

CHEERFUL

by

DESIGN

A Guide to Authentic
Happiness & Well-Being



FATIMA RUIZ

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Book Cover and interior design by Najdan Mancic

For my husband Israel and children, Aneela, Isaac & Ivan.

”

SPREAD LOVE EVERYWHERE YOU GO.
LET NO ONE EVER COME TO YOU
WITHOUT LEAVING HAPPIER.

—MOTHER TERESA





THIS WORKBOOK BELONGS TO:

”

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE HAPPINESS
AND WELL-BEING YOU TRULY DESERVE

—FATIMA RUIZ

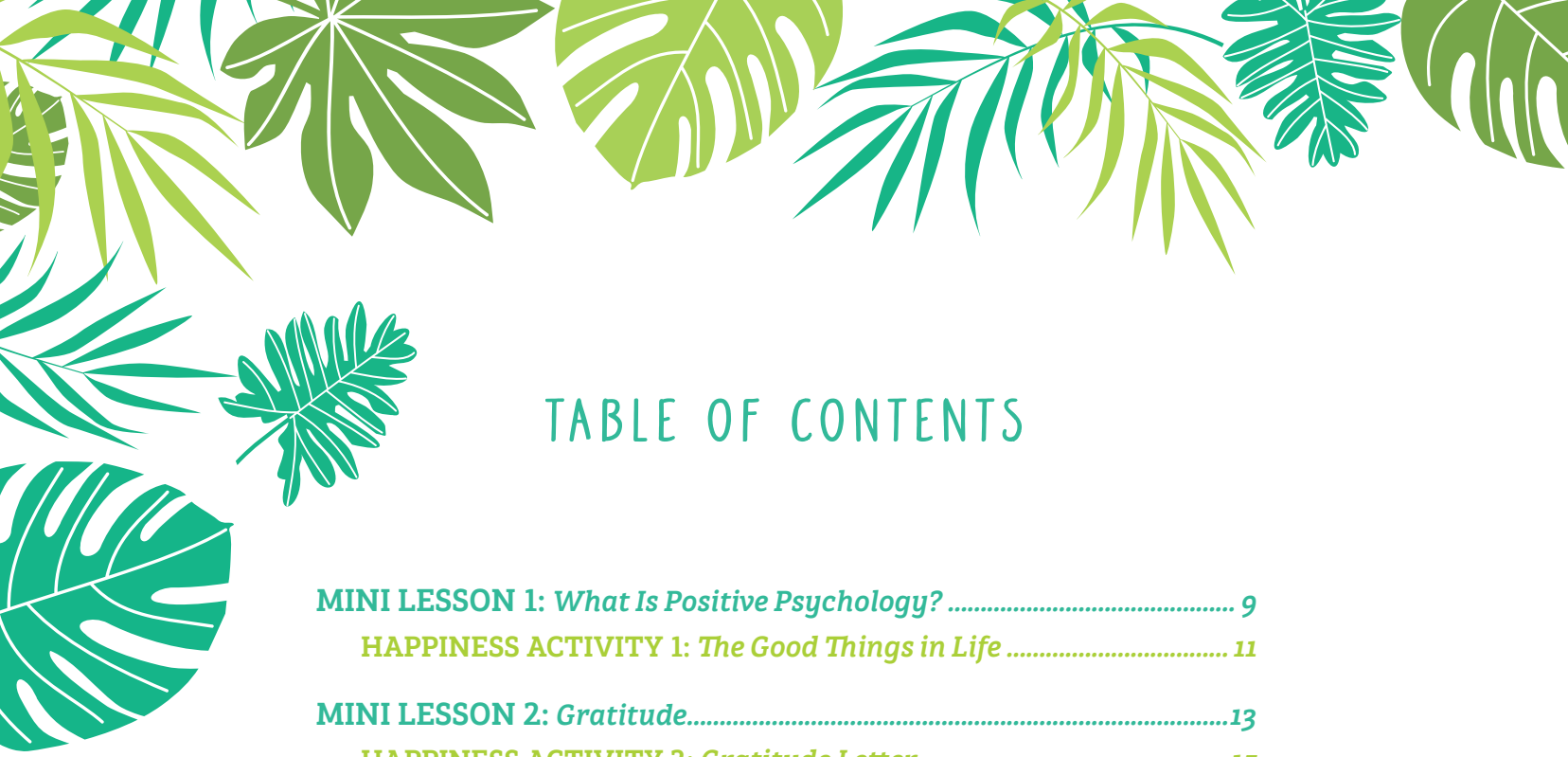
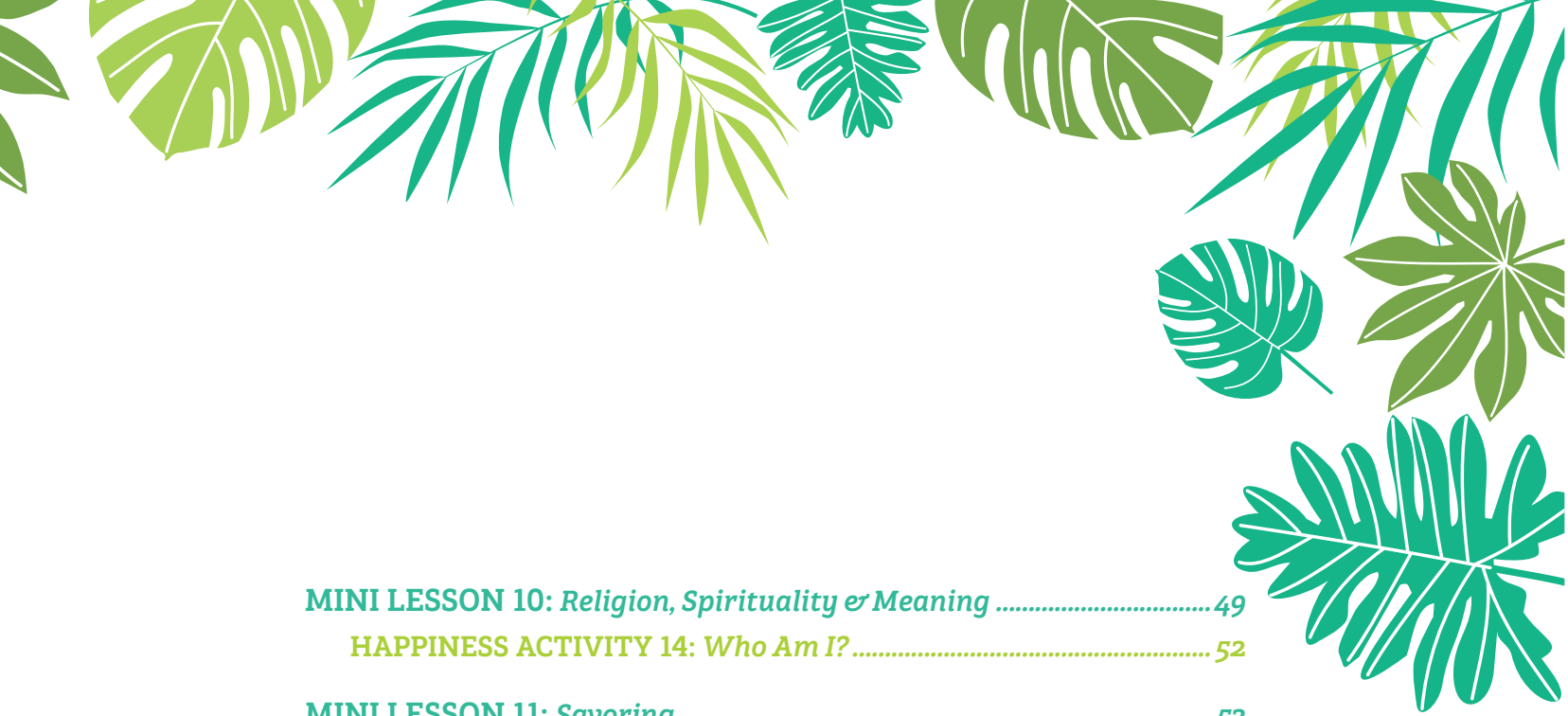


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MINI LESSON 1

WHAT IS POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY?

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IS a branch of psychology that studies exactly what helps people to flourish and live happy, fulfilling lives (Gable & Haidt, 2005). While historically, psychological study has placed a strong emphasis on mental illness and maladaptive behavior, practitioners of positive psychology seek instead to emphasize and build upon people's strengths, positive character traits, and positive emotional states.

One psychologist (and well-known proponent of positive psychology), Dr. Christopher Peterson, defined positive psychology as “the scientific study of what goes right in life” (Peterson, 2009, p.3).

Proponents of positive psychology understand that good mental health is about more than an absence of mental illness. To truly achieve good mental health, one must have the ability to thrive, even in the face of adversity. Of course, life comes with unavoidable challenges, but practitioners of positive psychology believe that we need to switch our focus to the things that make life worth living, despite those challenges.

Benefits of Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is an applied science. This means that this branch of psychology uses scientific research to achieve practical results. Practitioners of positive psychology are not only concerned with understanding the mechanisms behind happiness and other positive emotional states; they want to use the information they've gained through scientific research to actually improve people's lives.

Randomized control trials have been conducted to study the effectiveness of positive psychology and the activities that it promotes (Seligman & Steen, et. al, 2005). The evidence from these studies has shown us that positive psychology actually has proven health benefits. According to the research, using positive psychology activities (like practicing gratitude or entering flow) to promote a sense of purpose, feelings of happiness, and optimism leads to:

- Increased happiness
- Less depression symptoms
- Stronger immune system
- Better heart health, including lower blood pressure
- Longer life
- More fulfilling relationships
- Better lung function
- Better cancer outcomes (Park & Peterson, 2016)

As we move into the future of positive psychology, research is sure to reveal to us further health benefits of living a life filled with kindness, gratitude & Flow.

HAPPINESS ACTIVITY 1

THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE

For one week, write down three things that went well for you each day, and write down why they went well.

MONDAY

What:

Why:

What:

Why:

What:

Why:

TUESDAY

What:

Why:

What:

Why:

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Why:

WEDNESDAY

What:

Why:

What:

Why:

What:

Why:

THURSDAY

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What:

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FRIDAY

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SATURDAY

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SUNDAY

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Why:



MINI LESSON 2

GRATITUDE

The Benefits of Gratitude

NOT ONLY DOES practicing gratitude feel good in the moment, but it's also been scientifically tied to tangible benefits for both our physical and mental health. Dr. Robert Emmons, who we can thank for most of the groundbreaking research that's been conducted on the benefits of gratitude, has consistently found that gratitude increases overall well-being, improves health, and leads to more prosocial behavior (Emmons & Mishra, 2013).

Some of the life-changing benefits of gratitude include:

- A stronger immune system
- Improved mental health (including fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety)
- Better relationships
- A more optimistic life outlook
- More empathy for others
- Better sleep
- Higher self-esteem
- Less chronic pain
- More mental strength and emotional resiliency (Harvard Health Publishing, 2011).

Mindfulness & Gratitude

Mindfulness is an ancient Buddhist practice. More recently it's been applied to Western psychological practice. At its essence, it's simply the practice of being completely present in the now. This is how Emmons suggests we incorporate more gratitude into our lives—just by noticing opportunities to do so (Bono et. al, 2012).

To apply mindfulness to the practice of gratitude, get into the habit of being fully present in each moment. Sometimes, when we can't find anything to be grateful for, it's simply because we're not paying enough attention. When you start being mindful, you'll start noticing the little things, like the beautiful butterfly in your garden or the smell of freshly baked bread.

There's So Much to Be Grateful For

If we look closely enough, our lives are full of things to be grateful for. Science has shown us that learning to intentionally foster gratitude helps us become healthier, happier people.

HAPPINESS ACTIVITY 3

GRATITUDE JOURNAL

MONDAY

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4.
5.

TUESDAY

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4.
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WEDNESDAY

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THURSDAY

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FRIDAY

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4.
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SATURDAY

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

SUNDAY

1.
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MINI LESSON 3

KINDNESS

Does Being Kind Make You Happier?

WE'VE ALL SEEN the feel-good news stories: someone pays for a stranger's cup of coffee, and another gives a \$100 tip to their food server. Random acts of kindness are all over social media, and it's obvious these kinds of actions make a big difference to the people on the receiving end.

But what about the person performing the act of kindness? Does being kind to strangers make us happier people?

Research tells us that yes—acts of kindness not only benefit the receiver, but the giver as well.

The Benefits of Kindness

Dr. Sonja Lyobomirsky, a well-known researcher in the field of positive psychology, studies how different actions can improve our happiness and well-being.

In one study, she asked her participants to commit to performing five acts of kindness every week for six weeks. It didn't matter what the act of kindness was; it could be as small as holding the door open for a pregnant stranger or as large as giving money away.

The study found that people who completed all five acts of kindness in one day (rather than one per day for five days) experienced an increase in happiness (Lyubomirsky, Shelson, & Schkade, 2005). Having some variety in the acts they performed also made a difference.

These results suggest that performing random acts of kindness *can* make a difference in our lives—but if we’re just completing the *same* act every once in a while, then we might not be able to really savor how good it feels. In fact, if we’re forced to do the same act of kindness over and over again, we can start to see it as a chore—and it can even make us *less* happy (Sheldon, Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2013).

It might be a good idea to set aside some time on the same day every week to perform your acts of kindness. And make sure you’re not doing the same act of kindness over and over again—because that could become unsatisfying.

After you perform your act of kindness, write a few sentences on what you did, and how it made you feel. This will help you to savor the moment and enjoy the feelings of happiness that the random act of kindness brings.

Being Kind Helps Others—and You

The Dalai Lama famously said, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” It turns out he was right—by performing random acts of kindness, we can make a difference in the world *and* become happier people.

HAPPINESS ACTIVITY 4

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

The acts of kindness you choose to perform can be big or small. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Compliment someone.
- Pay for someone's coffee.
- Let another car in your lane in traffic.
- Give someone your seat on the bus.
- Fill up someone's expired parking meter.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen.
- Give money to a person without a home.
- Let someone who's in a hurry cut in front of you at the grocery store.
- Cook a meal for a neighbor.
- Offer to babysit your friend's children.
- Publicly offer recognition to a coworker.

ACTS OF KINDNESS THIS WEEK

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5.

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How did you feel after completing the acts of kindness?

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MINI LESSON 4

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Could Social Connection Be the Key to Happiness?

WE ALL LOVE and value our family and friends. We appreciate them and enjoy spending time with them. But research shows that we should be appreciating them even more, and that having strong social connections is one of the primary predicting factors for happiness (Eid & Larson, 2008).

What does the evidence say?

More and more, scientific research is pointing toward the idea that having strong personal relationships in our lives is absolutely key to increasing happiness. Study after study, all around the world, has proven this—people who engage in more fulfilling social activities are, overall, happier than their more individualistic or solitary counterparts.

Research that's been conducted on happiness and life satisfaction for older adults has revealed similar results. Studies show that older adults who have strong social relationships are not only happier, but also live longer, healthier lives (Rook & Charles, 2017).

Social support is so key in finding happiness that it's even been shown to mitigate the effects of some negative life events, including unemployment (Helliwell, et. al, 2020).

Across the world, the findings are similar. One annual study called the *World Happiness Report* measures each country's level of social support by looking at its citizens' answers to the Gallup poll question; "If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you could count on to help whenever you needed them, or not?"

The report found that social support had a greater effect on the results of the Cantril ladder (a tool that measures well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness) than any other variable, including the country's GDP, freedom to make life choices, and perceptions of corruption. Nordic countries like Finland and Denmark consistently rank as some of the happiest countries in the world, and there are a few things they have in common—including high levels of social support (Helliwell, et. al, 2020).

Social connection makes us happier. Period.

The Harvard Study of Adult Development is an ongoing research project that has studied the lives of two groups of men for over 75 years. The researchers interview their subjects to understand more deeply what factors truly lead to happy and healthy lives (Vaillant, 2012).

Robert Waldinger, the current director of the study, says that above all, what they've learned is this: "Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period." (Waldinger, 2015).

The next time you become stressed about not being rich enough or accomplished enough, try to remember this very important lesson. At the end of the day, it's less about what we do in life, and more about who we do it with.

HAPPINESS ACTIVITY 5

ACTIVE LISTENING

Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major effect on the quality of your relationships with others. One practice that's been shown to increase happiness is active listening. Take 15-30 minutes this week to have a conversation with someone you're close to and ask them to share what's on their mind. Here are a few tips to ensure you are a great listener.

- Give your undivided attention (don't think about how you are going to respond or how the conversation relates to you).
- Use your body to show you are listening (nod, smile, lean-in and acknowledge what your speaker is saying with an occasional *yes* or *uh huh*).
- Don't immediately judge what they are saying.
- Don't interrupt them; wait and ask reflective questions like, "What I'm hearing is... ,"

Reflect On Your Experience:

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing.



MINI LESSON 5

MINDFULNESS & MEDITATION

What Are the Benefits of Meditation?

MORE AND MORE people are tuning into the benefits of a daily meditation practice. Supporters of this ancient spiritual tradition say that it helps them feel more relaxed, less stressed, and happier overall.

What Is Meditation?

Although its image is changing in modern times, it used to be that the word “meditation” would bring to mind the image of a Buddhist monk, hiding away in a cave somewhere and sitting perfectly still. Although the practice of meditation does have its roots in Eastern spiritual practices like Buddhism, anyone can practice it. It is not always a religious practice, and you can meditate no matter what faith you identify with.

Meditation, at its essence, is the practice of calming the mind to gain insight into reality or simply to relax. There are many different types of meditation, including:

- **MANTRA MEDITATION:** This type of meditation is often used as part of a bigger spiritual practice. The meditator chooses a syllable, word, or phrase as the object of meditation.

- **LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION:** This meditation uses words and images that promote love and kindness toward yourself and others. Practitioners of loving kindness meditation are better able to forgive, connect to others and love themselves more deeply.
- **SILENT MEDITATION:** In this meditation technique, you remain silent for the duration of the meditation, clearing your mind and bringing peace and inner joy to your life.

What is Mindfulness?

According to Mindful.org, “mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us.”

- **MINDFULNESS MEDITATION:** This is the most studied form of meditation in psychological research. Mindfulness meditation involves learning to be completely present in the here and now. Often, people pay close attention to their breath during mindfulness meditation.

Health Benefits of Meditation

Studies show that meditating in general has numerous health benefits, including:

- Less pain. A study conducted in 2016 found that regular meditators were able to control their pain better than non-meditators (Reiner, Tibi, & Lipsitz, 2013).
- Lower blood pressure and better heart health. There's evidence that supports the idea that meditation lowers our overall stress levels, which in turn leads to lower blood pressure and a stronger heart (Goldstein et. al, 2012).
- Improved gastrointestinal symptoms. Some studies have found that meditating lessens the symptoms of certain gastrointestinal diseases, including ulcerative colitis and irritable bowel syndrome (Gaylord et. al, 2011).
- Better mental health: Meditation is most often used to improve mental health. Meditation, especially mindfulness meditation, has been found to decrease symptoms of depression, anxiety, and insomnia (Goyal et. al, 2014).

Mindfulness meditation has numerous health benefits for both clinical and non-clinical populations. By starting a regular meditation practice, you could become a healthier, happier, and more relaxed person.

HAPPINESS ACTIVITY 6

LET'S MEDITATE

This week, you will practice the three types of meditation mentioned in this mini lesson (See meditations on following page). After you've tried each type of meditation, pick your favorite, and continue meditating for the duration of the week. You can find good meditation videos on YouTube. I have also provided you some basic instructions.

Basic meditation instructions to prepare you for all three meditation types:

1. Find a quiet place in your home, car or outside. The key is not to be interrupted.
2. Sit in a comfortable position on the floor or on a chair. You can also laydown, just make sure you are comfortable.
3. Keep your back straight, arms resting on your lap.
4. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in through you nose and out through your mouth.
5. Focus on the point between your eyebrows, your breath or prefrontal lobe.
6. Now, take a breath in through your nose for 6 seconds, hold it for about 6 seconds and release it for 6 seconds. (The actual number of seconds depend on your comfort level.)
7. Repeat this breathing technique for 3 or more breathing cycles.
8. Finally, take one more deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth, exhaling the words *Ha, Ha, Haaaaa*.
9. Keep your eyes closed and focus on your breath.

Mantra Meditation

As you sit, repeat a mantra or affirmation silently in your head. Some examples of mantras include; Hong-Sau (*I am Spirit*), *I am peace*, *I am love* or any other mantra or affirmation that speaks to your heart.

Silent Meditation

During a silent meditation, you sit quietly, silently observing your breath. Sometimes it helps to focus on the humming of an air conditioning unit or other gentle neutral noise that doesn't bring up any thoughts or concerns.

Loving-Kindness Meditation

For this type of meditation, you first focus on yourself, repeating the words: *I am healthy, I am happy, I am peaceful, I am loved*. Next you focus on someone in your life that you love and want to send loving thoughts towards, repeating the words: *You are healthy, you are happy, you are peaceful and you are loved*. Now, think of someone in your life (picture them) that you are having difficulty with and repeat the mantra above. Finally, think of a person (picture them) in your life that could really use some peace and love right now and repeat the mantra above.

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TUESDAY

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WEDNESDAY

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THURSDAY

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FRIDAY

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SATURDAY

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Write down the type of meditation used on each day this week

HAPPINESS ACTIVITY 7

THE ORANGE

The Raisin Exercise was developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, the creator of mindfulness-based stress reduction. This exercise keeps you in the present moment. It also teaches you to savor your food and participate in mindful eating.

- Take an orange in your hand. Observe its shape, color, and pores.
- Bring it closer to your face and spend a few more moments examining its shape, and texture.
- Now, apply slight pressure to your orange. How does it feel? Is it firm, soft, or somewhere in the middle? It is cold or warm to the touch?
- Smell the orange. What is its aroma? Can you smell the citrus?
- Next, bring the orange to your ear. Does it make any noise if you rub it or squeeze it?
- Finally, peel your orange and take another whiff. Did the aroma of the orange change? Now, put the orange in your mouth and savor it. What sensations does it create? Notice as it travels down your throat and into your stomach.

Write about your experience:

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

HAPPINESS ACTIVITY 8

NATURE WALK

Find a peaceful place to take a short walk in nature.

Nature Walk

As you walk, allow your senses to take in everything around you. What do you see—trees, flowers, grass, or maybe tiny insects moving about? Is there anything you can feel? Maybe a slight breeze, the coolness of a shaded path or the warmth of the sun? Can you hear anything? Are there any distinctive smells? Notice everything around you.

Write about your experience:
