



The *Art*
of *Being*
Satisfied

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*You carry all the ingredients
to turn your existence into joy.*

Mix them, Mix them!

—Hafiz

Joy to the world, what a lovely idea. And I'll get to that just as soon as I survive the holidays. First I have to shop for just the right gifts or worry about not being able to afford them, participate in too many events or confront being alone, feel obliged to contribute or offended when I'm not appreciated, and look cheerful during the whole ordeal.

The holidays often amplify how we impoverish ourselves. Our expectations, judgments, longings, and attachments take a high toll. There's always some outer authority explaining what it looks like to be "perfect," when of course, as students of metaphysics, we know that we already are. Nonetheless, ever since I read a story when I was twelve years old about an old-fashioned Christmas, I've been trying to get it right and have faced annual disappointment.

Another thing we know is that it's not outer circumstances that determine the quality of our

experience, it's our inner life. It's what we give our allegiance to, what we focus on and relate to that we become. If we don't stay awake, we fall prey to the trance of scarcity—our cultural predisposition to lack, struggle, and separation as our defining reality.

And then soon we're chanting the mantra of "not enough-ness:" I'm not enough—smart enough, attractive enough, loveable enough, worthy enough; or there's not enough—not enough time, money, opportunity, cooperation, love, you name it. Certainly advertising keeps informing us that we don't have enough and that we'll never be enough unless we make the next purchase. Or perhaps what we need is just one more academic degree, or promotion, or financial success to finally qualify as enough.

We weary ourselves with our endless striving and struggle. Our Puritan ancestors would be pleased with that focus but our

hearts ache for the truth of our nature—for our oneness with Spirit. How is it that we can be innately divine and full of dissatisfaction in the same moment?

But aren't we supposed to continually improve ourselves and strive to be the best we can be? How can we ever be satisfied if we are not there yet? In Western culture, we get fixated on our pathology—the study of our dis-ease. We spend time looking at the source of the distress, the justification of the distress, the consequences of the distress. We become experts about why we or life are inadequate and why being satisfied is out of the question.

Recently, I found myself acting like a guided missile for everything that was wrong. Feeling expansive, I went after anything within range. My partner, Tim, and I are currently remodeling a house we plan to move into, and for the first two months all I noticed was what wasn't happening: the contractor was behind schedule, they didn't call when they said they would, that repair wasn't done immaculately, the delivery of materials was incomplete.

I actually wrote out a list so I wouldn't forget anything, like there was any chance of that. I

swapped horror stories with others who had been through remodels. Yep, I was living right on the frontline of the battle zone.

With all my attention on what wasn't, I was robbing myself of what was. The place we're remodeling is a jewel in the woods. It's a magical hand-built home and every time we turn up the long driveway, we enter a sanctuary. But only if we show up for that experience. One morning, I finally snapped out of it and could once again partake in the feast that was waiting.

If we turn our attention to being present to receive all the gifts in our life, we experience the depth of joy. The theologian, Thomas Merton, wrote that “the greatest human temptation is to settle for too little.” It's unlikely he was referring to widgets. We often settle for too little meaning in our lives, too little peace, too little intimacy with self and others while striving for more things or accomplishments or unattainable “perfection.”

Paradoxically, the holidays—a time set aside for love and festivities—is when we turn up the volume on our need to do it all, and do it all flawlessly. We hurry along, scheduling ourselves back-to-back, which perpetuates our

Increase Your Aliveness, Happiness, and Satisfaction

Turn common acts into voluptuous experience (don't be afraid of the word *voluptuous*, it simply means the unbridled pleasure of the senses), with this simple practice:

In the very moment you are in right now, let yourself feel, hear, taste, touch, smell, its fullness. Savor it, don't miss a drop.

It can be as simple as feeling the chair you're sitting in, letting your muscles relax completely, enjoying how it feels to hold the magazine, seeing the colors in the room, the sound of silence or whatever is around you. Partake fully rather than taking it all for granted or only being half-present.

The more pleasure you experience, the higher your energy state, the less sense of effort, the greater the sense of flow. When you are experiencing true pleasure, nothing feels tedious, burdensome, or uninteresting. And you get smarter and more resourceful.

You are renewed rather than at the whim of circumstance to decide the quality of your life.

experience of scarcity. The word *hurry*, according to some scholars, derives from the Middle English word *harry*, which meant to hassle one's opponent until they were in a weakened state and easily overcome. Sound familiar?

In that state, we keep our bodies clenched so we can keep pushing through. We hold our breath, tighten our jaw, tense our stomach, and hunker down. We have turned the biological response of "fight or flight," which was designed to last about ten

minutes, into lifelong careers. As a result, we sleep poorly, overeat, work around the clock, and look for ways to go numb.

Given this sense of inadequacy and disappointment, going numb with one glass of eggnog too many sounds like a great strategy. But it pulls us even farther away from our aliveness and connection, such "relief" takes us in the opposite direction of pleasure. If we want to awaken from the trance of scarcity, pleasure is our great ally.

In a world that is 24/7,

pleasure can seem like a luxury that only comes after all your chores are done. Not only is pleasure essential to our well-being, it doesn't have to take long or cost money. It does, however, require your full presence and attention.

For many of us, the standards we try to adhere to, especially at this time of year, are really fantasy standards. "If I was really a sensitive person, I would know exactly the right gift for everyone." "I should be available whenever anyone needs me." "If my consciousness was high enough, I'd have all the money I need." Or even better, "If my consciousness was high enough, I wouldn't care about money."

What if we set a new standard for the holidays (and for every day!) for being satisfied, being happy? Buddhist teacher, Sharon Salzberg, says if we're not committed to happiness, we don't have a big enough definition of

it. Rather than it being conditional, deep satisfaction is about being full. And that calls for being able to receive fully.

Giving and receiving are central themes of the holidays, yet it's about far more than a wrapped gift. It's about being present to that gift, any gift—the giving or receiving of it—in such a way that the transmission is complete.

When we fully, deeply, wholeheartedly receive, we let ourselves be touched and changed. We are not the same. We cannot be armored and receive, we cannot be withdrawn and feel grateful, we cannot be numb and experience the richness of each moment.

When we recognize the endless nature of God's good and our oneness with it, we are far too busy counting our blessings and creating new opportunities to be caught in the dead-end game of not-enough-ness. We can cultivate the capacity to be satisfy-able, free from letting outer circumstances decide our experience or aliveness. And we can then make the unique contribution to our loved ones and to the world around us that is ours to make.

Joy to the world, indeed! •

To order Victoria Castle's book *The Trance of Scarcity: Stop Holding Your Breath and Start Living Your Life*, go to www.scienceofmind.com or turn to page 102.

