



Seven Tips for a Happy Life

By Ven Thubten Chodron

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Contents

- 1** Live without hypocrisy ... 7
- 2** Reflect on your motivation and cultivate an expansive motivation ... 11
- 3** Set wise priorities ... 15
- 4** Keep ourselves balanced ... 19
- 5** Befriend yourself ... 22
- 6** It's not all about me ... 27
- 7** Cultivate a kind heart ... 31
- 8** Conclusion ... 36

I was asked to speak about "Seven Tips for a Happy Life," but I had a hard time narrowing the tips down to just seven! Actually there are many more, and hopefully as you live with mindfulness, wisdom and compassion, you'll become aware of the others too.

1. Live without hypocrisy

Many of us go through life being extremely attached to what other people think of us. Most of us try to look good and try to make others think positively of us. We spend a lot of our time just trying to be what we think others think we should be, and this makes us crazy because everybody expects us to be something different. Besides, what is our motivation when we try to be what we think others think we should be? Are we acting with sincerity, or are we trying to be people-pleasers? Are we simply putting on a good show so that other people will say good things about us?

We can act and create personal images, and other people may even believe that we are what we pretend to be. However, that does not have any real meaning in our lives because we are the ones who have to live with ourselves. We know when we've been phoney and even though others may praise us for the persona we've created, that doesn't make us feel good about ourselves. Inside we know we're being fake. We're much happier when we are sincere and feel comfortable with who we are.

Being a hypocrite does not work because the karmic results of our actions depend on our intention. Our motivation is the key that determines whether what we do is meaningful and beneficial. Even if we look like we're very kind and considerate, when our motivation is

just to get people to like us, our actions aren't truly kind. Why is this so? It is because our motivation is concerned with our own popularity, not with benefiting others. On the other hand, we may act with a genuinely kind motivation but people misinterpret our actions and get upset. In this case, we don't need to doubt ourselves because our intention was good, even though we may need to learn to be more skilful in our actions.

Furthermore, we want to learn to derive happiness from doing the action, not from receiving others' praise afterwards. For example, in spiritual practice we want to train our minds to take delight in giving. When we take delight in giving, then regardless of where we are and who we give to, we feel happy. It does not matter whether

the other person says thank you or not, because our happiness does not come from the recognition we receive but from the deed of giving.

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and beneficial. ¶

2. Reflect on your motivation and cultivate an expansive motivation

We should constantly reflect on our motivations. Some of the questions we can ask ourselves include:

What is the thought motivating what I'm about to say or do? Is there the intention to harm someone? Or is there the intention to benefit others? Am I doing things to impress others or out of peer pressure?

Am I doing something for my own self-gain, or am I doing something out of genuine care for other living beings? Or it is a mix?



Am I trying to do what other people think I should do, or am I really in touch with myself and know what is best for me to do?

In discerning what I feel is best for me to do, am I operating out of attachment or anger, or am I operating out of kindness and wisdom?



Besides the process of looking inside and seeing what our

motivation is, we can also consciously cultivate a more expansive motivation. An expansive motivation is one that aspires for the benefit and welfare of

other living beings. Caring about others does not mean we neglect ourselves or make ourselves suffer. Self-respect is important, but we want to go beyond self-indulgent motivations and see that all living beings are interdependent. Our actions affect others, and because we see that everyone wants happiness and wants to avoid suffering as intensely as we do, we care about the effects of our words and deeds on others.

Most people tend to be quite self-centred, so our initial motivation is not always for the welfare of other living beings, especially when we refer to ALL living beings, which include the ones we cannot stand! So we need to stretch our mind and our motivation. If we discover that we are doing a kind action with a mixed or self-centred motivation — for

instance, we might give a donation to charity hoping that it will bring us a good reputation — this doesn't mean that we give up our beneficial actions! Instead, we transform our motivation into one of kindness that goes far beyond our own self-interest.

In order to cultivate an expansive motivation, such as the motivation to become a fully awakened Buddha, we will need to learn what a Buddha is, how it is possible for us to become a Buddha, what are the steps of the path for becoming a Buddha, and what benefits do we bring to ourselves and others by becoming a Buddha. The more we understand these things, the more expansive our motivation will grow and shine within us.

¶ An expansive motivation is one that aspires for the benefit and welfare of other living beings. 99

3. Set wise priorities

One of the most important activities in our life is to set good priorities; to know what in life is most important to us. We have received so much conditioning throughout our lives that it takes some time to discern for ourselves what we think is valuable. Our parents teach us to value X, Y and Z; our teachers encourage us to think A, B and C. Advertising tells us who we should be and what we should look like. All the time, we are getting messages about who we should be, what we should do and what we should have. But how often do we ever think about whether we really want to be, do, or have those things? How often do we ever think about what actually nourishes our hearts in a truly joyful, vibrant and beautiful way?

We want to live; we want to be vibrant! We do not want to live on auto-pilot, like a push-button robot that operates on others' commands. We have dreams and aspirations. We want to choose what we do in life because we have passion for that activity or field. What is your passion? How do you want to contribute? What is your unique talent or ability, and how can you use it to make a difference in the lives of others?

When we set wise priorities, we will choose activities that are for the long-term benefit of ourselves and others. When I need to make a decision, I use a particular set of criteria to evaluate which direction to take.

First, I consider, "Which situation is most conducive for me to keep good ethical conduct?" I want to make sure I

don't hurt others or myself, and keeping good ethical conduct is important for that.

If we sincerely try to live an ethical life, even though we do not make as much money or have as nice a house as the next person, when we go to bed at night, we feel peaceful. Our mind is calm and free from self-doubt and self-loathing. That inner peace is worth more than anything else we could ever have. Plus, no one else can take our inner peace away from us.

Second, I examine, "Which situation will enable me to be of greatest benefit to other living beings in the long term?" Since another one of my priorities is benefiting others, I evaluate the various options in front of me to discern which one will enable me to do that. Which situation will make it easier for me to cultivate

a kind, compassionate and altruistic attitude?

Sometimes our priorities are not what others think they should be. In such a situation, if our priorities are not selfish and they are for the long-term benefit of ourselves and others, then even if other people do not like what we are doing, it really does not matter because we know we are living in a good way. We are confident within ourselves that our priorities will lead to the long-term benefit of others.

“ How often do we ever
think about what actually
nourishes our hearts in a
truly joyful, vibrant and
beautiful way? ”

83



4 Keep ourselves balanced

To keep ourselves balanced on a day-to-day basis, we first need to maintain good health. This means we need to eat well, have sufficient sleep and regular exercise. We also need to engage in activities that nourish us. Spending time with people we care about nourishes us.

In my observation, what most people really want is connection with other living beings. Take the time to be with your family and with people you care about. Cultivate friendships with people who have good values, people whom you can learn from, and people who will be good role models for you. Develop a sense of curiosity about life and the world around you.

Nowadays people walking down the street are all looking at their cellphones, colliding with real human beings while texting people who are not there. Sometimes we need to turn off our technology and tune in to the real living human beings who are surrounding us. So much of our communication is through non-verbal cues — our body language, how we move our hands, how we sit, what we do with our eyes, the tone of our voice, the volume of our voice. Yet many children and young adults now are growing up without being sensitive to those kinds of things because they are hardly ever around real living people. They are always in their two-by-four universe, texting on their phones.

To be balanced human beings, we also need time alone, without our phones

and computers. It is so helpful, not to mention relaxing, to sit and read an inspiring book and think about life. We don't have to always be doing or making something. We also need some time to be with our friends. We need to nourish our body as well as our mind. We need to do things we enjoy, such as engaging in hobbies or playing sports. We should be careful not to waste the time in our precious human life on the computer, iPad, iPhone etc.

“Cultivate friendships with people who have good values, people whom you can learn from, and people who will be good role models for you.”



5. Befriend yourself

Sometimes when we are alone, we have thoughts such as "Oh, I am a failure! I cannot do anything right! I'm worthless, no wonder nobody loves me!" This low self-esteem is one of our biggest hindrances on the path to full awakening. We live with ourselves 24/7 but we do not even know who we are and how to be our own friend. We constantly judge ourselves using standards that we've never examined to determine if they are realistic or not. We compare ourselves with others and always come out losers.

None of us is perfect; we all have faults. That is normal and we do not need to berate ourselves for our faults or think that we are our faults. Our self-image is exaggerated because we don't really

know who we are. We need to learn to be our own friend and accept ourselves, "Yes, I have faults and I'm working on them, and yes, I have many good qualities, abilities and talents too. I'm a worthwhile person because I have Buddha-nature, the potential to become a fully awakened Buddha. Even now, I can contribute to others' well-being."

Meditation and the study of Buddhist teachings will help us become friends with ourselves. To overcome low self-esteem, we should contemplate our precious human life and Buddha-nature. Doing so enables us to understand that the fundamental nature of our mind is pure and undefiled. The nature of our mind is like the wide open sky — totally spacious and free. Mental afflictions such as ignorance, anger, attachment, pride,

jealousy, laziness, confusion, conceit and so on are like clouds in the sky. When clouds are in the sky, we cannot see the clear, open, wide and spacious nature of the sky. The sky is still there, it is just hidden from our view at that time. Similarly, sometimes we might become discouraged or confused, but all those emotions and thoughts are not who we are. They are like clouds in the sky. The pure nature of our mind is still there. It is temporarily hidden, and when the wind of wisdom and compassion comes and blows the cloud-like disturbing emotions away, we see the wide open, free sky.

Take some time each day to sit quietly and do a spiritual practice. To do a daily meditation practice, learn the Buddha's teachings and spend some time alone each day reflecting on your

life. Observe your thoughts and learn to discern realistic and beneficial ones from unrealistic and harmful ones. Understand how your thoughts create your emotions. Give yourself some space to accept and appreciate yourself for who you are. You don't need to be the perfect, number one whatever-type-of-person-you-think-you-should-be. You can relax and be you, with all the complexities of the sentient being you are.

Then you can tap into your potential and unlock all sorts of doors to help you understand yourself. The Buddha taught many techniques for overcoming disturbing emotions, transforming negative thoughts and removing wrong views. You can learn these and learn how to apply them to your mind, how to work with your own mind so that it becomes

clearer and calmer, how to open your heart in kindness towards yourself as well as towards others. In the process of doing this, you will become your own friend.

¶ Observe your thoughts and learn to discern realistic and beneficial ones from unrealistic and harmful ones. Understand how your thoughts create your emotions. Give yourself some space to accept and appreciate yourself for who you are. ¶

6. It's not all about me

Nowadays we think everything is about us. There's even a magazine called "Self" and another one called "Me." We buy products named "iPhones" and "iPads", and from the time we are little kids the advertising industry conditions us to always search for the most pleasure, prestige, possessions, popularity and so forth. We have this idea that it is all about me! My pleasure and pain are more important than anyone else's.

Think about what makes you upset. When your friends get criticised, you usually don't get upset, but when somebody says the same words of criticism to you, it becomes a big deal.

Similarly, when your neighbour's child fails his spelling test, it doesn't bother you, but when your child fails his spelling test, it is a catastrophe! Our mind gets incredibly upset by anything that happens to us or is related to us. We see everything in the world through the narrow periscope of "Me, I, My, and Mine". Why is it a narrow periscope? Because there are over seven billion people on this planet and we think we are the most important. It would be really good if we can chill a little bit and have as one of our slogans — "It is not all about me".

This self-centredness causes us so much misery. When we suffer from fear, anxiety and worry, it is because we are paying too much attention to ourselves.

in a very unhealthy way. Nothing has happened, but we sit there thinking, "What if this happens? What if that happens?" when in reality, nothing has happened. Experiencing fear, anxiety and worry is definitely suffering, and the source of this suffering is our self-preoccupation.

Our self-centred thought is not who we are. It is not an inherent part of us; it is something added on to the pure nature of our mind and it can be eliminated. Initially we may be afraid to let go of our self-preoccupation, "If I don't hold myself first and foremost, I will fall behind. People will take advantage of me. I won't be a success." But when we examine these fears, we see that they are not true; the world isn't going to crash if we release our self-centredness

and open our hearts to care about others. We can still be successful without being so self-preoccupied, and we'll be a lot happier too. For example, if we reach out and help others — friends, strangers, and enemies — they'll be a lot nicer to us, and our own lives will be happier.

“ But when we examine these fears, we see that they are not true; the world isn't going to crash if we release our self-centredness and open our hearts to care about others. ”

 7.

Cultivate a kind heart

As a corollary to "It is not all about me", we want to cultivate kindness. To do this, we reflect on the benefit we have received from so many people and animals too. When we contemplate the kindness of other living beings, we see that we can benefit from whatever somebody does if we know how to think about it properly. Even if somebody is harming us, we can see it as kindness, because by putting us in a difficult position, they are challenging us and helping us to grow. They are helping us to find qualities and resources within ourselves that we did not know we had, making us stronger.

It is easy to think of the kindness of our family and friends, but what about

the kindness of strangers? Actually we receive benefit from so many people we do not know. When we look around, everything we use comes due to the kindness of others — the construction workers who built the building, the farmers who grew the vegetables, the electricians, plumbers, secretaries and so forth all play important roles that enable society to run smoothly.

For example, I was once in a city where all the garbage collectors were on strike. That really helped me to see the kindness of the garbage collectors, so now I stop and thank them for their work when I walk down the street.

We benefit from all the different kinds of work that others do. All the people we see around us — on the bus, on the subway, in the stores — are the

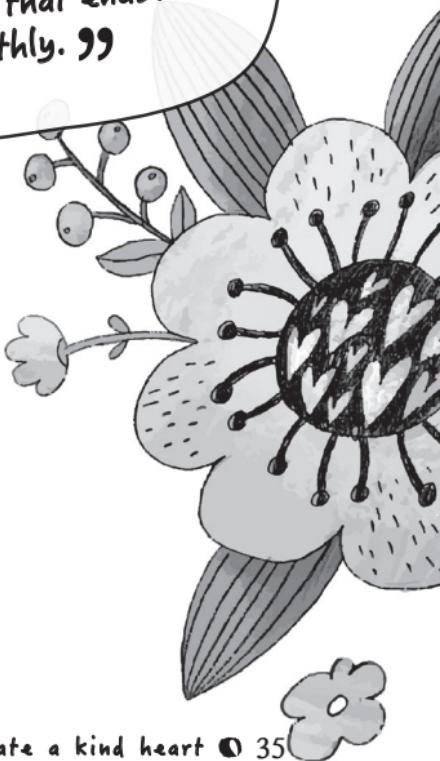
people who are making the things we use and doing the services we benefit from on a day-to-day basis. Hence, when looking at the people around us, let's consider their kindness and the benefit we've received from them. In turn, let's regard them with eyes of kindness, and with awareness of how dependent we are on others just to stay alive. Let's reach out and be kind to them in return. It's also important to respect all beings equally; after all, they're all important and we have benefited from all of them.

If you have a kind heart, you will be honest in your business dealings because you care about the welfare of your clients and customers. You know that if you lie to them or cheat them, they will not trust you and will not do business with you again in the future. In addition, they

will tell others about your unscrupulous actions. However, if you help your clients and customers, they will trust and have confidence in you. You will have good relationships with them that will last for many years and will be mutually beneficial.

When cultivating kindness, we should also learn to be trustworthy. When somebody tells you something in confidence, keep it in confidence. When you make a promise, do your best to keep the promise. We have to look beyond our own immediate gratification and learn how to be a good friend. Consider, "How I can be a good friend? What do I need to do and stop doing in order to be a good friend to others?" As we all want to have friends, let us make ourselves good friends to other people.

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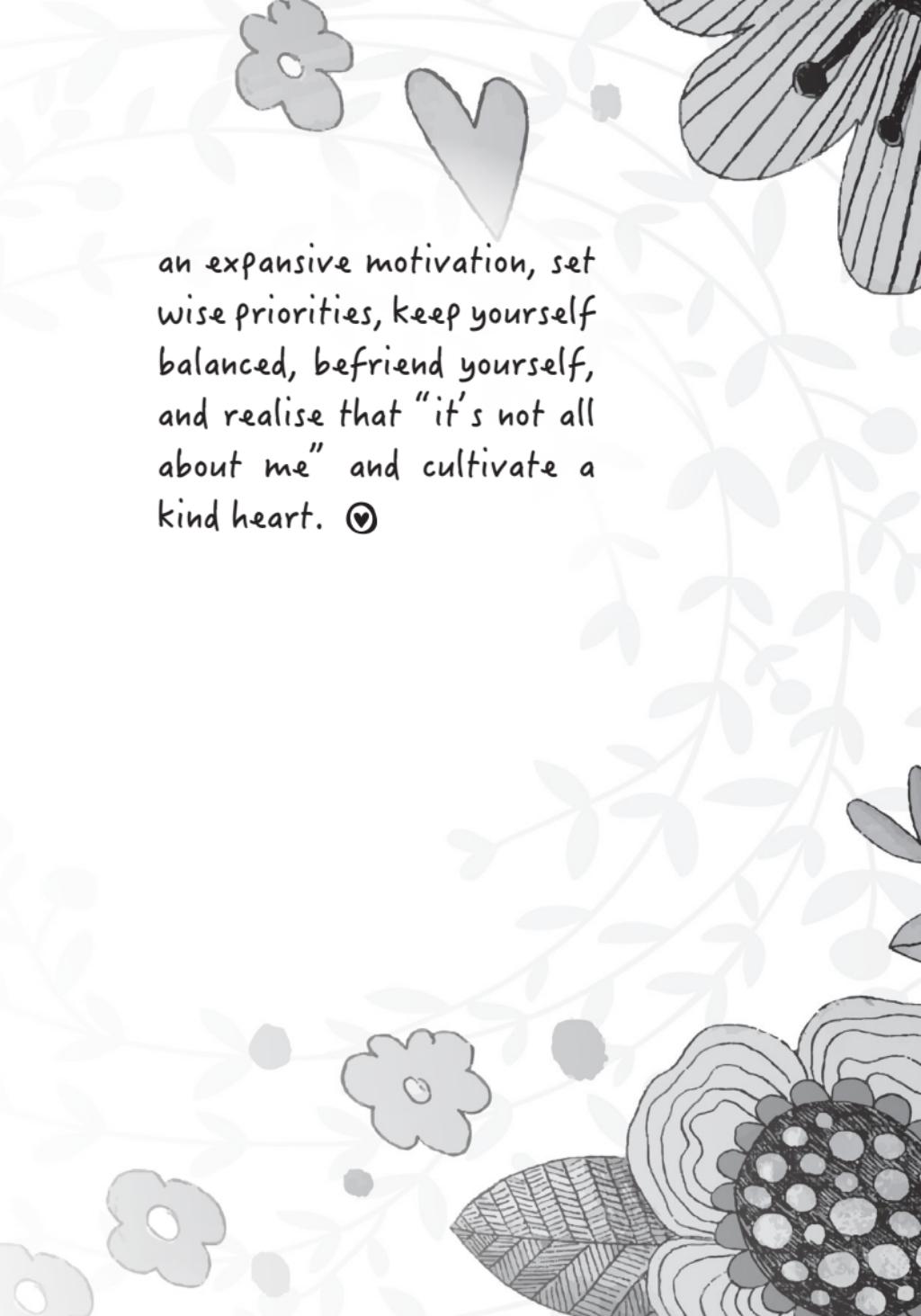




Conclusion

Please take some time and think about these seven tips. Don't simply rush off to the next activity, but apply these tips to your life. Imagine thinking or acting according to them. What would that look like? How would you feel? Seeing the benefits of implementing these tips in your life will inspire you to do so. As you do this, you will experience the benefits in both your mental state and your relationships with others. You will enjoy greater mental peace, more satisfaction and deeper connection with others.

Come back to these tips over time. Read this every so often to remind yourself to live without hypocrisy, reflect on your motivation and cultivate



an expansive motivation, set wise priorities, keep yourself balanced, befriend yourself, and realise that "it's not all about me" and cultivate a kind heart. ☺

Seven Tips for a Happy Life

- ① Live without hypocrisy
- ② Reflect on your motivation and cultivate an expansive motivation
- ③ Set wise priorities
- ④ Keep ourselves balanced
- ⑤ Befriend yourself
- ⑥ It's not all about me
- ⑦ Cultivate a kind heart