

5 All of us have the capacity to be happy. We have seeds of compassion, understanding, and love in us. We all have many good seeds of happiness and joy. Yet we also have the habit of running in us. This restless energy of dissatisfaction and struggle separates us from the present moment and from ourselves.

10 In part, we're running toward something. We think happiness isn't possible in the here and now, so we try to run ahead into the future. We think if we can just get enough power, fame, wealth, or admiration from others, then we'll finally be happy. We hope that if we run toward these things faster and harder, we will get to happiness.

15 *When you develop the habit of being happy, then everything you do, like serving yourself a cup of tea, you do in such a way that it creates joy and happiness.*

20 At the same time that we're running toward one thing, we're running away from something else. Every one of us has suffering, despair, anger, and loneliness inside of us. If we don't know how to be with these strong emotions, we want to get as far away from them as fast as possible.

25 Because we're always running, we're not there for ourselves. We're too busy trying to get somewhere else to be with the self we have right now. And if we're not able to take care of ourselves, we can't be there for our loved ones. So not only are we running away from ourselves, we're also running away from our family and friends.

All this running is a lot of work. It is exhausting, and creates tension in our body and mind. We do it because it has become a habit, but with mindful attention and deep looking, we can transform the painful habit of running into a habit of happiness.

The Roots of Our Habit Energy

Where does the energy pushing us to run come from? We need to stop and look deeply into the roots of our habit energy in order to transform it.

Each of us carries the habit energies of our ancestors. Our consciousness has a strong capacity to receive and absorb energies from those who have come before us and those around us. We carry these energies in our consciousness as fifty-one different mental formations preserved in the form of seeds, or bija in Sanskrit. These seeds of love, happiness, compassion, fear, hatred, anxiety, etc. are in every one of us.

Buddhist psychology divides consciousness into two parts. One part is mind consciousness and the other is store consciousness. Mind consciousness, which Western psychology calls “the conscious mind,” is our active awareness. Underlying it is the store consciousness, which contains the seeds of the fifty-one mental formations.

The first five of these are called the universal mental formations, because they are present in every other mental formation.

Contact, the first universal mental formation, happens when a sense organ and an object come together.

Next, the mental formation attention has the function of drawing you to a particular object. When you hear a sound, your attention is drawn to that sound. There is appropriate and inappropriate attention, and with mindfulness, you can choose to focus your attention on something that is wholesome and beneficial.

The third universal mental formation, feeling, may be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. With mindfulness, our unpleasant feelings can be transformed into pleasant feelings, such as feelings of gratitude. When a feeling is pleasant, you can stop all thinking and just become aware of the feeling. If

you can let go of thinking of this or that, you can be very happy just walking barefoot on the beach, feeling the sand between your toes.

5 The fourth universal mental formation is perception. When you see, taste, hear, or feel something, it appears in your mind as a sign that suggests a name. When we see something with petals and a stem, our mind gives it the name “flower.” If we don’t bring our mindfulness to our perception, we might not notice when it is wrong. Then we might mistake a piece of rope for a snake. We might believe a person is ignoring us when they are actually
10 deaf, or we might see something and think it causes us pain when actually it could bring us joy. Wrong perception is always possible and can bring about fear, anger, and irritation.

15 The fifth universal mental formation is intention, also known as volition. You have contact with the object, your feeling, and your perception about it, and then you have your relationship to that object. You decide whether to possess it or to push it away. The fifth mental formation is your decision whether to accept or reject an object.

20 **Transforming Habit Energy**

Our habit energy comes from these mental formations. Their seeds form neural pathways that lead to either suffering or happiness.

25 Any seed that manifests in your mind consciousness returns to your store consciousness stronger than ever. For example, when you come in contact with something that triggers the feeling of anger in you, your frequent traveling on that neural pathway turns anger into a habit. But with the intervention of mindfulness, you can erase the negative neural pathway and
30 open up another pathway that leads to understanding and happiness.

Your depression, fear, jealousy, despair, and the conflicts within you are all negative mental formations that contribute to your habit of running away. Don’t be afraid of them. If they want to come up, allow them to come up,
35 recognize them, and embrace them.

We can’t transform habit energy just with our intelligence and our desire to do so. We need some insight, and insight comes from deep looking. The only way to transform habit energy is to recognize it, embrace it with

mindfulness, and practice inviting positive seeds to create positive habit energies.

5 Mindfulness helps us to recognize the habit energy of running. When we notice its presence, we smile at it and we are free from it. When we recognize the habit energy of running, it loses its power and can't push us to run anymore. Then we can easily release the tension in our body.

10 Some habit energies are very difficult to transform. If you crumple a sheet of paper, it's difficult to make it flat again. It has the habit energy of being crumpled. We are the same. But happiness can also be a habit energy. The practice of mindfulness allows us to create new, more functional habit energies.

15 Suppose that you grimace when you hear a certain phrase. It's not because you want to make a face; it just happens automatically. To replace this old habit energy with a new one, every time you hear that phrase you can breathe with awareness. At first, conscious breathing may require effort, because it doesn't yet come naturally. If you continue to practice, however,
20 conscious breathing will become a new and positive habit energy.

Non-Thinking and New Neural Pathways

25 The practice of non-thinking is the secret to creating new habits. When thinking settles in, you lose the immediate experience of contact and move on to the other mental formations. You do not have much chance to be in the here and the now, to be in touch with what is in your body and around you. So just become aware of contact and feelings. In this way you can be in touch with the elements of nourishment and healing available in your body
30 and in the environment, both physical and mental.

With the intervention of mindfulness, you can erase a negative neural pathway and open another pathway that leads to understanding and happiness.

35 Suppose that every time you are worried or anxious or irritated, you reach for a big piece of cake to cover up that feeling in you.

40 This is a habit, because a neural pathway in your brain has been created for it. But if you allow yourself to stop before you reach for the cake, you can

recognize both the pattern and the other sensations happening in your mind and body. You may notice that you're not really hungry, that instead you're sad or tired. The habit of breathing and noticing your sadness will ease that suffering more effectively than cake, and you will not have the suffering of being overfull and cranky.

With mindfulness and concentration intervening in the process of perception, a new neural pathway can be created that does not lead to suffering. Instead it leads to understanding, compassion, happiness, and healing. Our brains have the power of neuroplasticity; they can change.

Suppose someone says something that angers you. Your old pathway wants to say something to punish him. But that makes you a victim of your habit energy. Instead, you can stop, accept the anger and irritation in you, and smile at it. With mindfulness, you look at the other person and become aware of the suffering in him. He may have spoken like that to try to get relief. He may think that speaking like that will help him suffer less, although in fact it will make him suffer more.

With just one or two seconds of looking and seeing the suffering in the other person, compassion is born. When compassion is born, you don't suffer anymore, and you may find something to say that will help him. With practice, we can always open new neural pathways like this. When they become a habit, we call it the habit of happiness.

When you develop the habit of being happy, then everything you do, like serving yourself a cup of tea, you do in such a way that it creates joy and happiness.

We practice mindfulness in order to get in touch with appropriate attention, stop our thinking, and enjoy the feeling that is possible in the here and now. We recognize the many conditions of happiness that are here, more than we could possibly imagine. This is possible. While we are doing so, healing takes place. We don't have to make any effort, because we have the habit of happiness.