night sky; take the time to appreciate a compliment you've been given and the glow you feel; close your eyes and feel the bliss in the beautiful harmonies in a song.

Remember, what you put your attention on grows stronger in your life. When you look for the good and savor the sweet experience, you're rewiring your brain for happiness. And that's something to be happy about!

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***"The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate."*** – Oprah Winfrey

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SECRET #2:

# Stepping Into Self-Love



## SECRET #2: Stepping into Self-Love

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***“You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe deserve your love and affection.” – Buddha***

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If you're like most people, you probably find it easier to give love to others than to give it to yourself. Yes, self-love can be tough, especially if you've had what I refer to as “hot pants moments”—times when you're overcome with self-judgment.

I call them this because one of my most vivid memories of self-criticism came when I was 13 years old and hot pants—three-inch-long shorts that barely cover the butt—were all the rage. I was quite chubby, but that didn't stop me from squeezing into my very own pair of bright pink hot pants.

On the day of my hot pants debut, I overheard one of my friends saying to another, “Can you believe Marci wore hot pants today—with those thighs?” I was crushed. When I got home, I took off those tiny shorts and stuffed them in the back of my closet where I'd never have to see them again. But I couldn't get rid of the self-loathing that easily.

For a while, every time I looked into the mirror, I heard “Can you *believe* how fat you are?” Later, when I was 19 and didn't have a boyfriend, that voice asked, “Can you believe what a loser you are?” And years after that, when I gave a talk and thought someone in the audience looked bored, the voice was still there: “Can you believe what a lousy speaker you are?”

My guess is that you've had the equivalent of a “hot pants” story in your life and your own version of self-judgments that have put a lid on your experience of love and happiness.

Decades after this hot pants incident, I started studying self-esteem and later taught courses on how to raise self-esteem. And while I think that having high self-esteem is great, it's actually self-love that we need in order to have deep and lasting happiness.

Here's the difference between self-esteem and self-love:

Self-esteem is conditional—it's based on “loving myself, because...” I'll love myself if I'm good enough, smart enough, pretty enough, do a good enough job, and so on. But what happens when I don't live up to the exacting standards that I hold? Then I plunge into self-rejection and my happiness is zapped.



On the other hand, self-love is unconditional—it's the experience of love and acceptance for yourself no matter what. It doesn't depend on you looking good in hot pants or doing a great job at work. It doesn't depend on you doing or being anything. It's knowing that you're inherently lovable exactly as you are.

So how do we foster self-love? Here are two easy practices to nurture the habit of self-love. They're especially useful when you're having a rough time or being particularly judgmental with yourself.

### **1. Practice self-care:**

When you love someone, you naturally want to take great care of them, right? Well, how well do you take care of yourself? Most people aren't in the habit of caring for themselves and honoring their own needs.

To reverse this, a few times during your day, stop and ask yourself this question: *"What's the most loving thing I can do for myself right now?"*

Then, listen to what your heart has to say, and honor it by following through, even for just a few minutes. Your answer may be to call a friend, drink some water, write in your journal or put on some music and dance.

Write that question on a Post-It and stick it on your computer, your bathroom mirror, the dashboard of your car...anywhere you're going to see it regularly as a reminder.

Just the simple act of stopping for a moment to ask the question *"What's the most loving thing I could do for myself right now?"* and then doing it, will help you nurture greater self-love.

### **2. Practice self-compassion:**

Think of something that you really don't like about yourself—you weigh more than you want or you can't sing, for example. Then send unconditional love to what you would normally judge or reject. If you don't feel able to love your excess flab or your pitchy voice in the shower, just love that you don't like that quality about yourself and are struggling with it. Beam love, compassion, and understanding to the person who's experiencing the challenge: you!





Self-compassion is the ability to simply bring love to every feeling or thought, without rejecting any of them—even the “unlovable” stuff. It means being able to say, I love myself even though I’m flawed.

Doing these two practices has certainly helped me move into greater self-love. In fact, my dear friend, Debra Poneman, founder of *Yes to Success* and co-founder with me of *Your Year of Miracles*, gave me a stunning pair of hot pink hot pants (satin, no less) for my last birthday to honor how far I’ve come. And I love them!

So, the next time you have a “hot pants” moment, give yourself some compassion and remember that you’re worthy of love— no matter what.

And here’s some good news about self-love: Love is actually the essence of who we are. We don’t need to create it. Our job is simply to remove the blocks to experiencing the truth of who we really are.

As the 13th century Sufi poet said,

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***“Your task is not to seek for love but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” — Rumi***

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I had the great honor of being with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, who is an embodiment of happiness and love.

SECRET #3:

# Flowing in Forgiveness



## SECRET #3: Flowing in Forgiveness

People always ask me what I consider to be the fast track to happiness. That's easy: **Forgiveness.**

Forgiveness has a high vibrational energy that can heal almost anything and can certainly raise your happiness set-point.

When I think of inspiring examples of forgiveness, the person who comes to mind first is Nelson Mandela.

Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years by the government of South Africa. He was often treated very poorly by his prison guards. During those years, he realized that in order to survive he could not simmer in hate and anger. If he did, it would kill his spirit.

For his spirit to survive, he was going to have to find compassion, love and forgiveness for the very guards who were beating him.

As he found that forgiveness, the prison guards began to soften and melt so much in his presence that they couldn't be tough on him. It got so they would often have to replace the prison guards around him on a regular basis.

Then, four years after Mandela was released from prison, he was elected the first black president of South Africa. At his inauguration, some of his former prison guards were sitting in the front row. One even became his bodyguard.

This is forgiveness. If Nelson Mandela can forgive in those circumstances, you and I can forgive what's going on in our lives.

Many people think that feeling hatred, anger, and resentment toward the person who wronged them is a way to punish them—but it's exactly the opposite! Holding onto those emotions is like taking poison and expecting it to hurt the other person. It's you who's hurt.

Forgiveness is great medicine for ourselves. We forgive for our sake, not theirs. It's not about condoning someone's behavior—it's about freeing yourself. Forgiveness, in Aramaic, translates as "unbinding the heart."

Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself that allows your heart to stop being contracted. When you forgive, you release the toxic resentment and anger you're holding in your



At a summit with Tawakkol Karman, Nobel Peace Prize winner from Yemen, in front of a photo honoring Nelson Mandela during one of my annual meetings as part of the Nobel Women's Initiative



heart, freeing yourself to get on with your life. It's like spring cleaning for your heart.

There's a well-known Tibetan Buddhist story that illustrates this point perfectly.

*Two Tibetan monks met each other a few years after being released from prison where they had been tortured by their jailers.*

*"Have you forgiven them?" asked the first monk.*

*"I will never forgive them! Never!" replied the second.*

*"Well," said the first monk, "I guess they still have you in prison then, don't they?"*

### **My Favorite Forgiveness Practice**

Sometimes we need help with forgiveness. Even though we want to forgive, the heart just won't let go of its grievance.

My favorite practice for forgiveness is Ho'oponopono, a simple technique from an ancient Kahuna Hawaiian tradition. (Don't worry, you don't have to be able to pronounce the word to do the practice effectively).

Ho'oponopono allows you to release your judgements and resentments towards yourself and others.

I've heard amazing stories of people using it with miraculous results, including a well-documented and amazing account of Dr. Ihaleakala Hew Len, a psychiatrist in Hawaii who cured a ward of criminally insane patients by using it, without ever seeing any of them.

Here's how you do it:

1. Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take some nice deep breaths.
2. Picture a person sitting in front of you whom you hold anger or resentment towards—it could even be yourself.
3. Now, put your attention on your heart area and silently say the following four phrases, addressing the image of the person in front of you. Simply repeat them for about five minutes:
  - I'm sorry.
  - Please forgive me.
  - Thank you.
  - I love you.

When you feel ready, you can open your eyes. How do you feel?

You may feel a shift from doing this just once, or you may need to practice this a number of times before you feel a significant difference. But over time, your heart will shift toward love.

It doesn't matter whether you're the injured party or the person who did the injuring. It also doesn't matter whether you're in contact with the person or even if they're alive. When you shift your own energy, it shifts the energy of the relationship and allows you to bring the vibration of pure forgiveness into any situation.

I've used Ho'oponopono many times in my life, but never has it been more important to me than when I used it about a decade ago with my sister, Lynda:

Lynda is 11 ½ years older than me, and though we hadn't been close while I was growing up, we had a loving relationship and family. But about ten years ago, Lynda and I got into an argument and we stopped talking to each other. We were both indignant and upset and felt wronged. I dug my heels in and very stubbornly refused to let go of my perspective.

Three months into "silent treatment," our family was to get together to move Mom from our family home of 58 years to her new assisted living apartment. This was the first time I'd be seeing Lynda since our argument, and I was worried about how uncomfortable it would be. The morning came and we went to my mom's new apartment to unpack her things.

Sure enough, we got off to an awkward start that day. I walked in and hugged my brother, sister-in-law and nephews, but didn't even make eye contact with my sister. I was *not* going to be the one to break the ice.

We spent the morning trying to avoid each other in the small apartment, and after hours of stony silence between us, the tension in the air was thick. I needed a break and decided to go sit in my car for a few minutes. I felt angry and hurt. But Nelson Mandela's story popped into my mind and I thought, *if he could love and forgive in the face of his situation, I can certainly love and forgive my sister.*

So I sat in my car and practiced Ho'oponopono, sending the four wishes to my sister. After about five minutes, I realized something: Lynda wasn't just mad at me for what had happened a few months earlier; I could see ways I'd caused her pain over all our years of being sisters. I saw things I'd done that I'd never recognized. My heart burst open, and I felt deep love and compassion for my sister.





I went back into the apartment feeling open and happy. Within a few minutes, Lynda came over to me out of the blue and said, "Let's go unpack Mom's closet together." I was shocked; I hadn't said anything to her and yet she was treating me as though there hadn't been a problem. A little while later at lunch, she reached across the table and offered me her baked potato, saying "Marci, you have mine—I know you like them more than I do." The change in energy was like night and day.

Later, I pulled aside my brother, who'd witnessed the whole thing, and asked what he'd said to Lynda while I was gone. He said, "Marci, nobody said anything to her. I have no idea what just happened."

Without us even talking about the situation, the energy of forgiveness had freed us. It was actually the beginning of a totally new relationship that I now have with my sister.

And thank goodness it happened when it did. Nine months later, Lynda and I found ourselves back in that same closet of our mother's – this time packing up Mom's clothes, because she had suddenly passed away. I hate to think what it would have been like if I'd held on to my anger and resentment. Life's too short to keep our hearts closed.

So, whenever you feel anger, resentment or judgment towards yourself or someone else, practice ho'oponopono. It will help you release the pain and contraction in your heart. Remember, it doesn't condone anyone's behavior or actions and it doesn't matter who's "at fault."

You are freeing yourself from the bondage of holding on, which is a beautiful way to release whatever is standing between you and greater peace and happiness.

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***The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world. – Marianne Williamson***

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SECRET #4:

# Powering Up Your Prana



## SECRET #4: Powering Up Your Prana

*B*eing happy isn't just a state of mind—it's also a state of the body.

Whaaaaat? Yes! But this has nothing to do with having a perfect body. Trying to make your body look perfect will only make you miserable. Believe me. . . I've been there!

This is about finding a way your body can support your happiness by powering up your prana.

Prana is a Sanskrit word that means "life force" or "vital energy". For thousands of years, Eastern systems of health have spoken of a vital life force or energy in the body. In China, this life force is called chi, or Qi, and in India, it's called prana.

When you have strong vital life force, your entire system is energized, which activates emotional and physical healing and juices up your happiness.

Can you guess the number one complaint doctors get from their patients?

***They feel tired, exhausted and drained—they don't have the energy they want.***

Can you relate?

And you've also probably experienced that happiness doesn't come as easily when your body doesn't feel good.

Do you know what one of the most powerful ways to power up your prana is?

SLEEP.

It may seem obvious, but we ignore it all too often. Sleep is actually a huge secret to happiness!

Here's an eye-opening statistic that puts sleep in perspective...

***The quality of sleep you got last night has a bigger impact on your happiness today than either your marital status or income level.***

Yes, you read that right! Sleep is a very BIG deal! It's your body's way of restoring, replenishing, and recharging. Good rest is a necessity for a happy life.





Unfortunately, these days it seems as though we're in a competition to see who can get the least amount of sleep. You might hear a conversation around the water cooler at work...like, "I got five hours sleep last night", and then another person responds with, "Well I got only 4." "WOW, you rock!!"

Seriously?? This is nuts!

Getting little sleep is nothing to brag about. No one wins a gold medal for getting the least amount of sleep. It's quite the opposite.

I know this all too well from my own experience. In the past, I used to get a lot done, but my stressed out body paid the price. I would push myself way beyond my limits, not get enough rest and be an unhappy camper.

But one day, I decided I couldn't live that way anymore. So as I started getting better sleep, I felt more energized, vital and happy through the day. I was able to get more done. Life felt easier and more in the flow. It was as though my increased prana radiated out and attracted the people and the things that I needed without the struggle.

But rather than just remind you **that the average person needs eight hours** (and that's true!), I want to share with you some lesser known ways to powerfully impact the quality of your sleep.

So here's the thing about sleep. Your body works best when it's in sync with the rhythms of nature. It's built to sleep when nature sleeps. Understanding your body's internal clock—or circadian rhythm—is the first step to better sleep.

Your circadian rhythm is the 24-hour cycle that tells your body when to sleep, wake, and eat. It's your 'body clock' and it's affected by environmental cues, like sunlight and temperature. It determines whether you feel wide-awake and energized or tired and depleted at different times of the day.

When your circadian rhythms are disrupted, you don't function as well. You tend to make a lot of mistakes. Even circumstances around you don't seem to go your way. You aren't in the flow.

But then you get the right amount of rest, and your experience of life completely shifts for the better. That's because you're in sync with the natural world. You're in harmony with life and supported by the subtle laws of nature.



According to Ayurvedic medicine, which is a 5,000 year old holistic healing system of medicine developed in India, there's something called the healing hours. They're the four hours from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. This is when your body gets the deepest, most rejuvenating quality of sleep. It's when your body is able to heal the most.

So, the healing hours are when you want to be sleeping. Most people get very tired around 9:30 pm. It's our body's natural way of saying, I need some rest. But most people power through, and if you do, you'll notice you get second wind sometime around 10:00 pm. You may think you're good to go for another couple hours and you get a lot done. Well you may be, but you're doing it at the expense of your mind and body's happiness and health. We sacrifice when we power through the healing hours, our prime time to rest.

I once went to see an Ayurvedic doctor who I was told was over a hundred years old, yet he had all of his hair and the brightest eyes I've ever seen. He gave me a prescription to go to bed by 10:00 pm three nights in a row. I call it catching the ten o'clock Angel Train, and it changed my life.

But don't take my word for it, try it for yourself. Catch that 10 o'clock Angel Train three nights in a row and on the fourth morning, you'll wake up feeling like a different person. I promise you!

Here are a few more great tips for improving the quality of your sleep:

1. No electronics for two hours before you go to sleep. That means no TV, computer or even a Kindle. The light from electronics stimulates the pineal gland and disrupts our ability to sleep well.
2. Sleep in a darkened room. A darkened room allows you to have greater melatonin infusion and melatonin is what helps you sleep. So close the blinds or buy some black-out curtains for your bedroom. It'll be well worth the investment.
3. Rub sesame oil on the soles of your feet. One of the biggest reasons you may have a hard time getting to sleep is that your mind is overactive—your thoughts are keeping you up. To quiet the mind, rub organic sesame oil on the soles of your feet. It



brings the energy out of your head and down to your feet. (Note: Keep some old socks handy to put on your oily feet).

4. Read or talk about something positive before you go to sleep (avoid the evening news). What you think about right before you go to sleep has an influence on your dreams and the quality of your rest, so put your attention on peaceful, loving thoughts.

Have fun sleeping your way to happiness!

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***“By helping us keep the world in perspective, sleep gives us a chance to refocus on the essence of who we are.” – Arianna Huffington***

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SECRET #5:

# Settling Into Spirit



## SECRET #5: Settling into Spirit

People often ask me about the one quality the happy people I interviewed most had in common. It would have to be that they felt plugged into Spirit.

You might be wondering, “What does that really mean?”

Well, think of a moment when you felt that life was miraculous—maybe it was while you were standing at the edge of a waterfall or looking out at the Grand Canyon, maybe it was the moment the doctor handed you your newborn baby, or maybe it was when you were gazing into the eyes of a beloved—a time you had so much appreciation for something that it turned into awe.

When we experience this kind of awe, we’re connecting to an energy that’s greater than us. It’s the spiritual energy that connects us to everything and everyone in the universe.

Connecting with this, life seems to take on a different dimension. It’s not just about going through the motions anymore. Life feels filled with grace. The more deeply you experience that connection, the richer and more joyful your life becomes.

And it doesn’t matter the specific religion or spiritual affiliation. The ways people connect to spirit can vary widely—prayer, meditation, being in nature. Research shows that people who feel a spiritual connection, regardless of how they get access to that connection, are happier than those who don’t.

As I look back on my life, I realize one of the main reasons I was unhappy when I was young was that I felt disconnected from Spirit. I knew there had to be more to life than my body, thoughts, and feelings. I truly had a hunger for the soul, but I didn’t know how to satisfy it.

My first breakthrough in the spiritual arena came when I was 16 and I learned to meditate. It immediately started to relieve some of the existential angst and low-grade depression I’d felt since I was a little girl. In the beginning, I often wondered if I was doing it correctly, but I felt so much expansion, peace and well-being, I knew I was doing something right. I was hooked. I’m convinced that meditating is what kept me from escaping my unhappiness through addictions.

Today, I’m so grateful that meditation still helps me stay connected to Spirit.



Hundreds of studies have been done over the last fifty years showing the powerful effects of meditation on our bodies, minds, and emotions.

The stillness people experience in meditation allows them to rise above the chaos of daily life and find peace, joy, and centeredness. When you become silent, the noise of everyday life slips away and you melt into the peace and wisdom that underlies all of creation.

I want to share with you my personal story about what a huge impact the practice of silence has had on my life:

In 1995, I was really burned out. You've heard of road warriors? That was me. I was traveling from city to city teaching self esteem seminars to 200 people.

Each morning, I would start setting up the room at 7:00 a.m, teach from 9:00 am–5:00 pm (in 3-inch high heels), then unpack the room before driving onto the next city, which was three to four hours away. I was a wreck.

One day, a dear friend of mine, Janet Attwood (author of the Passion Test) came to me and said, "Marci, you look terrible! I'm going to take you away with me to a silent seven-day meditation retreat."

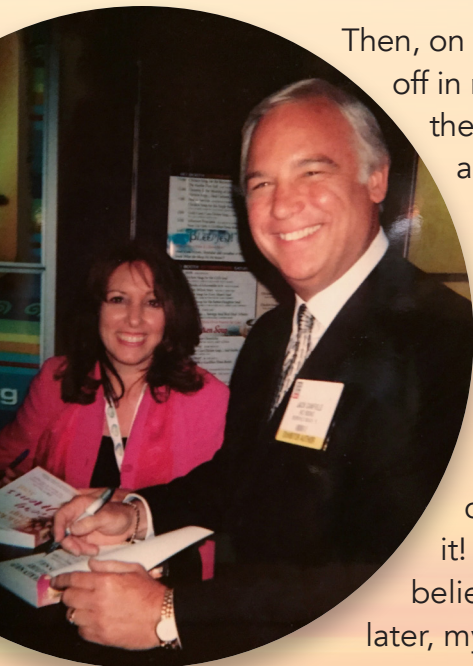
I looked at her and said, "You're crazy. I don't do silence. I'm a speaker. I don't think I've been silent for more than two hours in my life".

She said, "Marci, you need it." And she dragged me away with her to a seven day silent meditation retreat. The first few days were painful, but I finally settled in.

Then, on the fourth day in the middle of a silent meditation, a light bulb went off in my head and I saw the words *Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul*. At the time, only the original *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book was published and nobody had thought of a series. As soon as I saw those words, I knew it was spirit guiding me what I was to do next.

There was only one problem with this scenario—I had one of the greatest epiphanies of my life, but I still had three more days of silence, and I couldn't tell anybody!

As soon as the silent retreat was over, I ran to the closest payphone (yes, it was that long ago), called up my mentor, Jack Canfield who co-wrote the first *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book, and said, "I've got it! *Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul*." He said, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe nobody's ever thought of that. What a great idea!" And a year later, my first book was out.



Had I not gone into silence and connected more deeply with Spirit, that idea wouldn't have come to me.

Pretty cool, yes?

Now I know you're probably thinking, 'I don't have time for 7-day silent retreat!'

I understand. And the good news is that you don't need to have 7 days (I've never done a 7-day silent retreat since then).

Here's how I suggest you settle into Spirit in a way that can work with a busy lifestyle.

1. Make it a priority to take 10–20 minutes a day (preferably first thing in the morning) to do some kind of silent meditation, prayer or visualization. Find whatever works for you.
2. Once a month, take one day (or a half day) to completely unplug. Be silent and let yourself settle into a deeper inner experience. Take an electronics fast—no phone, computer, tv, etc. Be in nature, be with yourself, go inward.

When you do these two simple practices, connecting to silence and settling into your Spirit, you'll be amazed at how much happier you feel. I promise you'll be amazed at the results.

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***"In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness." – Gandhi***

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## CONCLUSION: A Happier Life for Yourself and the World

*L*iving happily ever after isn't just a fairy tale. It's totally possible.

And to make the quickest progress, you don't have to take huge leaps. You just have to take baby steps—and keep on taking them. Having the vision for a happier life is the first step on your way.

Just remember...how the world appears to you is determined by the color of the glasses you look through. When you're happy, you see happiness all around you.

The world may or may not change, but when we become happier inside, the world looks different, and I deeply believe that when we become happier inside, we have an enormous effect on our world.

People always ask me, *"Isn't it selfish to want to be happier? What about the world? Don't we have to save the world?"*

And my answer is that the most important thing you can do for the world is to focus on your happiness because when you're happier, you influence all the people around you: your family, your friends and ultimately the world. Being happy is the least selfish thing that you can do.

I leave you with this Chinese proverb that sums up why I care so passionately about each of us being happier:

When there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person.

When there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the house.

When there is harmony in the house, there will be order in the nation.

When there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

**My** prayer and my wish for you is that you feel that light in your own soul, that you experience deep and lasting happiness in your own life, and through that, we help create peace here on this beautiful planet of ours.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*M*arci Shimoff had a vision when she was 13 that she would spend her life traveling the world speaking to and inspiring millions of people. She's gone on to do exactly that, becoming a world-renowned transformational teacher, a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author, and an expert in happiness, success, and unconditional love. A spiritual seeker all her life, Marci takes what she's learned for herself and enthusiastically shares it with others in a practical way.

In the midst of a meditation retreat in 1994, Marci had another vision—*Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul*. Soon after, she became the woman's face of the biggest self-help book phenomenon in history, co-authoring six books in the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series.

Her personal quest to experience lasting happiness and love led her to research and write the *New York Times* bestsellers *Happy for No Reason* and *Love for No Reason*. Her books have topped every bestseller list including Amazon and the *Wall Street Journal*, and have been on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 121 weeks. With total book sales of more than 16 million copies worldwide in 33 languages, Marci is one of the bestselling female nonfiction authors of all time.

She's also a featured teacher in *The Secret*, narrator of the award-winning film *Happy*, and host of the PBS TV show *Happy for No Reason*.

For the more than 30 years, Marci's been a top-rated speaker for Fortune 500 companies, women's associations, non-profit organizations, and audiences around the globe. She earned her MBA from UCLA and is a founding member of the Transformational Leadership Council.

Marci currently co-leads a global online mentoring program near and dear to her heart called *Your Year of Miracles* with thousands of participants from 72 countries.  
[www.YourYearofMiracles.com](http://www.YourYearofMiracles.com)

Through her books, speeches, mentoring, and on-line programs, Marci's message has touched the hearts and rekindled the spirits of millions of people throughout the world. Marci is passionate about helping people live more empowered, joy-filled, and miraculous lives.

