

silver--lining Podcast Scripts

2. “Life filters”: Optimism & Co.

William Shakespeare once wrote, “Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners”. Now, what on Earth does this mean, and how can this apply for our daily life? I’m Daniel, and this is the second episode of silver--lining.

[intro sound]

If you thought this topic will be as complex and heavy as the last episode, you thought wrong. You are not alone, though. Most people think of very complicated neurological processes and encrypted philosophical messages when figuring out what their attitude towards life is. Sometimes, we resort to putting labels on our “life filters”. You may call me an optimist, a positive nihilist, an absurdist, whatever you think fits. Yet, the truth is that our attitude towards life can’t be distilled into one word. It’s something flexible, something we figure out and work on our entire lives. Oftentimes, it integrates many contemporary philosophic notions at the same time, or creates completely new ones. This is why it’s pointless to try to tell you which idea you should live by, and much more meaningful to tell you how to find your way to happiness in life, whatever your personal journey is.

It often seems like our mood and the way we perceive events in our day to day life depends on the events. For instance, if it’s your birthday and you get to celebrate it with your friends and family and a lot of birthday presents, you might say it’s impossible not to be happy, unless something bad happened beforehand or you associate birthdays with negative memories. On the other side, if you just lost a family member and are failing at work, it may seem like grief, anger and frustration is the only way.

Nevertheless, our brains and hearts are a lot more malleable than we think. We are not conquered by our emotions and mood swings, at least not entirely. It turns out that, with a little practice, we can use our biology and chemistry to improve our state of mind. Permanently.

There are about 80 muscles in the human face. They all can usually alter the brain’s blood supply and, consequently, the brain’s functioning. Have you ever heard someone say that laughing, even forcibly, makes you happier in the long term? They may have had a point. Already in 1907, French physician Israel Waynbaum held that facial expressions directly affect feelings. This is just one example of how mechanical our body is. It’s not some abstract, uncontrollable creature of its own. Rather, it’s like a somewhat predictable vending machine. When you consciously put the right amount of value and information into it, you can very much decide what your results will be. Proper education, nutrition, physical exercise and emotion management strategies can lead to an incredible balance in life and, thus, to your immediate happiness. Or, if you don’t want happiness at this moment, clarity.

This can start with meditation. Now, this doesn't have to be some spiritual awakening in the middle of a stone circle in a nearby forest. Meditating can be so many uncomplicated and not embarrassing things. I personally meditate while making my bed, or washing the dishes, or working out. It can be as easy as counting up to twenty and breathing deeply and regularly. Apart from seemingly limitless health benefits like longer attention spans, reduced stress (which we will talk about in the next episode), enhanced self-awareness, the reduction of age-related memory loss, better sleep and increased pain control, it makes you live consciously and helps to slow time down. Remember how I mentioned the spinning world we're living in in the introduction to this podcast? It's not a myth, it's a reality. As we get older, it's very common to feel like each year passes by faster. With age, we keep seeing more and more similar things and situations, so our brain partly shuts down the possibility of looking for new experiences and impressions. Time is subjective, and when each time we repeat our routine year for year, the repetition makes us believe times to be the same and thus running out. Meditation, or any other form of independent emotional relief, helps us take a break and open our eyes to the world. There is always something to learn and something to work on. Like our mental health!

To make a long story short: There are thousands of ways to influence the way you're feeling. Laughing and meditating are popular possibilities, but you can always find new approaches for yourself. Always keep in mind that you can shape your reality. I actually have a poster in my room that says "Life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it". Now that I think about it, life may be 100% how I react to it. The physical landscape of Earth establishes where I was raised, what resources I have available, what necessities I have to live properly. But at the end of the day, what I remember is the way how I reacted to external factors to balance my internal condition. If nihilism tells us that there is life is meaningless, I say: Give it a meaning! A meaning for yourself. A meaning that's not material possessions, but rather emotional well-being in yourself and those around you. Sharing love and happiness to make the world a better place to live, not just to survive.

The term "life filters" is a funny thing. Professionals would probably call positions such as optimism, pessimism and nihilism something like life attitudes or philosophical approaches. The thing is, I went into this podcast with the goal of sharing my own experiences and perspectives, not repeating what scientific journals have already said countless times. Science is accurate, but sometimes impersonal. I hope that, by combining scientific facts with heartfelt commentary, I can make this very personal. Anyway, about "life filters". When I wake up in the morning, I sometimes have the feeling that I woke up with black lenses in front of my eyes. When I wake up the next day, they're gone and I have golden lenses on. It's incredible how it can get to the point where I feel like there are different moods available for my brain every 24 hours, no matter whether good or bad things happen.

I have come to notice one thing: Rigidity and conformity are the enemies of stable mental health. Just because you have experienced frustration and joy in confusingly short and alternating daily intervals for so many times, it doesn't mean you can give up on your emotional well-being, thinking 'Oh, there is nothing to change about it either way, so might as well just go with the flow'. No! We need to go out of our way to counteract all the negativity in the world to create a balance within ourselves. Living like this will prevent our life from going stale. If you manage to remind yourself daily that you can physically impact the way you

perceive things and produce the exact outcome you want in the long term (for most, happiness), you can add spice to your life and grow a real character arc.

To avoid daily repetition and supremacy of heavy, negative feelings that just won't go away no matter how hard you try, you can literally create a weekly schedule to program your body accordingly. Healthline lists numerous activities you can try right now: Cleaning up your room, meeting friends, planning out your week, ditching your phone, exploring nature, therapy, self-care rituals (make your face glow, for example), giving compliments and gifts, keeping a journal, reevaluating your goals and values in life, cooking... Don't ever feel like you are not in charge of your mind – you can control more than you can believe!

Ask yourself: What do I want? What do I want for those around me? What is my current situation? What do I want my future to be like? What is the difference? What are immediate solutions to this difference? What am I here for? What matters most to me? Am I giving in to conformity and repetition?

Be clear with yourself and others. Living consciously and in the moment has been scientifically proven to improve mental health dramatically. Carpe diem is just the beginning. Seize the day, yes, but be aware of what the day means to you and to your emotions, how it affects you and your loved ones, and what you can do to maximize your joy and your growth within each day. Don't confine to just one philosophical idea. Make your own philosophy. I can only emphasize once more that human biology is often controlled by our thinking, our philosophy, our values. Use that inextricable link to remove unnecessary life filters and start living your life to the fullest today. You already did by listening to this podcast, so what's stopping you from continuing?

[outro sound]