

Don't Worry - Be Happy

By Mary Lee Peterson

Don't worry, be happy. Why didn't I want to write about this? I fumbled with this idea all week -- we have to worry and can't be happy! After all millions of people are dying at war all over the world. Folks are dying on our streets through violence or poverty. The world is warming and it's irreversible! Religious fundamentalists from every major religion except Buddhism are killing others who don't believe as they do. It's irresponsible and selfish to not worry and just be happy Pollyannas!

Is it possible that it's a choice? A choice each of us make every moment we're awake (and maybe even when we're sleeping). It doesn't seem that way -- I think that every emotion I feel and every thought I have just are and that these emotions and thoughts define me and therefore are the truth. Being angry or happy or disgusted or frustrated or annoyed or lustful or loving or generous or scared or silly or anxious are the truth. Why would I possibly choose them -- especially the negative ones. How can it be a choice when my nervous system pumps chemicals into my bloodstream in response to a comment or an idea or a flash of light or a breath of air? What a drag! Is it possible that how I feel is inside me and not out there? It's me and not you? Pshaw!

Then one day I was standing in the checkout line at Safeway. I was looking off to the side when the person in front of me stepped hard on my toe. In the nanosecond it took me to turn toward them, a fury rose up in me like a rogue wave at the beach. I turned toward him in shock and anger -- and saw he was on crutches and had accidentally stepped on my foot. The anger receded so quickly that I almost felt dizzy and the pain in my foot disappeared. Now this can't really be true that not only my feelings are a product of mind but also my physical pain? What I thought about this jerk who stepped on my precious foot had created the rush of adrenaline and the intensity of the pain in my foot. And when I saw he was on crutches and wasn't a jerk, my feelings totally changed to sympathy and empathy and a willingness to help. Is it possible that other things that I think can cause me to be either happy or sad or distrustful or generous? Did what I think create the anger and heighten my physical pain?

So what does this mean for the rest of my life? Did my mind create all the stories I base my life upon and respond to the world with? If that is true then what else am I creating? What else am I thinking that is making my life miserable or unproductive? Is it possible that I created the story that my father committed suicide because I was the wrong baby? Is it possible that I'm not too old or stupid or unlovable to create a happy life! Do I choose to worry instead of being happy?