

Seven Keys for a Life of Happiness and Fulfillment

By Carol Chanel

I know you want to be happy. Why does being happy and fulfilled seem so challenging so much of the time?

I've been studying this for years and I've noticed that people try to be happy and fulfilled in the wrong ways.

For years we were taught to get a good job, make lots of money, drive a nice car, live in a big house. The values were accomplishment and accumulation - the right schools, the right clothes, the right address. All these things were supposed to be the keys to happiness and fulfillment.

Then came the realization that we weren't happy. That spawned a million self-help books. I think I read them all. It kept me busy for many years.

Groups of all sorts emerged, as well as workshops and seminars, all designed to help us live happier more fulfilling lives.

I noticed people, including myself, still weren't happy. What was missing? In my search and eventually my discovery, I found seven keys that I want to share with you.

These seven keys, which my clients and I consistently live by, have brought us happiness and fulfillment! I have put these keys to the test over the years with my clients and they work.

They are simple things to do and they aren't easy for those of us raised in this fast-paced, doing culture. They require commitment, persistence, patience and faith. Most of us don't mind hard work, we just mind hard work that doesn't produce desired results. These practices produce desired results.

I know if you are reading this that you are up to the challenge of living and modeling these seven keys.

The seven keys to truly being happy and fulfilled are:

- *Living in Integrity*
- *Having Compassion*
- *Forgiveness*
- *Quieting the Critical Inner Voice*
- *Loving*
- *Trusting in a Higher Power*
- *Being Silent*
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Let's look at them one at a time.

LIVING IN INTEGRITY – honoring your values

Integrity means keeping your word to yourself and others. It is about honoring your values, commitments and your word to yourself and others.

The reason that integrity is so important is that if you don't honor your commitments, your values and your word, then you live a life without any value, and you don't feel good about yourself.

Let me give you an example of a client I coached. We'll call him Michael. Michael was a good person, kind, warm, giving and he constantly lied. Little lies. He didn't keep his word to himself or others. And every relationship that he had ended badly because his girlfriends always found out he was lying to them.

His reasons for lying weren't so awful. In fact they were actually understandable, but not to a partner. Michael was afraid to tell the truth for fear that the women in his life would reject him. He was insecure and thought that he needed women to validate him. He couldn't be faithful to one woman because he needed continual validation. He was always searching outside himself.

Now I don't know too many women who will tolerate a boyfriend who is sexually involved with other women. He stood a better chance by telling them up front. Who knows, one of them might have accepted it. Instead he kept it hidden and went on lying.

He thought he needed women's validation to be happy. Why doesn't that work? Because when we give others the power to validate us, we also give them the power to take it away. We have to validate ourselves. Then it's real.

Michael and I worked on teaching him to value himself; having him see that he was a good person and that he could validate himself.

Michael ultimately settled down and is finally happy with himself.

How about the person who is out of integrity with their value of being fit? Maybe they aren't keeping their word to themselves. How would this keep a person from being happy?

My client Susan, when she first came to me used to joke about needing to exercise and eat right. She was constantly getting tripped up. She thought I would laugh with her too. I didn't. When we looked at her values, we found she had a strong value on health. Her mother had been very ill and died when she was young. She didn't want that kind of life for herself. So by not honoring her value of her commitment to her health, she was out of integrity. And being out of integrity, she didn't feel good about herself. This showed up in her work and her relationships inside and out of work.

During our coaching time I had Susan commit to small steps towards honoring her value of health. Without judging her I continually encouraged her to take small healthy uncomfortable steps until she eventually lost 15 pounds, was exercising regularly and had a meal plan she enjoyed.

Another big way you can be out of integrity is by not keeping your word to others and not honoring boundaries. This one can be insidious. It starts with making a commitment to someone and seemingly not having time to keep your agreement and then blowing it off or trying to ignore it.

The person you didn't keep your word with gets angry and hurt. Then you feel guilty and let them do something you wouldn't normally allow.

Let me give you an example. I had a client who had an enormous amount of shame. I'll call him Stephen. Stephen wanted to play with his young sons, and would make a commitment to them to play after work. Then he would get busy at work and forget his commitment until it was too late.

When Stephen came home he remembered and felt awful. Then he would let his boys do things he might not otherwise let them do – eat sweet treats, stay up later than usual. This caused a problem with his

wife and his children, who would be hyper from the sugar and cranky the next day from lack of sleep.

Stephen didn't stay in integrity with his word, felt guilty and let his children violate the boundaries that he and his wife had set for them. That taught the children that they didn't have to honor the boundaries of others. What a messy cycle.

We taught Stephen to only make commitments to his boys that he could keep. Then the time he did spend with them was truly valuable and not filled with guilt.

Living a life honoring integrity is crucial to being happy and fulfilled.

FORGIVING – for giving love to yourself and others

The second key to having a happy and fulfilled life is

FORGIVING. By the time we are adults we have done things we would like to be forgiven for while others have done things to us for which they need to be forgiven.

Forgiveness is not about condoning irresponsible or hurtful behavior. Forgiveness isn't about turning the other cheek, being a victim or a martyr. It is about finishing old business that then allows us to experience the present, free of contamination of the past. Forgiveness allows us to give and receive love.

I had to really work at forgiveness. I had been badly treated as a child. My mother died when I was seven and my father remarried a woman who didn't want me around and was down right mean to me. My father was physically abusive to me and had unrealistic expectations of me as a child.

So between the two of them, my childhood was for the most part miserable. I would ask people to help me and no one did because they didn't think anything was wrong, or they didn't want to get involved. And as a child, I needed the help. Even my stepmother's mother told her to start being nicer to me.

Needless to say, I grew up feeling awful about myself. In fact, I actually hated myself. I would look in the mirror and cry and cry because I thought I was so ugly.

After years of working on myself, I was ready to forgive my parents. I came to realize that they did the best they could and that the experiences I had growing up help me today to understand, at a cellular level, what my clients are going through.

Now forgiving my parents turned out being easier than forgiving myself. You see, over the years when I felt badly about myself I had at times behaved badly toward others. I didn't mean to, it was just a reaction out of my pain and suffering. So I had to learn to stop judging myself and to forgive myself, step by step.

Sometimes that looked like calling and apologizing to people and other times it was just saying a prayer, sending light and asking for forgiveness on an energetic level. Whatever it took. Mostly it was giving love to myself and understanding that I did the best I could with who I was and what I knew at the time.

And it's a process. There are still times when the little girl inside me cries, but now I know to take her in my arms and comfort her, or let someone special hug me and love me. Forgiveness – for giving love to yourself and others.

COMPASSION – for all of us to be free of suffering

The third key ingredient for living a happy and fulfilled life is **COMPASSION**. It is the cornerstone of the Buddhist religion. The Dalai Lama, in his book "The Art of Happiness," defines compassion as

"a state of mind that is nonviolent, nonharming, and nonaggressive. It is a mental attitude based on the wish for others to be free of their suffering and is associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility and respect towards others. There is also a sense to the word of its being a state of mind that can include a wish for good things for oneself.

"In developing compassion, perhaps one could begin with the wish that oneself be free of suffering, and then take that natural feeling towards oneself and cultivate it, enhance it, and extend it out to include and embrace others."

As children we are usually highly compassionate. A child will cry when they see someone or something being hurt. As adults we can become hardened to the suffering of others. And when we harden, our hearts close and we will never be happy and fulfilled.

I had a client, James, who had a huge heart and yet he lacked compassion for certain people in his life. Usually, the ones he cared most about.

James had a girlfriend who could act crazy and sometimes be mean. When she did that it reminded him of his critical mother and then he would get angry with her. So much for compassion. And usually she got angry with him in the first place when he did something that reminded her of her critical father.

They really loved each other and couldn't quite make it work. He came to coach with me after she broke up with him. He was so hurt and angry. Little by little we helped him heal the pain and sadness in his heart. And find the compassion he had in his heart for his girlfriend. And ultimately James was able to take that compassion and give it to his mother, which greatly improved his relationship with her.

He found compassion for her by looking back on her life and seeing what her father had been like, how tough he had been on her. He saw how courageous she had been in marrying his dad and starting a family. And that compassion for her and his old girlfriend transferred to people on the streets, his friends, and ultimately himself.

At this point James and his old girlfriend have a friendly relationship and no one knows where it will go. At least they're friends and he is out of pain.

When we can have compassion for ourselves and others – when we accept and realize that we all have a right to be free of suffering – then we can be happy.

LOVE – to feel the bliss and wonder of love for others and ourselves

And of course in order to be truly happy and fulfilled, there must be LOVE. Without love we really have nothing. No amount of stuff, toys, houses, cars, jobs, careers, or whatever, mean anything if there isn't love in our lives.

People think that means they must have a great relationship in order to have love in their lives. That is just one way. True love starts with giving love to ourselves. And then taking that love and giving it out into the world.

We can love our work, our families, our friends, and our hobbies, and if we don't love ourselves, we won't be happy.

Why is it so hard to love ourselves? Usually when I ask people if they love themselves they say yes. And later, when they feel more comfortable, they admit that they would like to learn to fully love themselves.

One of my greatest success stories in this area is my own. I really hated myself and I had to learn to love myself. No easy task and yet I did it. I knew that if I could learn to love myself, I could guide others to love themselves.

My client who worked on this the most was a man named Thomas. When he came to work with me, he had done a lot of therapy, and had a pretty good understanding of how he had come not to love himself. He just didn't know how to love himself.

So I started working with him on his non-loving perspectives. And one by one we worked to shift his perspectives from non-loving to more loving to fully loving.

He had done some things he wasn't pleased with. As a result, he was judging himself and therefore couldn't love himself. We coached, looking at how he did the best he could (compassion, forgiveness) with what he knew at the time and who he was at the time. He agreed and accepted that the pain he had been feeling at the time caused his previous actions. Now he would do things differently. Now he was free to start loving himself again.

Here's the catch. We often equate our goodness and lovability with our actions. In truth we are not our actions. We don't have to like our actions and we do need to be compassionate, forgive ourselves and commit (integrity) to doing better the next time.

We are human beings with precious souls. Our soul is here to learn, to love and, for many, to do good deeds. That's all. To learn. To love. To do good.

So when Thomas was having a bad day, we would help him find someone to give love to that day. It might be a friend, a fellow worker, even someone who was causing him difficulty or maybe someone he was jealous of.

Why was that important to do? Because then Thomas could get out of himself and back into love and then he would feel better about himself. And guess what? He would love himself again.

If you catch yourself judging yourself – STOP. Take a deep breath and let go of the judgment. Remember a time when you felt love for yourself, and if that doesn't work, remember when you felt loved by someone else. Let the love into your heart. Little by little you will replace self-judgment with self-love.

It's so simple. It's not always easy, but it is simple.

QUIETING THE CRITICAL INNER VOICE – to be free and live full out

That leads me to the next key ingredient in having a happy and fulfilling life, and that is **QUIETING THE CRITICAL INNER VOICE**. I really believe that the negative thoughts in our minds are connected to most of our problems. Most people have a full time concert going on in their minds. However, instead of playing beautiful music, their minds are filled with all sorts of poorly tuned instruments that give off bad notes or negative thoughts.

Have you ever heard yourself saying, "Wow that was stupid, I can't believe I just said that" or "You idiot, why did you bring the wrong wine to dinner" or "I'm so fat and lazy I deserve to be alone?" People constantly have these kinds of negative thoughts in their minds. And we wonder why we aren't happy.

Let me give you an example. I had a client, Susan, who thought that she didn't deserve to have money or good health. She would continually think back to when she was a sickly frail child. She would repeat over and over how she was treated differently and couldn't play like the other kids. She was 55 at the time I was coaching her.

She wouldn't let it go. And guess what? She had become sickly and frail. Those negative thoughts from her childhood became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

We worked to have her shift her perspective and see herself as healthy and free. She began to take steps to becoming healthier. This was hard for her because she liked to do things that were actually bad for her.

Ultimately she began to quiet the critical inner voice that said she was a frail, sickly woman and began to take better care of herself. She found good doctors to help her rebuild her strength and is now back at work and light exercise.

That critical inner voice can make us sick, cost us our money, relationships, jobs, and most importantly our peace of mind. And as long as those thoughts are inside our mind doing damage, we won't be happy and fulfilled. Listen to what your inner voice is saying and choose another perspective.

We've looked at integrity, compassion, forgiveness, love and quieting the critical inner voice as some of the main ingredients to happiness and a fulfilling life. There are two remaining keys and they are the two most essential. In all my years of working with people, if these two aren't firmly in place, then the individual will have limited happiness and fulfillment no matter how compassionate, forgiving and loving they are.

BELIEVING AND TRUSTING IN A HIGHER POWER – for your transcendence

Let's look at **BELIEF IN A HIGHER POWER**. It doesn't really matter what you call it, if you have a name for the source of love. To me it's not about a religion, it's not about a philosophy – it's that you have a belief that there is a higher power that is loving.

Because without that faith, that belief, most people's lives are very bleak. And they aren't happy or fulfilled.

I call that higher power God and it doesn't matter to me about the name. Universal Source works, too. I'm not a religious person; I am highly spiritual.

And as I coach people, I hear that they believe in a higher power and they think that higher power doesn't believe in them. I hear things like: "God hates me," "God abandoned me," "God lost my file," "God doesn't think I'm worthy," "God is too busy for me." I hear these things and many more. Each person has a thought about how the source of love - a higher power - doesn't love him or her.

Well, no one is going to be happy if they think the source of love - the higher power / God - doesn't love, approve, value them or know they exist.

So I love to help my clients understand that a higher power knows their worth, hasn't forsaken them, hasn't lost their file, isn't too busy and definitely loves them. And how do I know that to be true? Because I know it's true. I know that without a doubt. I've been blessed to have it shown to me so I can share it with others.

Let me give you an example. I had a client, Julia, who had a really tough upbringing. Really tough - abuse - physical and sexual, addicted parents, and so on. Julia had done a lot of therapy and she never addressed the issue of whether God loved her. Actually, she thought God hated her. As we coached on this topic, one day we began to look at the good things that had happened to her. She remembered the times when people had given her things just because they wanted to. I had her list all those times and she saw that indeed, she had been taken care of - when she allowed it.

We also looked at how she had connected with that loving part of herself and gave love because she knew what it felt like not to be loved.

She started to cry as she realized that her suffering had given her a huge compassionate heart filled with love and understanding. She realized she was a worthy person that was loved by God or a higher power.

I want to share with you what she wrote.

"I have been seeking wholeness from my many scars, in thousands of meetings, individual therapy, seminars and every avenue that came my way for 20 years.

Carol, what is so special is that unique gift of 'knowing' that you possess. I have never had such complete faith and trust in one's ability to facilitate healing.

You were able to remove the scar I had secured over a deep and ugly curse I accepted as a child. I am transformed from being cursed to being divinely and eternally blessed. I now KNOW that God loves me. Thank you."

And the most important part is **TRUSTING**. I had a client who used to say, "If God would just get out of my way." Her ego wanted to control things.

Why don't we trust? Why are we so afraid to surrender? I can't speak for everyone and the answer I most frequently hear is this: in this society we were raised with a fear of God. We were taught that God was vengeful, judgmental and was to be feared.

Many people stopped relating to God and found the Universal Source of love, which I call God, and it doesn't matter. It's the source.

If we can't trust the source of love, then we have to give up. We don't trust because we think we haven't gotten the love, the job, the house, whatever, we think we should have gotten. Or perhaps we had bad things happen to us.

I remember one of the reasons I thought God – the universal source of love – hated me was because I had been hit by a car at age five and almost died. My injuries were so severe it's a miracle I'm alive.

Then one day I realized some things. I'm alive, I can walk. I'm not brain damaged or disfigured. At the Baltimore hospital that day there were two top surgeons. They had been operating on someone and were on their way out of the hospital. They stayed and operated on me. That realization completely changed my life. I realized I was loved, provided for and protected.

Yes, that car hit me, but maybe that body cast I was in for six months kept me from getting hit at home. Who knows!

The real test and blessing comes in allowing that love to guide our lives. We have to trust and surrender and try not to do things all by ourselves. When we are having a difficult time, we need to surrender – to turn it over to a higher power. We need to trust that we will be provided for, and that the outcome is ultimately for our higher good - even if it doesn't look like it at the time.

BEING SILENT – so you can hear the answers

All **BEING SILENT** is, is spending time with the intention of connecting to the higher power, the love in the universe. If we are silent we can hear that voice telling us the answers to our questions,

our fears, and our troubles. In that silence, when we connect with the love, then we find the ultimate happiness and fulfillment. Then we find what we have always been seeking and couldn't find because we were looking outside of ourselves.

In this culture we are so busy working, playing, doing, running errands, etc. that we don't just stop and be.

If we only knew the gifts that come in the silence. If we knew the joy and peace that come in the quiet, we would gladly stop our doing and be silent.

In his book "The Divine Romance," Paramahansa Yogananda explains in great detail why we must meditate. He also explains how feelings and emotions obscure our souls – our true being.

"So long you have thought of yourself as having certain qualities, with their characteristic feelings and emotions. Once you realize that each day you are only impersonating different characteristics according to your changing feelings, you will not be the same person. Every person is innately wonderful; he has only to rid himself of the mask of ego consciousness."

We rid ourselves of our ego masks by sitting, meditating and connecting with God, the Universal Source of love. Then we let our magnificent souls emerge from being covered by our ego, our personalities.

And when our souls emerge, we are truly happy. That is fulfillment.

When we trust that it's okay to stop and sit and be silent, we will receive the true blessings on this earth. We will truly find happiness and fulfillment and then we can take that out into the world. Others will then experience the joy that comes from our beautiful hearts and precious souls.

I would like to close with a meditation from Yogananda's book "Metaphysical Meditations," called 'Wisdom and Understanding'.

Since Thine indelible image of perfection is in me, teach me to wipe away the superficial stains of ignorance and to know that Thou and I are, and always have been, one.

May all demoniac, noisy thoughts take flight, that Thy silent song-whispers of guidance be audible to my forgetful soul.

I will behold wisdom in ignorance, joy in sorrow, health in weakness; for I know that God's perfection is the only reality.

I am an immortal child of God, living for a little while in the body. I am here to behold the tragedies and comedies of this changeable life with an attitude of unchangeable happiness.

Since God has given me all I need, I will know Him first and then use His counsel to desire and to do only what He wills.

Being endowed with free choice, I am a son of God in reality. I have been dreaming that I am a mortal man. I am now awake. The dream that my soul is imprisoned in a bodily cage has vanished. I am all that my Heavenly Father is.

Dear Father, whatever conditions confront me, I know that they represent the next step in my unfoldment. I will welcome all tests because I know that within me are the intelligence to understand and the power to overcome.

I will cultivate calmness of mind, knowing God is ever with me. I am Spirit!

May your lives be filled with love and light!

I've been helping people achieve their potential and live life to the fullest since 1983. I work helping people to get unstuck and to achieve their dreams and find happiness and fulfillment at the same time.

This article gives you a sense of how I work and what areas I work on with my clients. People come to me generally with some issue, some place in their life where they are stuck, and can't move forward.

In order to help my clients get unstuck, I usually end up working with them on one or more of the seven keys in this article.

*If you would like to explore the possibility of my assistance please call me at **310-998-8860**. Also, please visit my website at www.carolchanel.com. You'll find other articles there and more in-depth information about my services and me.*

May you live a joyous life of integrity, filled with compassion and for giving love, an ease to surrendering and trusting, and a silent journey to your destination of happiness and fulfillment.

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