



## Higher Potential Living – Mind, Body and Spirit

Higher Potential Living is about getting the most out of the human experience: focusing on improving the quality of life through Mind, Body and Spirit. Most people in the Western world live under the philosophy that if it isn't broken then don't try to fix it. The problem with this philosophy is that it does not account for the difference between being broken and running optimally. For instance, we know that we shouldn't wait until our engine seizes or explodes before we get an oil change. Yet we do this in our lives all the time. Most of us find ourselves settling for "OK" for most aspects of our lives.

In relationships, we often view Couples' Skill-Building as something to only do if our relationship is on the edge of collapse, instead of the means of judgment-free communication and a relationship where everyone's wants and needs are being met regularly.

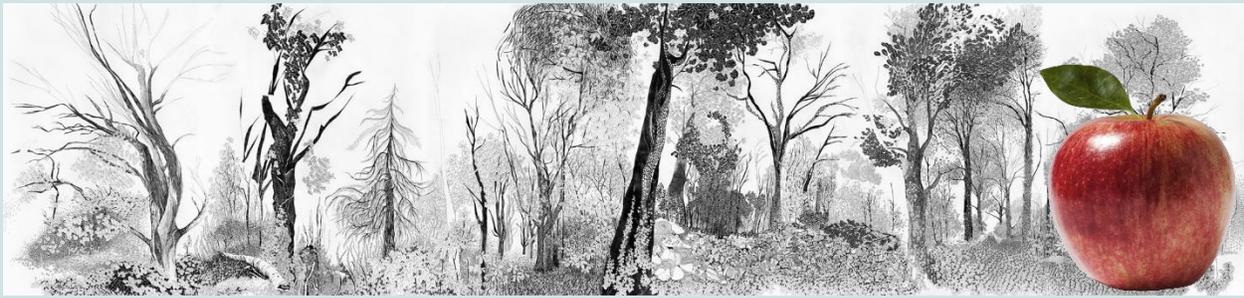
With our mental health, again most of us will wait until we are in the depths of depression, having suicidal thoughts, or we burn-out before we will seek help or look to improve our outlook on life.

With our physical bodies, we will settle with it being stiff or sore, telling ourselves that it is all part of getting older, when instead with proper care we can stay healthy and active well into our old age.

These examples are endless of how we settle, compromise, or simply get by.

Now imagine waking up every morning feeling excited for what the day will bring, and as you step out of bed you notice you feel strong, energized and pain-free. Of course, this is subjective to each person's unique circumstances in life, but the point is we have no way of knowing what is truly possible in our lives if we are not willing to invest in our wellbeing. The first step is to let go of any pre-scripted narratives about our injuries, stressors, or traumas, and enter the present moment. This is where the state of Mindfulness comes into the HPL (Higher Potential Living) model; in fact, it is the foundation of it.

Think about your first day of work at a new job. You might be a bit nervous but there is usually a level of excitement there as well. You are meeting your co-workers with smiles, and you face your work day with determination. Fast forward 5, 10, or 20 years and we find ourselves thinking about how much we want the work week to be over; we dread getting out of bed in the morning. But what if it were possible to approach every day with that initial determination and excitement? If we can truly embrace the principle of spontaneity, that every moment has the possibility to amaze us and bring us joy, we can go to work every day like it was our first.



## The Tenth Apple

This is a classic proverb that demonstrates how complacent we become with what we have:

*A hunter once lost his way deep inside the forest while chasing a deer. He used all his navigation skills but neither did he find any way out of the forest nor could he find any food to eat for eight days at a stretch. He started feeling so hungry his stomach felt like it was eating itself. Disappointed, he lost all hope. And that is exactly when an apple tree caught his sight. He collected ten apples to feed him for the rest of his search.*

*As he ate the first apple, his joy knew no bounds and he just couldn't stop feeling grateful and blessed. He felt as if everything was starting to go his way. He could not believe his luck when he ate the first apple, but he was less grateful while having the second apple, and even less grateful when he had the fifth apple. Somehow, with each passing apple, the hunger still kept on increasing and the joy kept on diminishing. He just could not enjoy the tenth apple.*

*Why? He had already taken for granted the gift of having found an apple tree in the middle of a forest, after eight long days of wandering with hunger. When he took the tenth apple in his hand, he was still very hungry but he just did not feel like eating it any more.*

*The tenth apple did not lack taste, it did not lack the potential to satisfy his hunger; what was lacking was his gratitude for finding food in the middle of the forest while lost.*

*The tenth apple is as sweet as the first apple. If the tenth apple fails to give as much pleasure as the first one, nothing is wrong with the apple, but with the person enjoying the fruit.*

Most of us can relate to the 'tenth apple effect' in some way. When we begin to lose the joy for things that once gave us a spring in our step, what is it that has changed? Can we learn to find that childlike wonder for the world around us again? Can we look at a flower with as much admiration as we did as young children? Can we look at a cardboard box again and see the potential for fun, play and possibilities, rather than wondering when recycling day is? Can we as grown adults blow bubbles in the park and focus on the joy of it, rather than worrying what others might think?

## The Mind's Lens

I often describe the mind as a complex DSLR (Digital Camera).

When I first got a professional camera, I was so excited I wanted to start using it right away. I knew nothing about how to frame a shot or anything about shutter or aperture. My camera had a magical setting called "Auto Mode". I flipped it onto that green "A" and I started shooting. For the most part the pictures were fairly good. But it wasn't until I found myself in situations where the lighting wasn't great or things just seemed a bit dark in my surroundings that I was forced to start to learn how to use some of the other features. I discovered a world of photography where I could control what was in focus, and what I could blur into the background. I also learned how to control what I wanted to include in my field of vision, allowing me to focus on what I genuinely wanted to capture.

The mind is the same way. The possibilities of what our minds are capable of are enormous, but the brain is a muscle. Unless we take the time to exercise it and try the different settings, we will never learn how to use it to its fullest potential. Imagine starting to feel anxiety, then being able to make the conscious decision that you don't want that, and then it stops. Or imagine as you are trying to fall asleep that your mind is wandering, preventing you from finding rest, then being able to simply tell your thoughts, "Now is not the time". And so your mind settles, and you drift off to sleep.

Higher Potential Living is about becoming the true master of your mental switchboard; recognizing that we are all walking bags of trauma and learning how to turn those traumas into valuable tools, rather than crutches and obstacles in our lives.



## Mind

When finding HPL through the mind, we look at uncovering the layers of conditioning, trauma, pain and ego to uncover who we truly are underneath it all. We often hear about how meditation can help with stress and anxiety, so we download an app or go to a couple classes, but we seldom approach it with the mindset of self-realization.

There are many styles of meditation, and the ways you can modify those styles to suit your needs are endless. The more we learn about how the brain works and how everything (from ruminating thoughts, anxiety, fear and depression, to love, joy and bliss) are combinations of signals firing in the most impressive muscle in our body, the more we can accept our ability to train it. Like any other muscle, if you want it to be strong you need to exercise it. Well, a large part of meditation be seen as just that: exercises for your brain. Perhaps we find one meditation we like and stick with that for every situation we encounter; for some people that may work. But in my experience, I have found that to be like going to the gym and only working out the chest and back, always skipping leg day! To get the most from our brain we need to work it evenly.

Some meditation techniques can strengthen our ability to focus on single tasks and increase our productivity. Others can strengthen our will power, our ability to embrace the moment, or even our ability to remain objective observers in trying situations. We can even increase the amount of compassion we enter each situation with or strengthen the belief that the only opinion that matters is our own.

The journey is about discovering what we need and when we need it. We can treat our mind as our ally; one that cares for our wellbeing and is worth us listening to in order to support it.

## Body

The body acts as an important vehicle for the True Self. Despite not truly representing who we are, the body acts as the canoe that the true self can navigate life's waters in. If the canoe is neglected or gets cracks or holes in it, you won't be able to spend much time on the water. In the yogic tradition, this is why the asana practice (physical postures) is regarded to be just as important as the rest of the means of reaching enlightenment. Eastern philosophies better appreciate the connection between the body and mind; understanding that even physical ailments tell us a story of what is happening on the intellectual or emotional layers. If one gets a headache, the question will be "why is it there and what is the cause?", versus "what is the best way to rid myself of these symptoms?". In this way, it is like cutting the top off of a weed, yet the roots keep spreading and getting stronger. Truly taking care of the body means taking the time to find the roots of an issue and dealing with it from the source: whether it is another part of the body, or a part of the mind.

It is important to note that our body, like our mind is trying to help us based on the lifestyle we want to lead. If we spend all day each week sitting hunched over, then we get mad at our body for not being able to run that marathon on the weekend, we only have ourselves to blame. By our habits and things

we do for long periods of time, we communicate to our body that this is the state I need to be comfortable in. The body responds by sending more fat to your butt and thighs to make sitting more comfortable, or by slowly changing your posture to get closer to the keyboard. If you want your body to be usable long into your elder years, the best way to do that it is to keep the body in anatomical neutral. Move your spine in the morning, counter stretch if you have been in a position for long periods of time, take breaks and walk around, and don't settle for "this is just what old age feels like", because the age has less to do with it than the lack of effort.

Another super important aspect of keeping the body healthy is the food you put in it. No one in their right mind would start grabbing random liquids and pouring them into their car's gas tank. Yet this is what we do to our bodies all the time. The difference is that our bodies are amazingly resilient and are constantly trying to heal the damage we do to it, so the consequences are not as immediate as in the example of the car. For a moment, think about the foods, liquids, and smokes/vapors you put in your body in the last 24 hours. Consider how much of it was good for your body, how much of it was simply not bad for your body, and how much of it was potentially poison for your body.

When we think of the body as individual parts we feel invincible, but when we recognize that it functions as a whole there may be a different story. Perhaps this study shows that the glass of wine can make the heart function more easily, but it may not take into account the sugars and strain on the liver. Then add on the trace amounts of heavy metals and contaminants that accumulate in the body over the years. Sprinkle in those other voluntary poisons we put in our bodies; add a dash of whatever viruses or pathogens are trying to infect us at any given time. All of this adds up to a recipe for disaster.

Think of your body as the only car you will ever have in your life; if it stops running you can no longer travel this world. Barring the ghostly possibilities, imagine there is no means of public transit and no hitch-hiking. If that was your reality you would make sure you took great care of that car. You would probably only put in premium fuel, get regular oil changes, and use the best synthetic oil. You would consider how much strain you put on the engine because you wouldn't want it to burn out.

Higher Potential Living is about understanding that all of our physical abilities are different and always changing, but it is also recognizing that we have the power to get the most out of this vessel.

## Spirit

The spiritual component is about recognizing our True Self. In Yoga, when we say Namaste to each other it means that my True Self recognizes and honours your True Self. This can also be translated as "the light in me bows to the light in you". The mistake most of us make as humans is associating our identity with things gained during our lifetime. The problem is that same mentality would suggest that you could just as easily lose those elements of who you are; but this is impossible.

To fully understand the True Self is to become enlightened, so it is often much easier to identify what we are not in the early stages to get more glimpses of who we really are. So if we are not that which can be lost, stolen, or damaged, we know we are not our bodies, not our job, not our bank accounts, not our relationships and not even our thoughts, emotions or traumas.

The further down the path we go to discovering who we are, the more we tap into the spiritual element of life. When we strip away all that we falsely associate with who we are, we find we are only left with the essential source of all life. This is where the concept of non-duality comes from. If we imagine that the source of life is represented by the sun, our human existence can be seen as billions of rays of sunlight claiming independence by wrapping themselves in a body and different coloured fabrics. These rays of light focus so much on the things that make them different that they lose sight of the fact that underneath it all they are all made up of the same light.

When we start seeing the ways that we are similar with all sentient being, it allows us to see ourselves in all things. This leads us to a natural state of compassion, and we begin to break down the feelings of competition, jealousy, spite, aggression, and hatred. We see that happiness for one of us can be happiness for all of us.

In Higher Potential Living, we look to suspend those moments where we can glimpse our true happiness. We create space between all of the false associations of identity, so we can look at them more objectively and see which ones are actually serving us as tools, and which ones we wish to simply leave behind.

The word 'potential' is a term used in physics to describe the possibility of energy in motion, but the object must be still for it to be in a state of potential. This is the same for our lives. The world is very fast-paced, and we spend much of our time in a state of doing rather than being. If we spent a bit more time in the stillness of the moment, perhaps it would be easier for us to realize our potential.

## Koan

I thought I would close out this eBook with a Koan. Koans are Zen stories used for many years to evoke thought. Here is one to make us ponder what is important in life.

Ryokan, a Zen master, lived the simplest kind of life in a little hut at the foot of a mountain. One evening a thief visited the hut only to discover there was nothing to steal. Ryokan returned and caught him. "You have come a long way to visit me," he told the prowler, "and you should not return empty-handed. Please take my clothes as a gift." The thief was bewildered. He took the clothes and slunk away. Ryokan sat naked, watching the moon. "Poor fellow," he mused, "I wish I could have given him this beautiful moon."

