



## Optimistic Spirit



How about a quick test to get us started? Take a peek at the following four questions and respond with your immediate first impression. In your opinion:

- Is optimism beneficial, or merely naïvety?
- Is optimism simply wishful thinking?
- Does optimism play an important role in your success, or does it interfere with achieving results?
- How would you describe your level of optimism, and what are three specific examples of how you have demonstrated it?



**Self Reflection Question:** Reflect on a time when you experienced a feeling of pessimism, hopelessness, or depression. How did this affect you (physically, mentally, emotionally)? How did you turn it around?

We believe when you meet with us on Sunday and discuss the Core Ability of Optimistic Spirit, you'll see that an Optimistic Spirit may not change the situation, but it will absolutely put things into a healthier, more life-affirming perspective

that opens your mind to solutions – and helps you weather any storm that comes your way.

We're going to take a look at a well-know Bible passage that we feel is totally misleading and consequently has had an 'awfulizing' impact on people for thousands of years. We'll share what we believe is a much more optimistic – and truthful – interpretation.

Here's a quick look at the traditional interpretation found in most biblical texts: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28 – *New International Version*). As you can readily see, this interpretation needs some serious triage. Our *retake* on it is this: ***We know with confidence that we can Divinely Order every experience and use our innate Core Abilities, 12 Powers, and Spiritual Principles to work all things together for good!***



**Think about how YOU would reword this verse to align with your current belief system!**

The word optimism is originally derived from the Latin *optimum* which means 'best.' Being optimistic, in the typical sense of the word, ultimately means that you expect the best possible outcome from any given situation.

## What Does Scientific Research Say?

Optimism seems to be both an inherited trait and a learned trait, and is related to another perspective called 'optimalism.' Positive psychologist Martin Seligman, father of Positive Psychology, defines optimalism as **a willingness to accept setbacks and disappointments while remaining confident that success will follow.** However, it doesn't mean looking at life with rose colored glasses.

There's an objectivity to optimism and its sister term optimalism. Learned optimism is the idea that a talent for joy, like any other, can be cultivated. It's contrasted with learned helplessness, which believes that one has no real control over what occurs and that something external is dictating our ability to accomplish a task, succeed, etc.<sup>1</sup>

Now, here's the neuroscience of optimism: As thoughts of happy future events flood our minds, two brain structures are strongly activated. The rostral anterior cingulate cortex (RACC) and the right amygdala areas are lit up. The RACC, it seems, works hand-in-hand with our emotional center, the



amygdala, to actually downplay negative emotions, helping us to stay more positive in the face of negative situations.<sup>2</sup>

So, if we seem overly enthusiastic about this core quality it's because we're, well, optimistic! And when you light up your rostral anterior cingulate cortex by being more optimistic, you'll take another important step closer to connecting with your Core Essence, which we believe is your Divine Nature.

## How to Strengthen Your Optimistic Spirit Core Ability



Here's just a handful of life-affirming tips to build your optimistic spirit, and thrive as you take advantage of the medicinal benefits of optimism. We encourage you to make these part of your Spiritual Practice – and to make your Spiritual Practice your lifestyle!

1. **Stamp indelibly on your mind a mental picture of yourself as succeeding in whatever you do.** Hold onto this mental scenario tenaciously. Over time your mind will imprint this optimistic perspective in the neural pathways of your brain. So always picture a successful outcome no matter how badly things seem to be going at the moment.
2. **Whenever a negative thought comes to mind, deliberately generate a positive thought to cancel it out.** This really works because of our brain's neuroplasticity (the lifelong ability to generate new neural real estate).<sup>3</sup>
3. **Do not manufacture obstacles in your imagination.** Anesthetize every so-called obstacle. Difficulties and challenges must be studied and efficiently dealt with to be eliminated, but they must be seen only for what they are. They must not be inflated by fear, doubt, anger, and false assumptions.
4. **Gain self-knowledge.** 'Know thyself,' as the saying goes. Learn the origin of your inferiorities, self-doubts, and vulnerabilities. If necessary, get a competent counselor to help you understand why you may have cultivated such a negativity bias.
5. **Believe in your own extraordinariness.** As you learn to become more optimistic, do not become egotistical, but develop a wholesome attitude of self-respect and self-confidence.

Self Reflection Question: How have you seen your Optimistic Spirit work in your life?

It seems to us that optimism is the digitalis of pessimism. It brings us back to life. It rights our ship, so to speak. Susan Vaughan, MD, integrative medicine doctor in Greensboro, N.C. and author of *Half Empty, Half Full: How to Take Control and Live Life as an Optimist*, agrees. She describes optimistic behavior as a psychological righting reflex:

“It's like cats,” she says. “When you throw them out the window, they always land on their feet.”<sup>4</sup> If you know perennial optimists, we’ll bet you’ll agree that describes their landing on their feet ability.

An optimistic spirit is a beautiful state of mind. We believe an optimistic spirit, not the negativity bias, is hardwired into our brain. We believe that because we are all endowed with an Extraordinary Nature which is characterized by all of the qualities we need to make our human experience worthwhile, happy, healthy, and productive. An Optimistic Spirit is one of the chief qualities of our extraordinariness as you walk the spiritual path on practical, positive, prosperous feet!

*Be Extraordinary!*

BE EXTRAORDINARY!

1 Seligman, Martin. *Learned Optimism*. New York, NY: Pocket Books. 1998)

2 Sharot T, Riccardi AM, Raio CM, and Phelps EA (2007). Neural mechanisms mediating optimism bias. *Nature*, 450 (7166), 102-5)

3 Chang, E.C., D'Zurilla, T.J., & Maydeu-Olivares, A. (1994), “Assessing the dimensionality of optimism and pessimism using a multimeasure approach.” *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 18, 143-160)

4 Vaughan, Susan, *Half Empty, Half Full: How to Take Control and Live Life as an Optimist*, Harvest Book, Harcourt, New York, 2000)

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