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Real
LOVE

*The truth about finding
unconditional love &
fulfilling relationships*

Real Love and Genuine Happiness

Real Love is caring about the happiness of another person without any thought for what we might get for ourselves. When we give Real Love, we're not disappointed, hurt, or angry, even when people are thoughtless or inconsiderate or give us nothing in return – including gratitude – because our concern is for *their* happiness, not our own. Real Love is unconditional.

It's Real Love when other people care about *our* happiness without any concern for themselves. They're not disappointed or angry when we make our foolish mistakes, when we don't do what they want, or even when we inconvenience them personally.

Sadly, few of us have either given or received that kind of love, and without it we experience a terrible void in our lives, which we try to fill with money, power, food, approval, sex, and entertainment. But no matter how much of those substitutes we acquire, we remain empty, alone, afraid, and angry, because the

one thing we *really* need is Real Love. Without it, we can only be miserable; with it, our happiness is guaranteed.

When I use the word *happiness*, I do not mean the fleeting pleasure we get from money, sex, and conditional approval. Nor do I mean the brief feeling of relief we experience during the temporary absence of conflict or disaster. Real happiness is not the feeling we get from being entertained or making people do what we want. Genuine happiness is a profound and lasting sense of peace and fulfillment that deeply satisfies and enlarges the soul. It doesn't go away when circumstances get difficult. It survives and even grows through hardship and struggle. True happiness is our entire reason to live, and that kind of happiness can only be obtained as we find Real Love and share it with others. *With Real Love, nothing else matters; without it, nothing else is enough.*

The Destructive Legacy of Conditional Love

Real Love is “I care how **you** feel.” Conditional love is “I like how you make **me** feel.” Conditional love is what people give to us when we do what they want, and it's the only kind of love that most of us have ever known. People have liked us more when we made them feel good, or at least when we did nothing to inconvenience them. In other words, we have to *buy* conditional love from the people around us.

It's critical that we be able to distinguish between Real Love and conditional love. When we can't do that, we tend to settle for giving and receiving conditional love, which leaves us empty, unhappy, and frustrated. Fortunately, there are two reliable signs that love is not genuine: **disappointment** and **anger**. Every time we frown, sigh with disappointment, speak harshly, or in any way express our anger at other people, we're communicating that we're not getting what **we** want. At least in that moment, we are not caring for our partner's happiness, but only for our own. Our partner then senses our selfishness and feels disconnected from us and alone, no matter what we say or do.

Most of us have received little, if any, Real Love. We prove that every day with the evidence of our unhappiness — our fear, anger, blaming, withdrawal, manipulation, controlling, and so on. People who know they're unconditionally loved don't feel and do those things. But most of us have been taught since childhood to

do without Real Love and to settle instead for giving and receiving conditional love. Let me use myself as an example. As a child, I was thrilled when my mother smiled at me, spoke softly, and held me, because I knew from those behaviors that she loved me. I also noticed that she did those pleasant things more often when I was “good” — when I was quiet, grateful, and cooperative. In other words, I saw that she loved me more when I did what she liked, something almost all parents understandably do.

When I was “bad” — noisy, disobedient, and otherwise inconvenient — she did not speak softly or smile at me. On those occasions, she frowned, sighed with disappointment, and often spoke in a harsh tone of voice. *Although it was certainly unintentional*, she clearly told me with those behaviors that she loved me less, and that was the worst pain in the world for me.

Giving or withholding acceptance based on another person’s behavior is the essence of conditional love, and nearly all of us were loved that way as children. When we made the football team, got good grades, and washed the dishes without being asked, our parents naturally looked happy and said things like “Way to go!” or “I’m so proud of you.” But when we failed a class at school, or tracked mud across the carpet, or fought with our siblings, or wrecked the car, did our parents smile at us then? Did they pat us on the shoulder and speak kindly as they corrected us? No, with rare exceptions they did not. Without thinking, they frowned, rolled their eyes, and sighed with exasperation. They used a tone of voice that was *not* the one we heard when we did what they wanted and made them look good. Some of us were even yelled at or physically abused when we were “bad.”

Other people in our childhood also gave us conditional approval. School teachers smiled and encouraged us when we were bright and cooperative, but they behaved quite differently when we were slow and difficult. Even our own friends liked us more when we did what they liked. In fact, that’s what made them our friends. And that pattern of conditional approval has continued throughout our lives. People continue to give us their approval more often when we do what they want. And so we do what it takes to earn it.

Drowning for Lack of Love

Imagine yourself again in the middle of the ocean, but this time there's no boat, no island, and no one to help you. You're drowning out there all by yourself. You're exhausted and terrified. Suddenly, a man grabs you from behind and drags you under the water. Completely overwhelmed by fear and anger, you struggle wildly to get free, but no matter what you do, your head remains underwater.

Just as you're about to pass out and drown, I arrive in a small boat and pull you from the water. After catching your breath, you turn and see that the man who dragged you under is actually drowning himself and only grabbed you in a desperate attempt to save his own life. He wasn't trying to harm you at all. Once you realize that, your anger vanishes immediately and you quickly help him into the boat.

That's how it is with relationships. People really don't do things with the principal goal of hurting *you*. When people hurt you, they're like the man who dragged you under the water – they're simply drowning and trying to save *themselves*. People who don't feel unconditionally loved are desperate and will do almost anything to eliminate the pain of their emptiness. Unfortunately, as they struggle to get the things that give them temporary relief — approval, money, sex, power, and so on — their behavior often has a negative effect on the people around them, including you. But that is not their first intent. Other people hurt us only because they're reacting badly to the pain of feeling unloved and alone. When we truly understand that, our feelings toward people, and our relationships with them, will change dramatically.

Without Real Love, we feel like we're drowning all the time. In that condition, almost everything seems threatening to us, even the most innocent behaviors. When people get angry or criticize us, we don't see them as drowning and protecting themselves. We become afraid, defensive, and angry, and we respond by using behaviors that may hurt *them*. Naturally, they react by protecting themselves and hurting us with even greater intensity, and until we understand that Real Love is the solution, we can only perpetuate this cycle of self-protection and injury.

Most relationships fail because we become angry and blame our anger on something our partner did or did not do. We need to remember that our anger is actually a reaction to the feelings of helplessness and fear that result from a lifetime of

struggling to survive without unconditional love. Getting angry and assigning blame may give us a fleeting sense of power that momentarily relieves our fear, but those feelings originate within us, not with our partner's behavior.

When the man dragged you under the water, he did not cause your angry reaction. Your anger was the result of a series of many events that led to your drowning in the ocean, and also a result of your own decision to blame that man for drowning you. You weren't murderously angry with the man in the water because of a single tug on your shoulder. You were angry because you'd been spit out in the middle of the ocean with no chance for survival and because you were exhausted and frightened and about to die. What the other man did just added the last straw to the camel's back and *appeared* to be the cause of your anger.

Similarly, the anger we feel toward our partners results from past events (whether or not we felt Real Love – mostly from our parents) and present decisions (whether we choose to be angry or loving with our partners). We're reacting to a lifetime of trying to survive without unconditional love, and anger is an understandable response because it makes us feel less helpless and afraid – for the moment. It protects us and briefly makes us feel better. But it never makes us feel loved or happy or less alone.

We need to learn a better response to our pain than blaming and anger, and we can. As we come to understand that our partners are not to blame for our unhappiness, we can better exercise self-control to curb our anger. Then, as we begin to find and experience Real Love, we'll feel as if we're being pulled out of the water and into the boat. In the absence of the terrible fear that accompanies drowning, we'll no longer have a *need* to protect ourselves with anger – or any of the other unproductive behaviors we use in relationships, such as lying, acting hurt, and withdrawing. Our ability to form and maintain loving relationships will then come simply and easily.

Just as being pulled into the boat instantly allowed you to gain the correct perspective on the man who was drowning you, understanding Real Love will provide you with the ability to discern the difference between the "right" and "wrong" decisions you make in your life and in your relationships. First, I suggest that being genuinely happy is the ultimate goal in life and is therefore also the ultimate good. Second, because Real Love is absolutely essential to our happiness, I suggest that anything that interferes

with our ability to feel and share unconditional love is necessarily “bad” or “wrong,” while anything that promotes our ability to feel loved and share that love with others is “right” and “good.”

The Truth About Relationships and Individual Choices

The reason for learning to recognize and find Real Love isn't abstract or theoretical; we need to learn these things because Real Love actually transforms our lives by enriching our relationships with everyone around us on a daily basis.

In school, I had to learn geometry, chemistry, and history, even though I now can't recall the last time anyone asked me to calculate the hypotenuse of a triangle, diagram the steps of the Krebs citric acid cycle, or describe the significance of the Council of Trent in European history. Most of us, in fact, have spent many years studying subjects in school that we rarely use, while we were taught nothing at all about relationships, a subject we're required to deal with every day.

The most fundamental principle of all relationships is the Law of Choice, which states that everyone has the right to choose what he or she says and does. Nothing is more important than our ability to make independent choices for ourselves. Imagine what our lives would be like if that right were taken from us. We wouldn't be individuals at all, only meaningless tools in the hands of those who made our choices for us. *A relationship is the natural result of people making independent choices.*

Just as a painting is composed of countless individual brush strokes, so it is that who we are is a result of all the choices we've made over a lifetime. Every decision has left us more alone or loved, angry or happy, weak or strong. In our infancy, other people may have applied those strokes to the canvas of our lives, but with time we increasingly took the brush into our own hands. And from all those choices, we've created a canvas with a unique color that includes our personality, style, needs, fears, and even our Getting and Protecting Behaviors.

When we mix blue and yellow paint, the *natural result* is green. Green isn't something we hope for or even work for. It just happens *every time* we mix blue and yellow. Similarly, relationships naturally result from the blending of the colors of each partner, colors produced by the choices each partner has made

independently over a lifetime. If I'm yellow and you're blue, our relationship will be green. It doesn't matter that I *want* our relationship to be orange, or that you want it to be turquoise. The result *will be* green.

Our relationships, therefore, are often not what we expect or want them to be, just as expectations and desires are completely irrelevant to the result we achieve when we mix two different colors. Relationships can only be the result of the *choices we've already made*. If two people have been unconditionally loved and have made a lifetime of unconditionally loving choices, they *will* have a mutually loving relationship. If, however, they have not been unconditionally loved, they *will* choose to get Imitation Love and protect themselves, and as a result of those choices, their relationship *cannot* be loving. They can, however, learn to find Real Love and introduce that into their relationship.

In any relationship, we have what amount to four basic choices to make independently: to change our partner; to live with it and like it; to live with it and hate it; or to leave.

Here's how those choices applied to the relationship between Joan and Tyler. Joan was angry with her husband, Tyler, because, no matter how much she begged and nagged him, he never picked up after himself, and his messiness had eventually become more than she could stand. She finally talked about the situation to a wise friend. Remember, as I said earlier in the chapter, that a wise man is *anyone* who feels sufficiently loved in a given moment that he or she is capable of accepting and loving us when he sees the truth about us. All of us have wise friends around us, and I'll be talking more about how to find them in the following chapter.

"The man lives like a pig," Joan angrily complained to her wise friend. "He throws his stuff all over the floor and then I have to clean up after him. It doesn't matter how many times I talk to him – he never listens."

"So," said the wise man, "you expect Tyler to be neater and more considerate of you, is that right?"

When Joan agreed, her friend went on. "Then your relationship is doomed. Relationships result from the choices people make independently. Tyler has chosen to be a pig, and he gets to make that choice, even if it's inconvenient for you. He's almost certainly been a pig all his life, long before he met you. But

you're not a helpless victim here. You still have your own choices to make."

Joan, naturally curious, asked what those choices might be.

"As I see it, you can make one of three: live with the pig and like it, live with the pig and hate it, or leave the pig."

"But..." Joan protested.

"There is no *but*," the wise friend interjected. "You want a fourth choice, which would be to stop him from being a pig, but that's not your choice to make, because it would be violating Tyler's right to choose. Even when what we want is good, and other people make bad choices, we can't *make* them do what we want. You only get to make choices that involve your own behavior."

Like Joan, most of us, when we're dissatisfied with our partner in any way, want to change him or her. But as I've said, relationships aren't based on what we want; they're determined by the choices each of us has already made individually.

The Worst Choice: The Nonchoice

We usually like *some* things about our partner, or else we'd never have begun the relationship in the first place. And even though we're aware from the beginning that there are also things we don't like, we simply assume we'll be able to change them – much as we'd rearrange a roomful of furniture. But that's not Real Love. Trying to change another person is manipulative, controlling, and arrogant, and it proves that we're primarily concerned with our own happiness, not our partner's. And in any case, because that other person's attitudes and behaviors are the result of his own lifetime of experience, they're almost impossible to change.

With enormous effort and persistence, it is possible to change some things about another person. Some of us attack people or play the victim so effectively that we really can get our partners to behave differently. But even if we do that, our victory must be hollow, because anything we get as a result of manipulation cannot be felt as Real Love and is therefore worthless. There were times when Joan's nagging and blaming were so unbearable to Tyler that he actually did clean up his mess. When that happened, Joan thought she was getting what she wanted, but what a price she paid! He resented her, and because his cooperation was not freely offered, she never felt loved. But even if Tyler had cleaned up his mess as an act of Real Love freely

given, Joan would not have been able to feel it, because she'd manipulated him with her Getting Behavior.

In fact, by controlling Tyler, Joan was making sure she would feel alone. By manipulating him, she was depriving him of the ability to make independent choices, of showing his "true colors," which means that she was not having a relationship with the person Tyler really was. He became nothing more than an extension of *her* will – and so she was alone. Whenever we control another person, that person becomes nothing more than an object – no different from our shoes or our car – and we can't have a relationship with an object. I spend a lot of time with my shoes and my car every day, but when I'm with them, I'm still alone.

But perhaps the worst consequence of controlling others is that we can't learn to be loving, which is the greatest joy of all. We can't be happy while we're selfishly manipulating people.

Expectations, a Close Cousin to Controlling

Although many of us would deny that we're trying to control our partners – we may not make overt demands like Joan, for example – most of us still have enormous *expectations* of them, and those expectations can cause as much harm in our relationships as outright manipulation.

When we don't feel unconditionally loved, we experience so much emptiness and pain that we understandably turn to our partners in the expectation that they will do something to help us. Sometimes we believe our expectations are justified because we've given something — our time and attention, for example — to that other person. In other words, we think we have the right to expect something because we've *paid* for it. Sadly, that way of thinking only leads to the situation that exists in most relationships: "I'll give you what you want if you give me what I want." It's a *trading* of Imitation Love. That may satisfy both partners temporarily, but no relationship can be genuinely fulfilling when it's based on trading rather than unconditional giving.

For example, if you bring home flowers and tell your wife you love her, but then you expect sex in return, you're just giving her praise and power in exchange for pleasure and power for yourself. Early in a relationship, that may create a feeling of superficial happiness, but it doesn't last long, and eventually the unfulfilled expectations cause nothing but contention. If you perform an act of service for your husband, but you have

expectations of praise and gratitude for what you do, you'll feel only an increase in the tension of your relationship. Although you may not openly nag your partner to get what you want, honestly ask yourself what you expect your partner to do for you. Is it to be grateful for everything you do for him or her, to compliment you on your appearance, take the major responsibility for the household chores, take care of you when you're sick, read your mind and be extra sensitive to you when you're in a bad mood, have sex on demand, be nice to your difficult parents, do the disciplining of the children, handle the family finances, and so on? If you have these expectations, and others like them, your partner will feel the pressure of them.

And so, while we may avoid the pitfall of direct manipulation, we can still destroy our relationships if we crush our partners under the burden of our expectations. Expectations cannot be justified either by what we need or by what we have done for others. The Law of Expectations, which follows naturally from the Law of Choice, states that *we never have the right to expect that another person will do anything for us*. If each partner in a relationship truly allows the other the right to make his or her own choices, neither one can ever have the right to *expect* the other to do *anything*. How arrogant it would be for me to expect that you would change who you are just for my convenience. Surely you wouldn't expect that of your partner. And yet that's just what you do every time you're angry or disappointed with anyone – you're indicating that your expectations have not been met. Most of us have these expectations all the time. We expect our spouses, our children, our bosses, our co-workers, and even other drivers on the road to change their behavior – to change who they are – in order to make our lives more convenient. Expectations are self-serving and unloving – and therefore they are “wrong,” as we defined that word at the end of Chapter One.

Whenever we expect another person to change in any way, we are, in effect, demanding that he or she love us – care about us – and make us happy. But Real Love can never be demanded; it can only be freely given and received. And so, as in the case of the apples, any love we demand can never be felt as Real, even if it is. Our expectations seriously interfere with our happiness.

The only exception to the Law of Expectations occurs in the case of a *promise*, which is an agreement on the part of one person to perform a specific act. Whereas expectations are

destructive in loving relationships, they are an accepted part of any promise. If I promise my wife to pick up our daughter after school, she has a right to expect me to fulfill that promise.

It may seem strange to state the Law of Expectations so categorically – “We *never* have the right to expect that another person will do *anything* for us” – and then immediately to claim promises as an exception. I do that because I want to emphasize that expectations are terribly damaging to relationships. When we have expectations of our partners, we set ourselves up for the inevitable disappointment and anger that make loving relationships impossible. And so, as a general rule, we need to diligently avoid expectations and only rarely justify an expectation with a claim that our partner has made a promise.

What kind of expectations *are* acceptable in a relationship? We can have expectations about many things, *but we never have the right to expect someone to love us or make us happy, even when they promise to do so* – as in the case of wedding vows. When marriages have problems, one spouse (or both) often says, “When we got married, we promised to love, cherish, and honor each other, right there in front of God and everybody – and my spouse isn’t keeping his (or her) end of the agreement.” While it’s true that I may *promise* to love you, the moment you *expect* me to keep that promise, you destroy the possibility of feeling *unconditionally* accepted, because unconditional love can only be freely given *and* freely received. When we *expect* love, anything we receive can only feel like an order that was filled, or something we paid for.

At this point, many people wonder why they should ever get married. What’s the purpose of wedding vows if they can’t expect their spouse to love them? The principal reason many people get married is so they *can* have an expectation that someone will love them for the rest of their life. And so, if, as I’ve said, expectations are unproductive, marriage might seem like a bad idea altogether. For now, let me say that when we stop seeing marriage as an obligation for our partner to fill our expectations, and instead see it as an opportunity to learn to love another person, it becomes the most beautiful experience imaginable. We’ll talk much more about the purposes of marriage in Chapter Eight, after laying a foundation for it in the following chapters.

With the exception of love and happiness, you can expect your partner to fulfill almost any kind of promise: take out the

garbage, support the family financially, stay home and raise the children, clean the kitchen, do the shopping, and so on. However, the promise needs to be *clearly understood by both parties*. You cannot expect your partner to do something just because you think he *should*. In the case of Joan and Tyler, Tyler did not promise to pick up his clothes before he married Joan, so she had no right to expect him to do that. But the real problem was that, because Joan had insufficient Real Love in her life, she expected Tyler to pick up after himself *as an indication that he loved her* – and she didn't have a right to expect that. In all unhappy relationships, the real cause of unhappiness is a lack of unconditional love; controlling and expectations are just symptoms of that cause.

What can you do when promises are violated, as they so often are? If Tyler *had* promised to pick up after himself, and then failed to do so, would Joan have been justified in being angry at him? *No*—because, as we've discussed, our ultimate purpose here is to be loved, loving, and happy, and anything that interferes with achieving that purpose is wrong. Being angry certainly qualifies in every way as wrong, since it has such a uniformly destructive effect on our ability to feel unconditionally loved and on our ability to love other people. And so, no matter what our partner does, we can never justify being angry – the consequences of anger are just too severe. Anger is always wrong.

So what *is* a productive reaction to a broken promise? Eric and Hannah, another married couple, demonstrate one such response. Hannah's brother was planning to buy a used car in three weeks, and he needed a sheltered workplace where he could perform some repairs on the car's engine. Hannah volunteered the use of her garage and asked Eric the next day if he had any problem with that. Eric agreed to the arrangement and said he would finally clean out all the stuff that had been collecting there for years.

A week before the day that Hannah's brother was to arrive with the car, she could see that Eric hadn't even begun, and she knew he'd need at least a week to get the job done. So Hannah asked, "Do you remember that my brother is bringing that car into the garage one week from today?"

It is not the words that are important here. What's important is how and why Hannah said them. Hannah understood what we all must remember whenever we speak in a loving relationship: Happiness comes from telling the truth and loving

your partner. The truth and Real Love can never be separated. Hannah wasn't trying to attack Eric, as she had done many times in the past – “See, you're not keeping your promise, as usual!” – but was really trying to help him avoid that feeling of last-minute panic she knew he hated. And Eric could feel her genuine concern for him.

However, Eric had put off cleaning out the garage for years because it was an exceptionally distasteful chore, and the day before the deadline he still hadn't done anything. Hannah spoke to him about it again. “The car arrives tomorrow and must be protected from the rain until my brother finishes working on it. What can I do to help you?”

Hannah simply told the truth about the situation and loved her husband. That's all Eric needed. He knew he'd made a mistake, and he started working on it immediately. He had to take a day off work to finish the job, and he had to borrow a tarp from a friend to cover the car for two days while it sat in the driveway. Hannah could certainly have attacked Eric with nagging and anger, *but to what end?* He wouldn't have understood his responsibility any better, nor performed more efficiently. In fact, we all perform better when we feel loved than we do when we feel attacked. And with anger Hannah would have done great damage to their relationship. A clean garage isn't much of a trophy when you realize that your partner hates to be around you. We must always remember that a promise is far less important than a loving relationship.

The Remaining Three Choices

Earlier, I said that when it comes to changing a relationship, we have four choices. It should be obvious by now that trying to change your partner is always the worst choice of all, because it will never be fruitful. In fact, it's such a bad choice that I refer to it as the nonchoice. That leaves us with three remaining options.

The Happy Choice – Live with It and Like It.

Tyler's messiness was just one brushstroke among the thousands that had combined to create his own personal color. Instead of choosing to accept and enjoy the beauty of his overall canvas, Joan chose to be miserably distracted by one stroke that inconvenienced her. Most of us do this with our partners. Real Love is what we all really want from every relationship, but because we didn't receive

enough of it, we can't possibly identify what produces genuine happiness. The reason we try to change our partners is because we've learned that Getting and Protecting Behaviors are the only way to relieve the emptiness and fear that are the legacy of Imitation Love – which is the only kind of love we've ever known. But as we begin to feel unconditionally loved, we begin to see people without the blinding effects of emptiness and fear, and then all human beings become beautiful to us and easy to accept just as they are. Right now that may sound like magic to you, but it really happens that way, and in the following chapters I'll suggest ways for you to learn how to find that love for yourself so that you'll no longer be emotionally starving and will be able to share what you've found with your partners.

The Angry Choice – Live With It and Hate It.

Many of us have tried to change a partner so many times that we've finally become frustrated and quit trying. We stay in the relationship, but we continue to wish that our partner were different, and we resent him or her when he's not. In effect, we choose to stay in a relationship where unhappiness is the only possibility. We *choose* to be miserable.

Although the angry choice is obviously foolish, it's one that too many of us make. What we have to remember is that anger is always a choice, not something other people "make" us feel. When we understand that, we can begin to choose differently. We are not lifeless objects to be acted upon, like shoes or cars. We have the ability to determine how we will react to events. However, in our defense, when we don't feel unconditionally loved, sometimes we don't *see* that we have a choice other than anger. Without Real Love, we're often not *able* to make the loving choice, even though that choice still exists. As we gain experience with Real Love, we can *learn* to choose to be loving instead of angry – which, incidentally, *proves* that anger is a choice we make, not something that other people *cause* us to feel.

The Final Choice – Leaving.

We can always leave a relationship, emotionally or physically, and there are always two ways to do that – blaming and not.

When we leave a relationship and blame our unhappiness on our partner, we use all the Getting and Protecting Behaviors. It's obvious that we're running, but we're also lying, because we

believe and tell others that *our partner* is at fault, when the real cause of our misery is the long-standing lack of Real Love in *our* lives and *our* inability to accept and love our partner. As we're blaming, we're using attacking as a Getting and Protecting Behavior, and we're also acting like a victim, because we invariably say things like "Look what he (or she) has done to me!"

Sometimes leaving a relationship is the best thing to do. While we're learning to be truthful about ourselves and feel loved, we may become so confused and threatened in the presence of a particular person that we automatically revert to the familiar use of Getting and Protecting Behaviors. When that's the case, it may be unwise to spend time with that person, but we need to admit that *we* are the problem. *We* are not loving enough to participate in a loving relationship with that particular person. We'll talk more about leaving relationships in Chapter Nine. It is never a decision to be taken lightly.

We hope you have enjoyed these excerpts from *Real Love: The Truth About Finding Unconditional Love and Fulfilling Relationships*. We can confidently promise that as you learn and apply these principles you will begin to experience a level of happiness that you never thought possible.

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