



*A man is
but the product
of his thoughts.
What he thinks,
he becomes.”*

Mahatma Gandhi

Woman in a yoga position. Image courtesy Joel Nilsson.

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

By Frankie Rozwadowska

‘Modern day life is filled with constant stress. We often forget the power of our thoughts to channel positive energy to get us through difficult situations. Frankie Rozwadowska explores how necessary it is to train our minds to focus on the good in order to combat the bad.



Is the glass half full or half empty? We all answer ‘half full’, but is that because we know that’s what we should say? The reality is, the majority of us would say ‘half empty’, but we know that how we answer this question is a strong reflection on how we look at life. Negative thoughts act as a barrier - an inhibitor that stops us from seeing and experiencing new things while preventing us from dealing with and adapting to everyday situations or coping with stress. They also affect our health, with research proving that positive thinking creates lower levels of distress and depression, reduced risk of illness, and longer life expectancy. So why don’t we want to say ‘half full’? Can we re-train our minds to become more positive? We can if we want.

The brain is extraordinarily powerful, responsible for everything from keeping our hearts beating and our limbs moving to managing thoughts and emotions. There are numerous sayings suggesting the power of thought, for example ‘mind over matter’ or ‘you can do anything you set your mind to.’ If our mind controls everything, and we control our mind - then we hold the key to our happiness. It’s all about The Law of Attraction, the principle that ‘like attracts like.’ If you think positively, positive things and people will generally come your way. Likewise negative thoughts bring about negative people and experiences.

Yet the challenge is that positive thinking is easier said than done. We get stuck in a rut, picking up bad habits and allowing stress or negative people to affect our state of mind. Noora Kobty, a Counseling Psychologist at the German Neuroscience Center in Dubai, advises that to change our way of thinking we must assess our ‘self talk’, our everyday thoughts. “It’s how you see yourself and things around you. If you realize you’re a pessimist, then that’s where to start - learning to change your self thoughts.” This is something we are all guilty of, and according

to Noora, a big reason why “social media and technology impacts our everyday lives. Social media allows us to compare our lives to others. It’s easy to look in the mirror or a magazine and tell yourself you aren’t good enough, that you’ll never be that pretty or that skinny. When we constantly compare ourselves to others we enter into a vicious egotistical cycle; we constantly feel the need to achieve more, change ourselves instead of focusing on what we have. This will never prove self-satisfying.”

It’s in these situations that positive thinking can radically change how we feel about ourselves and, consequently, about our life. Instead of focusing on the negative in a situation, focus on the positive. Noora uses the example of someone who discovers they didn’t get their desired job. “The positive thinker is more likely going to think of ways he can do better and resolve the situation, whereas a pessimist is likely to dwell on the situation and do nothing to help himself.”

By adapting our attitudes in this way, we subconsciously open the door to many new and exciting opportunities. Sabina Christensen, a Personal Development Consultant at LifeWorks Dubai, strongly believes that “the benefits of positive emotions don’t stop after a few minutes of good feelings subside. In fact, the biggest benefit that positive emotions provide is an enhanced ability to build skills and develop resources for use later in life.” Therefore, negative thoughts shut you off from the world, limiting what you see, altering your perception of the good in any situation and the options available to bring about beneficial change. “For example, when you’re stressed out about everything you have to get done today, you may find it hard to actually start anything because you’re paralyzed by how long your to-do list has become. Or, if you feel bad about not exercising or eating healthy, all you think about is how little willpower you have, how you’re lazy and don’t have any motivation. In

each case, your brain closes off from the outside world and focuses on the negative emotions of fear, anger, and stress. Negative emotions prevent your brain from seeing the other options and choices that surround you.”

Both Kobty and Christensen believe meditation is one of the most effective ways to channel positivity and clear out negative thoughts, especially in difficult or stressful situations. It helps us focus on learning to be in the present moment. As Christensen says, “very often we are going around at 100 kilometers an hour, not even conscious of our thoughts or how we’re doing in any one minute. Meditation and mindfulness slows us down, making us aware of the now - allowing us to live in the present and not in the past or future.” If you are new to meditation, Kobty suggests starting with a simple process, “all it takes is for you to relax and allow peaceful thoughts to enter your mind. Use words or sentences that are meaningful to you, for example ‘I am a good person’, ‘I have people that love me.’”

Kobty also suggests making a list of the things in your life that cause you stress according to the level of anxiety they cause. This helps you recognize what you find difficult and to focus on positive ways to overcome them. Christensen recommends writing down positive experiences every day. A study published in the Journal of Research in Personality showed that those who wrote about a positive experience every day, for three consecutive days, versus those who wrote about a control topic, had more positive experiences and better mood levels. So set aside some time for yourself, surround yourself with people who believe in you - and soon you will too. When you’re faced with a tough or stressful situation, use the power of your mind and positive thoughts to get you through. Soon that glass won’t just be half full - it will be overflowing. ♦