

# The Psychology of Happiness

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Thank you for the kind words.

I have a confession to make. This is a recycled talk. I've given it 15 times already, the first time in 2000 when I was invited by the Auxiliary of the Jewish General Hospital to give a lecture on the topic, "Age is just a number: the psychology of staying young". Several years ago, however, my daughter Becky asked me to give the same talk to the first year medical students at McGill, as part of their Wellness Day. I didn't feel comfortable using the original title, so I changed it to "The psychology of Happiness".

# Age is Just a Number: The Psychology of Staying Young

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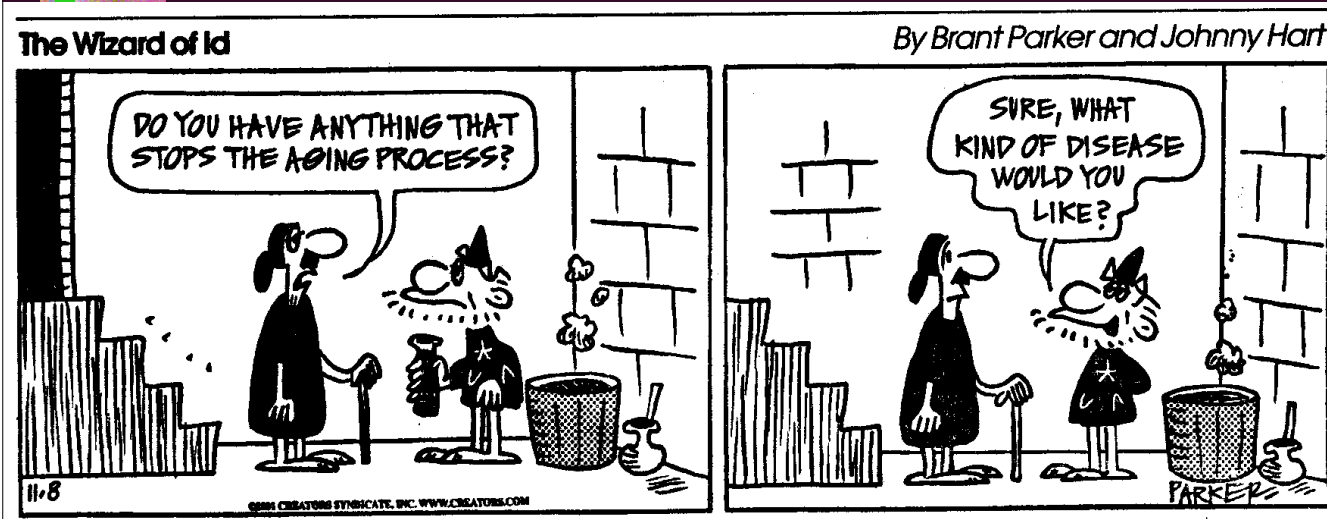
So please excuse me, if I go back to the original name for the talk.

Is it possible to stay young, as this title implies? My friend Roger Rak, who I used to run with as a member of the Wolf Pack Running Club, says: "You're only young once, but you can be immature all your life!"

More seriously, can we avoid getting older?

Yes, we can! Here's one way.

# The Wiz on aging



This is the Wizard of Id's solution to prevent aging.

Of course, this way of avoiding getting old is not the same thing as staying young. Who here wants to stay young?

Do you want to remain young forever?

Not me! I think eternal life would get terribly boring after awhile! But I do want to continue to enjoy life!

That's what staying young means to me - continuing to enjoy life. Striving for happiness. Not continuous happiness - like eternal life, that would begin to pall. Besides, happiness is something you have to work for, and work to keep.

So, what does it take to be happy?

# Determinants of Happiness

- **Sufficient money**
- **Perceived good health**
- **A project or passion**
- **Good relationships**

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I used to work in the Psychogeriatrics Clinic at the Jewish General Hospital. The clinic in those days organized an annual conference called the Sylvia Hamovitch Day, to honour a special person who had worked at the clinic for many years, and who continued to volunteer there after she retired. She exemplified what caring is all about.

Several years ago, the topic for the conference was “happiness in old age”. The participants concluded that there are four determinants of happiness:

First ♣, sufficient money. This means having enough money so you don’t have to worry all the time about it. For many people, sufficient money means a roof over your head, and food on the table.

Sufficient money also means not too much money. You don’t want to have so much that you’re continually worried about it, about what to do with it or whether people will try to take it away from you.

Second ♣, perceived good health. Perceived is the key word here. We once interviewed an elderly gentleman in the clinic. When asked about his health, he said “Well, I have diabetes, and I have to inject myself with insulin a couple of times a day; and I have arthritis, so it’s really hard to get myself going in the mornings; and I have cataracts, and my hearing is not so good anymore. But when I compare myself to my friends my age, they’re mostly dead, so I guess I’m in pretty good health!” How’s that for a positive attitude!

The third determinant ♣ is a project or passion, something that you’re excited about doing, that gets you up out of bed in the morning. This could be a volunteer job, a hobby, learning something new, playing a musical instrument, and so on.

But the most important determinant of happiness ♣ is good relationships. This is true at any age. Think of a baby without its mother!

# Good relationships

- **Especially with your spouse**
  - **Children, parents, siblings**
  - **Friends, neighbours**
  - **Colleagues and coworkers**
  - **Employer, employees**
  - **Animals, eg pets**
- **Large social networks associated with good mental & physical health**

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The longest, most intense relationship for most of us ♣ is with our spouse. In the clinic I met many people who'd been married fifty years or longer! In comparison, how long do you live with your parents; with your brothers or sisters, or for that matter, how long do your children live with you?

The relationship with your wife or your husband, if unhappy, can bring you more misery than just about anything else in life. On the other hand, if both partners are motivated, a marriage relationship can provide a quiet but profound joy and fulfilment.

I don't want to imply that other relationships ♣ are unimportant. They all can be sources of happiness, whether it's family, friends, community, people at work, or pets. There are many, many studies showing that having a large social network ♣ is associated with good mental and physical health.

The bottom line: by looking after your relationships, you are looking after yourself.



Twenty-two years ago, I lost my wife Ann to colorectal cancer. She had been diagnosed 6 years earlier, and at that time we hoped that the surgery and chemotherapy had cured the cancer. Nevertheless, Ann was determined to make the best of her situation. She began running, and eventually joined a running group called the Wolf Pack. She felt so good after her runs that I decided to take up running also, and for years I ran with the Wolf Pack on Sunday mornings.

She also decided to go back to school to learn more about community health. As a nurse with the Continuing Care Clinic at the Jewish General Hospital, working with people with chronic psychotic illness, she believed that learning more about community health would enhance her effectiveness with her patients. Even though she was partially deaf, she chose to study in French, at the Université de Montréal, figuring that she could become more bilingual at the same time.

When she had a recurrence of her cancer three years later, she opted for experimental surgery at Boston's New England Deaconess Hospital, where they took out all her pelvic organs. After she recovered, she signed up for a weeklong Outward Bound adventure especially geared to cancer survivors. In spite of her fear of heights, she scaled a rock face, wearing a safety harness which had to be specially constructed, because she had a colostomy pouch on one side, and a urostomy pouch on the other. Afterwards, she gave talks about her experiences, using slides from her trip.

When Ann died, one aspect of my mourning process was internalizing some of Ann's good qualities. And the most important of these qualities, I think, was her

# Positive attitude!

- **Optimism**
- **Looking on the bright side**
- **Seeing opportunities in crises**
- **Accepting responsibility for change**
- **The essential determinant of happiness!**

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Positive attitude! What is positive attitude? Of course ♣, it includes an optimistic outlook on life, while not ignoring the realities. As the proverb states, “Hope for the best, prepare for the worst.”

A positive attitude also includes ♣ looking on the bright side, actively seeking something positive in every person and every situation you encounter. Personally, I feel that this the most important legacy that Ann left me. But it requires effort! Fortunately, if you put in the effort consistently, after only three weeks it becomes a habit.

Very much related to looking on the bright side ♣, is the capacity to find opportunities in the crises that we face. When a crisis strikes, all we know is that something has to change - things can no longer go on the same as before. But a change can be either negative or positive - it's up to us to choose. And that's the opportunity each crisis gives us, the possibility to choose to change for the better.

Talking about change, having a positive attitude means giving up the notion, or perhaps the wish, that if only other people would change, our lives would be better. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that any of us can do to make someone else change, except to change ourselves. This is the hardest part, I think ♣; accepting responsibility for making changes in ourselves in order to improve our lives.

The Sylvia Hamovitch Conference on happiness concluded that having a positive attitude is essential to all four of the determinants of happiness. Think about it. If you're a pessimist, can any amount of money ever be sufficient? Is it possible to perceive of your health as being good, if your attitude is negative? Do people with negative attitudes attack projects with passion and enthusiasm? And who the heck wants to spend time with a complainer?

So we can conclude that in fact ♣, positive attitude is the one, single, essential determinant of happiness.



# Optimists live longer

- **Mayo Clinic: follow-up of 839 patients who had taken the MMPI 30 years earlier**
  - **Comparison of expected with actual survival rates**
  - **Optimists (124) had better survival**
  - **Pessimists (197) had 19% increase in risk of death**
- **Mayo Clinic Proceedings, Feb 2000**

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Research even shows that optimists live longer. This study ♣, done at the Mayo Clinic, was a followup of people who had taken the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, usually known as the MMPI, in the early 1960s. The MMPI includes a scale which scores how optimistic or pessimistic a person is.

Thirty years later ♣, the actual death rates that occurred in this group of people were compared to the expected death rates, adjusted for age and gender. It was found ♣ that the 124 people out of 839 who had scored as optimists, lived longer, while ♣ the 197 pessimists in the group had a 19% increase in their risk of being dead. ♣

We can't explain this 100%, although common sense suggests that optimists are less likely to develop depression, and are more likely to have a positive attitude towards seeking and receiving medical help.



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Pessimism is identifiable early in life, and is believed to be changeable. Research needs to be done to see if interventions to help individuals become more optimistic, can decrease the likelihood of physical illness and dying.

Now, while a positive attitude is essential for happiness, and is essential for the four determinants of happiness, it isn't sufficient. You still have to work to achieve those four determinants, sufficient money, perceived good health, a project or passion, and good relationships.

As a physician and psychiatrist, I can help people with health and with relationships, provided they are willing to work. Fortunately, most of the older generation that I see are not afraid of hard work. That's one of the reasons I enjoy working with over-65's.

# Impediments to Good Relationships

- **Blind spots**
- **Negative personality factors**
  - **Narcissistic**
  - **Paranoid**
  - **Schizoid**
  - **Antisocial**
  - **Histrionic**

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Basically, to be happy, we need to work at it, which means we have to put time and energy into having good relationships. Even the best marriages and the most solid friendships require constant effort to keep them that way.

But what if good relationships elude you, despite your best efforts? What can be getting in the way? Here ♣ are some impediments to good relationships.

First ♣, blind spots. This refers to a pattern of behaviour which may be obvious to others, but to which the individual is blind. He or she is unaware of the pattern, or how it gets in the way of good relationships.

Next ♣, negative personality factors are often a problem. For example, some people come across as self-centered, or ♣ narcissistic. Others have a great deal of difficulty trusting others; they may be ♣ paranoid. Others become so anxious around other people that they choose occupations and lifestyles where they will be alone; we call this ♣ schizoid. Antisocial personalities ♣ seem to have no conscience: they may be charming initially, but they hurt others and take advantage of them. Hysterical personalities ♣ occur most often in women; the name is based on the ancient belief that in these women the uterus wasn't properly tied down and tended to wander all over the body.

All of us have personality traits, some negative, others positive. When negative traits are so problematic that they significantly impair functioning in the areas of love, work, or play, we have a personality disorder. I'll talk later about how personality disorders develop.

# Impediments to Good Relationships

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- **Negative personality factors**
  - **Narcissistic**
  - **Paranoid**
  - **Schizoid**
  - **Antisocial**
  - **Histrionic**
- **Hidden anger**
- **Angry behaviour**
- **Unnecessary guilt**
- **Procrastination**
- **Difficulty accepting help**
- **Low self-esteem**

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The third impediment ♣ to good relationships is hidden anger. This is like an acid, eating away insidiously at a person's relationships and therefore at their happiness.

Fourth, for most of us, ♣ angry behaviour simply gets us into trouble.

Fifth, when individuals feel compelled to do things ♣ out of guilt, when the guilt itself is unwarranted, relationships suffer.

Sixth, many of us put off doing the things we know are necessary to improve our relationships. We ♣ procrastinate.

Some of us are exceptionally good at doing things for other people in need. But we may have a very hard time ♣ allowing other people to help us. This interferes with our relationships also. We'll look at how this works later.

Finally, ♣ poor self-esteem not only makes us unhappy in a very direct way, but it also gets in the way of good relationships.

We'll look at how each of these impediments to good relationships work.



# Low Self-Esteem

We'll look at them in reverse order. So, starting with low self-esteem. How would low self-esteem interfere with our relationships?

I know this woman who is a fantastic seamstress. She makes all her own clothes, and also many items for her children. When I notice she's wearing a lovely new dress, and comment on how good it looks on her, guess what she says?

"Oh, it's nothing special. Just something I threw together from some fabric scraps I had lying around".

Clearly, she's self-effacing. But do you notice that she is also saying something about me?

By disparaging my compliment, she is saying, in effect, that I have bad judgment. She's criticising me!

But of course, poor self-esteem goes much deeper than just a person's response to a compliment. Poor self-esteem means that a person doesn't love himself or herself very much. And not loving yourself is also a comment on the people who care about you. Basically, it's a message to them, saying to them that their love for you has little importance, because they love a worthless person. Thus, poor self-esteem is an insult to the people around you.

So the first order of business to improve your relationships is to learn to love yourself more, to learn to care for yourself better.



# Difficulty Accepting Help

Closely related to low self-esteem is difficulty accepting help.

In the Psycho-oncology Clinic at the Jewish General Hospital where I used to work one afternoon a week, I often saw people experiencing difficulty with fatigue or depression after being diagnosed with cancer.

An example is a woman who I saw several years ago. She lamented that she wouldn't be able to put on the Passover Seder meal for her large extended family that year, as she just didn't have the energy. She feared that because of her illness, the family wouldn't get together at all for Passover, and so she was responsible and felt very guilty.

I asked her why one of her adult daughters couldn't have the Seder for the family at her house. She said, "Oh, I couldn't ask her! She's much too busy with her own family!"

I then asked her if she enjoyed doing things for other people. Yes, of course, she enjoyed being helpful to others. It made her feel good! She had a long history of active community and volunteer involvement.

I went on to find out whether she thought other people would also feel good if they were helpful to others. Of course, she agreed.

Finally, I asked why she would want to deprive other people, like her family, from feeling good by turning away their help!

Fortunately, it was easy for her to see that when she was ill, it was her duty to give the others the opportunity to feel good by helping her. It was her responsibility to ask them for help. Taking into account, of course, their capacities and willingness.



# Procrastination

The next impediment to good relationships is procrastination, putting off doing what we have to do to improve our relationships.

In the psychogeriatrics clinic at the Jewish, I encountered many patients who felt that their life was so miserable, they might as well be dead. However, it was rare that they actually wanted to do away with themselves.

Some of these people with such awful lives, are relatively young, late sixties or early seventies. So I asked, how much longer do you think you'll live?

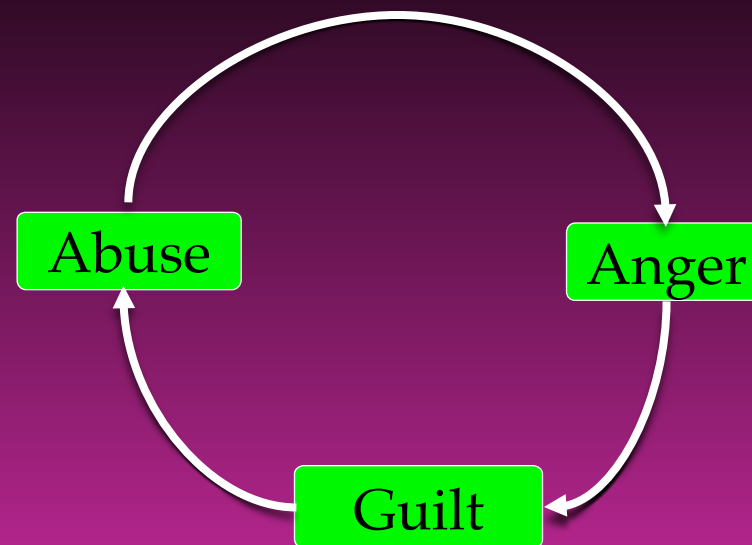
What did they answer, do you think?

Generally, they thought a couple of years, five at the most. With only a couple of years of life left, they feel it's hardly worth the investment in time and energy that it would take to heal their relationship with their spouse or their child. To me, this attitude is a form of procrastination.

But here's the reality that I pointed out to them. Unless they chose to kill themselves, they might live to be 100! Except for suicide, we have no control over how long we live. A seventy year old may have another 30 years of life to go. Almost half their lifetime so far!

Do they really want to be miserable for 30 more years? Or do they want to make the investment in time and energy to fix their relationships?

## Guilt and anger: a vicious circle



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The next impediment is unnecessary guilt.

A number of years ago, when I was working at Douglas Hospital, I used to give talks to groups of family members of chronically mentally ill patients. One time, during the question period following my talk, a man stood up and asked about a particularly difficult situation he and his wife were experiencing. His daughter, a woman in her thirties, had been hospitalised for many years at the Douglas, and the couple, very devoted to her, their only child, would take her home on weekends. The problem was that she would swear and curse a blue streak as well as verbally abuse her parents, endlessly. They felt powerless to do anything about it, as they had been told that their daughter's behaviour was caused by her mental illness.

I asked the father how his daughter's behaviour made him feel. He replied, "I get very upset and angry, particularly when she is so abusive to my wife. But then I feel guilty; after all, she's sick, it's not her fault that she acts this way."

So here we have the father ♣ who's being abused by his daughter. This naturally makes him ♣ angry, as it would anyone. But because he believes that his anger is unjustified, he feels ♣ guilty. His guilt prevents him from acting to stop the abuse, and in fact it leads to more abuse from the daughter, completing ♣ the vicious circle.

How can we avoid getting into this vicious circle? The answer has to do with anger.



# Anger

- **Occurs when we're hurt or frightened**
- **Gives us courage and energy**
- **An automatic response**
- **Angry behaviour can create problems**
- **Wisdom means being less impulsive**

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If anger causes so many problems, why do we even possess the capacity to get angry? What the heck was Mother Nature thinking?

Imagine that you're a mother, 50,000 years ago, living in the jungle. A wild animal comes along and grabs your baby. Naturally, you're frightened. When your baby is hurting, you're hurting. Suppose you aren't able to get angry - it hasn't been built into your genes. What happens? Your baby gets eaten, and your lovely genes, free from all anger, fail to reproduce.

On the other hand, suppose you are able to get angry when you're hurt or frightened ♣. Your anger gives you courage, so you can overcome your fear of that wild animal, and your anger gives you strength and energy to go after that animal and get your baby back. Because of anger, your baby survives, passing on those genes that have the capacity for anger, to future generations.

So anger itself is good - ♣ it gives us courage and energy. Even if anger were bad, there wouldn't be much we could do about it. It's an emotion - it happens automatically ♣ when we are hurt or frightened. We can't turn it off.

So let's forget the notion that we shouldn't be angry. If we get angry, there's a reason. Besides, anger by itself doesn't cause problems - it's angry behaviour ♣ that gets us into trouble. If I get angry with my boss, and punch him in the nose, I'll lose my job, not for getting angry, but for punching him.

In general, when we get angry, it's often best to not say or do anything until we've figured out what not to do. Our capacity to not react impulsively when we become angry, improves with the maturity and wisdom ♣ that accompany age and experience. We learn to count to ten, or a hundred, or even a thousand, till we calm down.

# Anger: the fight-or-flight response

- **Physiologic changes when we are hurt or frightened:**
  - **Blood is redirected to large muscles, skin**
  - **Blood is redirected from stomach and gut**
  - **Less blood goes to the brain!**

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I can't stress enough how important it is to first calm down before making a decision about what you're going to do! There's a very good reason for this. You've all heard ♣ of the fight-or-flight response? When we are frightened or hurt, besides becoming angry, our bodies get ready ♣ to either fight or to run away. For example, the circulation of blood is altered so that more blood goes to the large muscles of the legs and arms so we can fight or run better; ♣ more blood goes to the skin, for cooling. Where does this blood come from? Well, less blood goes to the stomach and gut ♣, because digesting our food is the last thing we need to worry about; and most importantly, blood is redirected away from our brains! ♣ That's right, when we're angry, we become temporarily stupid! That's why we don't want to make any important decisions about what we're going to do or to say, until we've calmed down by counting to ten, or a hundred, or a thousand, whatever it takes.

Now, many people have all sorts of immature or inappropriate ways of expressing their anger. Let's look at some of them.

The person who behaves aggressively when they get angry is the easiest to recognise. You've all heard of road rage, right?

# Spectrum of angry behaviours



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You can think of the range of angry behaviours as being on a spectrum, with ♣ aggressive behaviour at one end. Suppose you're dining out; you've ordered a steak, rare, and the waitress brings you a steak that's thoroughly cooked. If you're aggressive, what will you do? Yell at the waitress across the restaurant, of course, embarrassing her as well as the people you're with.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from aggressive behaviour is ♣ passive behaviour. What do you do if you're the passive type? Why, nothing! And if the waitress asks you, "How's your steak?" what do you say? "It's fine, thank you!"

In between the poles of aggressive at one end of the spectrum, and passive at the other, what do you find? ♣ Passive-aggressive behaviour!

When the waitress asks the passive-aggressive person, "How's your steak?", he will reply that it's not cooked right. If she offers to take it back and get him another one, he will say, "Never mind, it's OK". At the end of the meal, does he leave a tip? Of course not! And he's likely to accidentally run over the flower beds as he backs his car out of the restaurant parking lot.

# Spectrum of angry behaviours



But passive-aggressive behaviour happens all the time. I'm in a meeting at work; my wife beeps me on the pager; I check the number, it's my home, OK, I'll call when the meeting finishes. But then it beeps again, same number. This time, I think it's an emergency, and I excuse myself from the meeting to call home. My wife answers, "Henry, I forgot to get bread when I was shopping today. Be a dear and pick up a loaf on your way home from work."

Now, I may be angry at her for calling me out of a meeting for a loaf of bread, but I don't want to start a fight, so I just say OK. Later that day, I arrive home empty-handed. "Did you get the bread?" my wife asks. "Darn! I forgot!"

This kind of forgetting is passive-aggressive behaviour.

I used my wife in the example, but I want to emphasize that it's entirely fictional. In actuality, she would never page me for a loaf of bread.

# How hidden anger develops

- **Classical conditioning**
  - **Unconditioned Stimulus (US): mommy's absence**
  - **Unconditioned Response (UR): panic**
  - **Conditioned Stimulus (CS): anger**
- **Anger will subsequently trigger panic**

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So angry behaviour, not the anger itself, creates problems in our relationships.

We can assume that the aggressively angry person is aware of his anger. But it may be that both the passive and the passive-aggressive types are unaware of their anger or of their angry behaviour. It's unconscious, as the psychoanalysts say. This hidden anger is another of the impediments to good relationships I showed you earlier. How can it be ♣ that someone could be totally unaware of their anger?

Consider a six-month old infant in a crib; it's 3 am, and the baby wakes up, with a wet diaper, the blanket off, in the dark, feeling hungry. What does the baby do? Cry, of course. And when the infant cries, Mommy usually comes. What does the baby do if mommy doesn't show up? Most babies become enraged in this situation; they begin to scream. What if mommy still fails to show up? At this point the infant panics. After all, its entire world consists of itself and mommy, and mommy is a robot who responds when baby pushes the buttons on the remote control, that is, cries. If mommy doesn't respond, for the baby, its world has just come completely apart. It's as if you woke up one day and learned that the entire world, except for yourself, had been destroyed in a nuclear war. The psychoanalysts have a word for this kind of panic: annihilation anxiety. When mommy doesn't show, the baby experiences, after its anger, an overwhelming fear.

Those of you who remember your psychology 101, will know that we have here ♣ the elements of classical conditioning, like Pavlov's dog: ♣ the unconditioned stimulus is mommy failing to show up, ♣ the unconditioned response is panic. ♣ The conditioned stimulus here is the sensation and behaviour associated with the anger ♣ that baby experienced just prior to the panic. The conditioning ♣ causes future experiences of anger to trigger panic, even when mommy shows up.

# One-trial Learning

- **A form of classical conditioning**
- **No repetition necessary**
- **Does not extinguish**
- **Requires one of:**
  - **Extreme nausea**
  - **Intense fear**

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Big deal, you say. The effects of classical conditioning wear off, don't they? Not always. Who has heard of one-trial learning? ♣ This is a kind of classical conditioning, except that it only takes ♣ one trial for the learning to take hold, and it ♣ never extinguishes. In the case of lab rats, it occurs in two situations ♣ : after eating something that makes the rat ill, the rat will forever after avoid that food; and the second situation is when there's intense fear. The experiment the rat doctors use involves a cage with a floor that can be electrified so that the rat will receive an electrical shock. When the experimenter applies the juice at the same time as ringing a bell, the rat will scurry around like crazy until finally finding a little platform in the cage where he no longer gets the shock. Forever after, when the rat hears the bell ring, he will head straight for that platform, even if the floor is never electrified again. If you could ask the rat why he continues to jump on the platform even though he's not getting any shock, he would tell you it's because he's on the platform. It's like this schizophrenic patient who was always sitting on his hands in the hospital's dayroom. The staff asked one day why he was sitting on his hands; he said, "it keeps the CIA away". The staff responded, "but that's silly; there's no CIA around here!" To which the patient replied, "See? It works!"

# One-trial Learning

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So, to go back to this 6-month-old baby who woke up, got angry at mommy for not showing up, and then panicked: these are just the right conditions for one-trial learning to take place. The baby will believe forever after that becoming angry leads to intense fear. It may even develop the fixed notion, born out of its omnipotence, that its anger actually caused mommy to disappear forever!

Because it's one-trial learning, the baby will remain under the very powerful influence of this association, even years later as an adult. And it's almost a certainty that the adult will have no insight into this response within him or herself, much less any memory of how it came about. In other words, this will be part of the unconscious. Why? Because a six-month-old has not yet developed the capacity for symbolic thinking, which is necessary for speech, and I believe is the basis of consciousness. But that's a subject for another talk.





# Problems in personality development

I am now going to talk about negative personality factors, which in severe cases are called personality disorders. How do these come about?

First off, what is personality? I think that personality is how we relate to other people. We're not born automatically knowing how to relate, although babies possess two hard-wired characteristics that help a great deal: they can smile, and they can imitate. By doing these two things, it's almost guaranteed that they can get mommy to pay attention to them.

But smiling and imitating aren't enough to maintain relationships when you get older; people need to learn a whole repertoire of behaviours that are helpful in relating to other people. Most of this learning takes place through imitation. Children imitate their parents: how mom and dad relate to each other, how each of them relates to the child and to any brothers or sisters. Children will also imitate any other adult or child that they're in contact with. So the bottom line is: choose your parents very, very carefully!

# Problems in personality development

- **Absence of good teachers or role models**
- **Brain dysfunction**
- **Learning the wrong stuff**
- **Bottom line: don't blame yourself**

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Seriously, though, problems in personality development can arise in a number of ways. I won't even get into the very severe relationship difficulties of autistic children or adults, who may not have the hard-wired capacity to smile or to imitate in an adaptive way.

- ♣ Relationship behaviours cannot be adequately learned if there is an absence of good teachers or role models in the child's life: for example, parents divorce or die; they may be sick and hospitalised; or they may be emotionally unavailable because of depression.
- ♣ If the part of the child's brain that learns personality is somehow defective or damaged in a minor way, personality learning will also be defective. This is analogous to other types of specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia.
- ♣ Finally, the role models may have had personality defects themselves. For example, children who get physically abused by their parents grow up to abuse their own children.

The point is, there are perfectly valid reasons for many people to be the way they are, reasons which are not within their control. These people thus have no reason ♣ to feel guilty or to blame themselves. That's the good news. The bad news is that, once they are made aware of their personality difficulties, they then have the responsibility to make a real effort to overcome these problems.



# Overcoming problems in personality development

- **Time**
- **Energy**
- **Motivation**
- **A skilled, experienced psychotherapist**

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How can a person overcome personality difficulties? Consider someone with dyslexia. He or she can eventually learn to read adequately, but it usually requires a lot of time and effort, a skilled and experienced teacher, and a highly motivated pupil. The same is true of personality problems ♣ : motivation, effort, time, and an experienced psychotherapist. Time alone often helps: people who learn from their mistakes will improve, but it may take many years.



# Blind spots

Finally, the first item in my list of impediments to good relationships: blind spots. Blind spots are dysfunctional patterns of behaviour of which the individual is unaware. They are much like personality problems, but are less pervasive. They often occur only in specific interactions with specific people. For example, a woman may get along very well with her husband, her children, co-workers, etc. but have a difficult time with her elderly widowed mother. Mother frequently accuses daughter of not caring about her, of not loving her, even though daughter visits daily, does all the grocery shopping, brings over several cooked meals weekly, and drives mother to all her doctor appointments. Daughter is unable to recognise that her mother is pushing her guilt button, and that she is being psychologically abused, but when she feels near the end of her rope, what with two children at home and a husband to look after, as well as a job, she does on occasion get a little nettled and speaks sharply to mother. Mother, of course, uses this tiny bit of anger as further evidence that daughter doesn't love her or care about her.

Do you recognise in this scenario the vicious circle of guilt and anger, all over again? Pervasive, isn't it?

# Blind spots

- **Everyone has them**
- **Enlist a helper**
- **Write a non-aggression treaty**
- **Open your ears!**
- **Plan alternative strategies**
- **Practice!**
- **Try it out for 3 weeks**
- **Get feedback**

(This slide has builds!)

So, what to do about possible blind spots? First, ♣ accept that you, like everyone else, has one or more blind spots. Second, ♣ enlist the help of a caring individual such as a close friend, to help you identify them. Write out and sign a written promise that you will not express your anger at them ♣. Have them tell you in a constructive way what they see as the repetitive behaviour patterns in your life that cause you grief ♣. They should simply hold up your written promise when you react in disbelief and anger to what they tell you. When you've calmed down ♣, figure out what you can do or say differently in the situation that triggers your counterproductive response. Practise ♣ the new behaviour in front of a mirror, and in role-playing with your helper. Then try it out ♣ with the real-life individual. Continue to do this diligently for 3 weeks, so as to establish the new habit. Finally ♣, get feedback from your helper.



# Self-help vs Psychotherapy

## “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” - Robert Pirsig

(This slide has builds!)

I mentioned psychotherapy when talking about personality problems, and I spoke about a very specific self-help technique for dealing with blind spots. Of course, there are many other self-help approaches. For example, companies such as CareerTrack offer seminars aimed primarily at businesspeople, on subjects such as getting along with difficult co-workers, being an effective negotiator, and so on. That company, along with many worthy competitors, offers the same types of programmes on DVDs or CDs for individual use. Then there are self-help groups, ranging from Alcoholics Anonymous to the sessions for caregivers of Alzheimer patients offered at your local CLSC.

How do you decide ♣ whether to go for self-help strategies or get psychotherapy? Well, it's a little bit like car maintenance. Many people like the do-it-yourself approach for routine maintenance and minor repairs. But there's an investment in time, energy, and tools, including learning. Even the most ardent do-it-yourselfers, however, will go to the mechanic when there's a major breakdown and they need the vehicle.

Then there are people who feel that life is too short to make everything a do-it-yourself project, and they will take even minor problems to the expert.

Which type are you? If you have difficulty deciding, ♣ read the book by Robert Pirsig titled “Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance”.

What I'd like to do now is cover some specific techniques for achieving the four determinants of happiness. I'm willing to bet good money that all of you already know these techniques. And to prove it, I'm going to give you a little quiz.

# Sufficient money

**He who pays the piper ... calls the tune**

**Beggars can't be ... choosers**

**A fool and his money ... are soon parted**

**The early bird ... catches the worm**

**Nothing ventured, ... nothing gained**

(This slide has builds!)

First, techniques to help ensure that you have sufficient funds. Tell me how this sentence should end: he who pays the piper ... ♣ calls the tune.



# Perceived good health

**God helps those ... that help themselves**

**An apple a day ... keeps the doctor away**

**Eat to live, but ... do not live to eat**

**Hope for the best ... and prepare for the worst**

**Early to bed, early to rise, ... makes a man healthy,  
wealthy, and wise**

**Six hours sleep for a man,  
seven for a woman, ... and eight for a fool**

(This slide has builds!)

Let's try the same exercise to test your knowledge of how to have perceived good health. Complete the phrase: God helps those ...



# **A project or passion**

**What is worth doing ... is worth doing well**

**All work and no play ... makes Jack a dull boy**

**Make hay ... while the sun shines**

**A stitch in time ... saves nine**

**Too many cooks ... spoil the broth**

(This slide has builds!)

Now, how about keeping active in your life, having a vocation or avocation that gets you up in the morning?

How does this proverb end: What is worth doing ...

# Good relationships

**People who live in glass  
houses ... shouldn't throw stones**

**Actions speak louder ... than words**

**Birds of a feather ... flock together**

**The proof of the pudding ... is in the eating**

**Forgive ... and forget**

**To thine own self ... be true**

(This slide has builds!)

And now, what do you already know about forming and maintaining good relationships?

Try this one: People who live in glass houses ...



# The Golden Rules

**Do unto others ...as you would have them do unto you**

**Whatsoever a  
man soweth ... that shall he also reap**

(This slide has builds!)

And finally, the Golden Rules. I suspect that they're both found somewhere in the bible.

Do unto others ...

See, I told you you already know everything you need! But seriously, proverbs are helpful as catchphrases, but they're a little weak when it comes to details.

So, in the time we have left, we can look at a couple of specific techniques.



# Some strategies

## Ask others for help

(This slide has builds!)

When you're sick or otherwise troubled, you have a responsibility ♣ to ask others for help. It's your job. Why? Because it gives them the opportunity to feel good about themselves. It's your obligation to your family and to the community that you are a part of. Take it seriously. It's also your task to tailor your request to their capacities and degree of motivation.

We talked about this earlier, when I told you about the woman with cancer who was reluctant to ask her daughter to help with the Passover Seder. But there are many people who seem to be obsessed with doing everything for themselves. They will justify this by saying, for example, "if you want a job done right, do it yourself", or they may feel that others don't care to be helpful. Can anyone here not see the hidden anger in these attitudes?



# Set tiny goals

(This slide has builds!)

Ever been faced with a difficult task and failed? For example, stopping smoking. I can tell you all about stopping smoking: I'm an expert; I've stopped smoking many times!

There's a principle here about setting goals; I'll use smoking as an example to illustrate my point. Nicotine, as you know, is probably the most addictive substance known to man, so kicking the habit is very, very difficult for most people. Many individuals tell themselves one day, that's it, that was my last cigarette, I will never smoke for the rest of my life. And for a short while, they feel good about their resolution.

Think about the implications, though. When will this person find out whether he's been successful in sticking to his resolution? Not until he actually dies! He will know right away when he fails, but he will not taste the sweet taste of success for a long, long time, if ever. He might be comatose when he dies, and never realise his success!

Try this instead: instead of not smoking for the rest of your life, set yourself the goal of not smoking for the next minute. Think you can do that? And when the minute's up, you can congratulate yourself on your success. That was easy! Let's go for another minute! And when one minute at a time becomes too easy, stretch it to two minutes, and so on.

Instead of never being successful, you will enjoy success in meeting your goals many times a day. And nothing succeeds like success!

It's like a big salami sausage. Much too big to eat! But once it's sliced, each slice looks easy enough...

The principle is: ♣ break the overall task into tiny little goals, so that you're almost guaranteed to be successful for each little goal.



# Trust your gut instincts

(This slide has builds!)

I talked earlier about hidden anger, how it might come about, and about how it might manifest as passive-aggressive behaviour. Another way in which people express hidden anger is through crying.

Now, there are several different kinds of tears. There are tears of sadness, tears of anger, tears of joy, crocodile tears; maybe more.

How can you tell if someone is crying tears of anger and not tears of sadness?

Imagine that it's a kid crying. Those of you who are parents will have no difficulty with this. If the kid is sad, their best friend has just moved to Vancouver, what is your gut reaction to their tears? Right, you want to put your arms around them, hug them, comfort them.

What if the child is crying angry tears, having a tantrum? You've just said "no ice cream before dinner!" What is your gut reaction? Yeah, you just want them to go into another room!

Your instinct is usually pretty accurate, so ♣ pay attention to how you feel, when someone is crying. Unfortunately, some people, for example those who were abused as children, do not have normal gut reactions to a child's crying. Any tears make these people angry. This seems to be one of the factors which causes abused children to become abusers themselves with their own kids.

You need your gut instincts to be aware of others' hidden anger, as well as your own. Recognition is the first step to dealing with it, for example, to break out of the vicious circle of anger and guilt.





(This slide has builds!)

This next one is something I learned from a CareerTrack audiocassette program. The speaker told a story about this golf foursome; they were good friends, played together regularly. One was teeing off; his friends were off to the side, waiting their turn. The man at the tee swung and sliced his ball way off into the woods. Well, he started jumping up and down, yelling at one of his friends: “It’s all your fault! You were talking - you distracted me!” Now his friend could have responded in any number of ways. He could have said, “You’re crazy!” He could have said, “Cool it - you got up on the wrong side of bed this morning”. If the golfer had been a woman, he might have muttered something about PMS.

Well, he did none of these things. What he did instead was to say, “My friend, I apologise from the bottom of my heart”. ♣ What could the angry golfer do? Well, not much, of course. He just sort of muttered to himself, and the game went on.

♣ An apology acts as an appeasement signal. It turns off aggression. Other species have appeasement signals which are highly effective. Humans seem to have lost these somehow, but apologising seems to work.

So if somebody is angry at you, whether it’s justified or not, you can get them to stop their angry behaviour towards you by apologising. This works only if the apology comes across as sincere, however.



## Overcoming fatigue and depression

Finally, I want to share with you something which I'm researching. It has to do with the connection between sleep habits, depression, and fatigue.

A few years ago, I had a young woman patient with bipolar affective disorder, which you might know by the term manic-depressive illness. She was relatively stable on her mood stabiliser medication which she was taking regularly. However, one day, just a couple of days after I'd seen her in the clinic, she called my office. It was clear from her tone of voice, her rapid and pressured speech, and her grandiose ideas, that she had all of a sudden become very manic!

What had happened? She insisted that she had been taking her medication as prescribed. It turns out that her brother had gotten very ill, and she had spent the night at his bedside in the Intensive Care Unit. She hadn't slept all night, and the next day she had become manic.

Now, I knew that sleep deprivation had been used to treat depression, but my patient had become manic from sleep deprivation! It turned out that there were other reports in the research literature of sleep deprivation triggering mania.



# Overcoming fatigue and depression

Well, if too little sleep can cause mania, could too much sleep cause depression? After all, many people think mania and depression are at opposite ends of a spectrum.

Dr. Wiegand over 20 years ago had suggested a similar idea: that too much Rapid Eye Movement sleep, REM sleep for short, could cause depression. What is REM sleep? It's the stage of sleep during which we do most of our dreaming. It occupies about 25% of our total sleep time. It generally occurs every ninety minutes or so during our sleep. Each period of REM sleep tends to be longer through the night, with the longest period of REM sleep at the end of the night. The tendency to have REM sleep seems to have its peak at around 8 am.

How would a person get too much REM sleep? Well, if you slept longer than you needed, or if you slept late, you might get too much REM sleep.

I've done two questionnaire studies, one with cancer patients at the Oncology Clinic at the Jewish, the other with a group of fibromyalgia sufferers. I've presented the results at a number of conferences, including the Canadian Sleep Society annual meeting.



# Overcoming fatigue and depression

- **Get up early!**

Briefly, what I found was that, in both groups, the amount of depression as well as of fatigue, was higher the later the person got up in the morning.

What I think happens is, people who get up late get too much REM sleep. If they are predisposed to depression, probably because of a genetic predisposition, too much REM sleep makes them depressed. If they don't have this tendency to get depressed, they will simply develop fatigue, the kind of lack of energy, of motivation, of strength, seen in people with chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, AIDS, or just about any chronic illness. This kind of disabling fatigue can even occur in people who are otherwise quite healthy.

So what's my suggestion? ♣ Get up early. 6 am is a good time for most people.

Of course, most people with this kind of fatigue also complain of insomnia. They would insist that they are hardly getting any sleep at all! How could they possibly be getting too much REM sleep?

If you want to explore this further, why not ask about it during the question period?

Reti

Ben

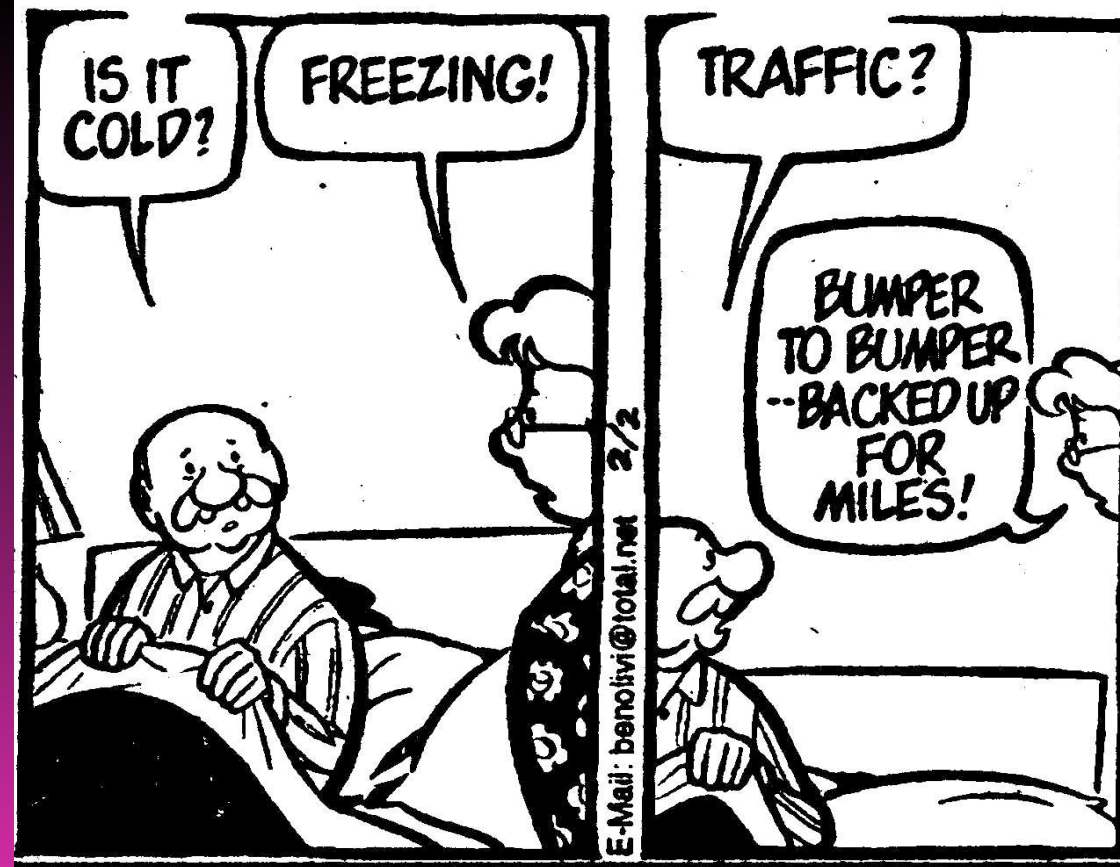


To close, I'd like to share with you a couple of my favourite comic strips. In the mornings, when I'm reading the Gazette, right after the Quote of the Day I immediately turn to the comics.

That's because laughter causes endorphins to be released in the brain. Endorphins are substances like morphine and heroin, except they're perfectly legal. Endorphins take away pain and make you feel good. Besides laughing, there are a couple of other things that stimulate endorphin production: exercising vigorously for at least 30 minutes; singing; and eating hot chili peppers. I try to do all of 'em.

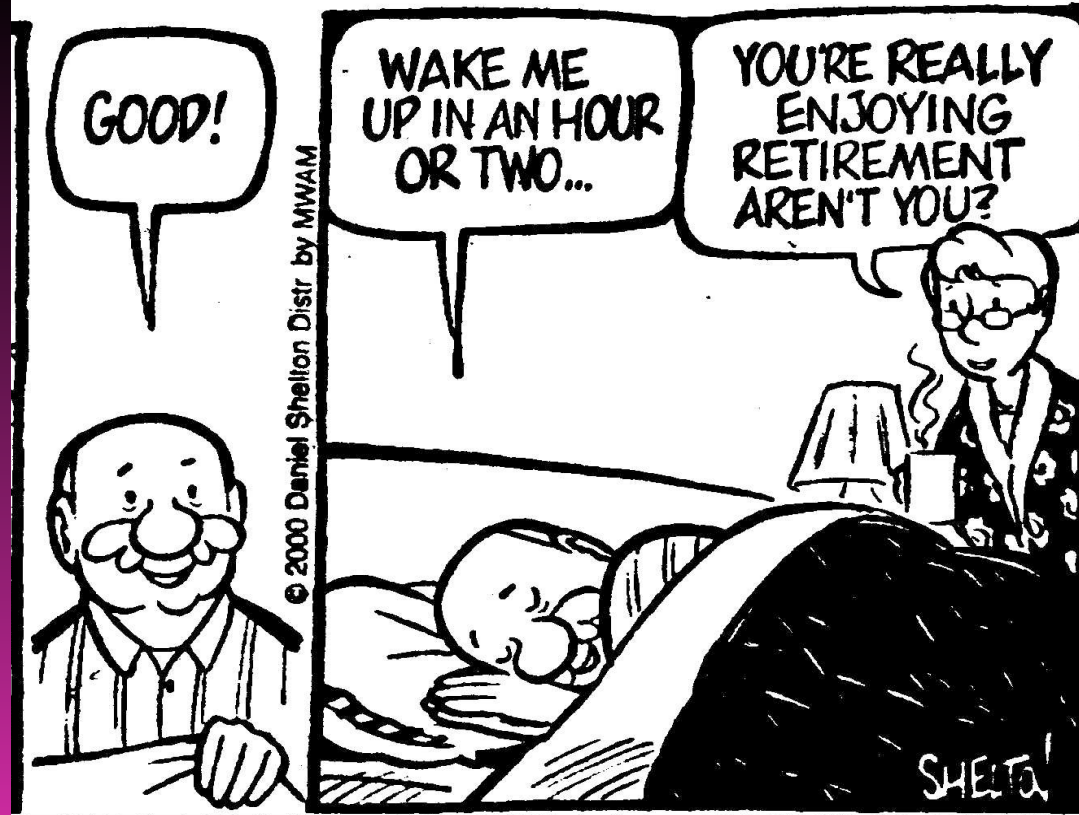
Even if you don't laugh, at least smile. Smiling can make us feel better in at least two ways: by direct pathways from the facial muscles to the centres of emotion in the brain, and by way of other people, who are likely to smile back at us when we smile at them. So smile a lot!

♣ Here's what Ben has to say about looking after yourself:





By Daniel Shelton





**Key  
to  
long  
life**

**Shoe**



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And Shoe's take on living for a long time:

By Jeff MacNelly



## Rising early



And this, just after you've heard me talk about the benefits of early rising.

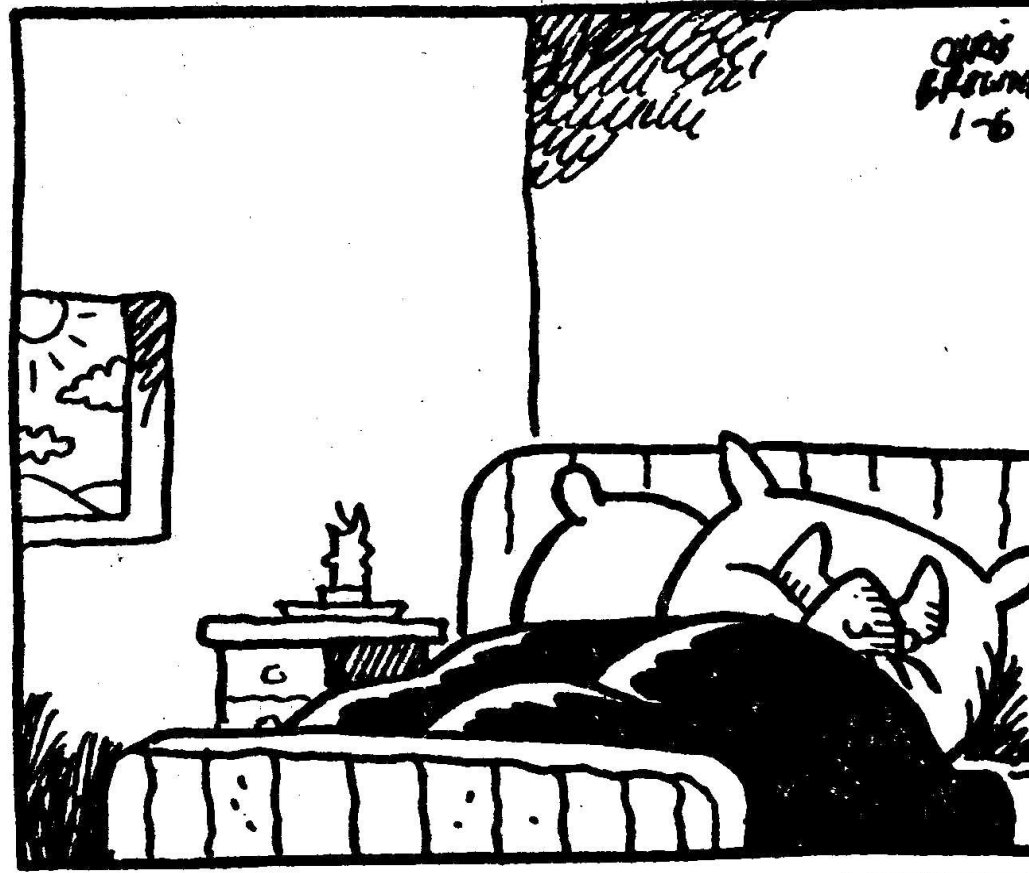
Thank you for being a great audience!

**Rising early**

THERE'S THE  
LEAKY ROOF,  
THE BUSTED  
DOOR HINGES,  
THE LOOSE  
FLOOR  
BOARDS  
AND  
UH...



By Chris Brown



Thank you for being a great audience!

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