



Getting Into & Staying in The River of Joy & Well-being

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Life is about living in a constant current of well-being and joy. For some it has been a long time since they stepped *into the river*; others expend a lot of energy trying to stay in the river and for a few the river has become home. If you are standing on the banks, start moving towards the river. If you are struggling to stay in, recognize that it may be time to surrender and flow with the river. If you are in the stream be aware of the moment you begin to fight the river or step towards its banks, and remember living in a state of well-being and joy should be effortless.

The first step toward getting and staying in the river is accepting that you deserve to be there all of the time. For some of you, this first step is a giant step, and it requires a lot of work. Can you look in a mirror and say with conviction, "I deserve the best life has to offer." Try doing this without looking away, without flinching. Do it until you believe it is true. You will know you are there when you can say it and feel every part of your body align with it. Once you believe you deserve to be in the river of well-being and joy, take the next step by recognizing that you have the power and control to get there and stay there. Others or circumstances don't 'cause' you to step out of the current and onto the bank and walk away from the river. Your own thinking moves you away from the river. You are in control; nothing and no one can make you step out unless you give permission.

Much of my work is with teens and adults, and I have worked diligently to explain the latest scientifically tested theory of human behavior (Perceptual Control Theory) in a way that is easily understood and applied in daily living. I think of my work as teaching people how to get back into the stream and stay there. The first skill I teach is, "Ask, Don't Tell." This practice sounds simple, and simple doesn't mean easy. After I've worked a sixteen-hour day, when I walk into my kitchen and find a sink full of dishes and trash sitting on the counters and my two sons sitting in front of the TV playing a video game, asking is often the furthest thing from my mind. What I've learned is that when others are involved, asking keeps me in the river of joy and well-being by keeping me from stepping onto the bank of blame, shame and guilt. When I step onto the bank and start telling others everything they are doing wrong, I am moving away from the river. More importantly, I have probably started to burn the bridges that cross back over to the others' rivers. Instead of telling, I can walk downstairs and ask, "When do you guys think you'll have the kitchen cleaned up?" The real beauty here is that you have just modeled for those you love most that the way to handle frustration is to stay calm and focus on fixing.

This idea of asking questions to stay in the river applies not only to your relationships with others; it also applies to your relationship with yourself, to your own thinking. Being in the river means asking yourself

questions instead of getting sucked into the quick sand at the river's edge, the mucky ground of blame, shame, self-pity, would have, could have, and should have. Shifting your thinking from, "*I made a mistake*" to, "*This is a learning opportunity*" keeps you in the river. Staying in the river means asking yourself questions like: Could I have done worse? Could it be worse? Am I the first person who ___? What can I learn from this? In five years, will this really make a difference? Who do I want to be in this situation? When you ask these questions, instead of feeling a tug that pulls you from the water, you feel yourself becoming stronger and gaining skills to navigate life more successfully. Just as walking in a strong current strengthens your leg muscles, seeing learning opportunities strengthens your being muscles.

For me, the easiest way to stay in the river is to follow a practice that I teach to teachers and parents of young children, "Keep it simple." I focus my actions on three "Be's," being safe, being a friend, and being helpful. One day, as I was explaining this skill, a woman in my class chuckled and said, "Ms. Roy, if I just focused on those three things, my life would be a whole lot different right now." She was right. One of the easiest ways to get and stay in a state of well-being and joy is to focus on being safe, being a friend and being helpful. Start with yourself. One of these three will apply in almost all of life's learning opportunities. Am I **being a friend** to me when I let myself be sucked into blaming and shaming myself? Am I **being safe** when I abuse my body, my mind, my soul? Am I **being helpful** when I focus all of my time and energy on making money rather than spending time with the people I love the most? Children are masters at staying in the stream of joy and well-being. Just try to pull them out and see what happens! Be a child and don't let yourself be pulled away.