

A BOOK ABOUT

Health & Happiness

Jock McKeen
and Bennet Wong

The Haven Institute Press 2007

THE HAVEN *Bookabout* SERIES

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Editors' note

The Haven Bookabout Series comprises titles by faculty members and course leaders at The Haven Institute on Gabriola Island in British Columbia, Canada. You can find details about The Haven on page 158 of this book.

A Book about Health & Happiness is the first title to appear in the series. Its authors, Jock McKeen and Bennet Wong, are the founders of The Haven and have been closely involved with its development over some 25 years. Their emphasis on relationships, on communication, and on personal responsibility without self-blame are central to the educational philosophy of The Haven.

The book is now in its second printing, and two more titles have been added to the series: *A Book about Living with Passion* by David Raithby and Sandey McCartney, and Joann Peterson's *A Book about Anger, Boundaries & Safety*.

The Haven has touched the lives of thousands of people, ourselves included. We hope that this book, and the series of which it is part, will help you create for yourself a life of increasing health and happiness.

Toby Macklin and Rachel Davey

A BOOK ABOUT

Health & Happiness

*To the many people
who have come to The Haven
to share with us
in exploring life and healing*

Introduction

Possibly you have been feeling unfulfilled, unhappy, ill, out of sorts. Or perhaps you simply want more in life than you have experienced thus far. If so, you probably have sought the key to changing this in many places. It is our belief that you can be healthier and happier, and feel connected to all of life. It is possible for you, in this lifetime, with your current job and relationships. You don't have to change the outside world. The transformation that is required is internal – the keys are within you.

We are two physicians who have been working together in the area of personal and professional development for the past 35 years. After our initial training in psychiatry (Ben) and western medicine and classical Chinese acupuncture (Jock), we pooled our resources in a remarkable relationship experiment, and have been learning ever since from our own lives and those of our clients. We outlined the story of our collaboration in our book *The Relationship Garden*.¹

Our training in western medicine taught us that we, as practitioners, were responsible for the state of health of our patients, and the burden was on us to dispense the correct advice or medications to each individual who consulted with us. In the conventional medical view, the body is a mechanism, and when there is difficulty, it is because of some breakdown or because of faulty parts that need replacing; our role as doctors was to accurately diagnose what was 'wrong' and prescribe what was needed to 'fix' the problem. In our practices, we soon learned that not every person could be treated the same; some people responded to one approach, while others required something quite different. Furthermore, we began to see that some people were willing to take more responsibility for their situations; these people seemed to be able to move through their current difficulties, learn from them, and move on. These were easy clients, since they were in charge of their circumstances, and came to us as counsellors and consultants rather than as the 'ones with the answers.' Others, who remained as passive victims of circumstance, seemed to languish in their disagreeable states, and nothing we as physicians could do seemed to alter this much. These early experiences in practice led us to the conclusion that it was our clients who were primarily responsible for their health and healing, not us!

We were dissatisfied with the mechanistic limitations of our western medical training, and found much stimulation in the energy and bodymind approaches that were surfacing in alternative therapies in the 1970s. We studied Reichian breathing,

various forms of bodywork and numerous energy theories that helped to fill out our understanding of ourselves and our clients. In our practices we were no longer just ‘doctors behind our desks’; rather we engaged in open dialogues with clients, in which we were sharing our lives and investigations, comparing notes with those who came to see us. We were also teaching our clients breathing techniques that helped them let go of restrictions and discover more health and vitality within themselves. In our common waiting room, our patients met each other as they waited for their appointments. We began to realize that people were coming early in order to join in the energetic exchanges that were occurring. Sometimes, the pre-appointment interactions were so invigorating to our clients that they would ask to have another person from the waiting room join them during their treatment hour. As the day progressed, more and more people remained in the office, joining in the investigation of life that focussed on the next client. We were doing group work now, and the conventional individual client hour was transformed into a process of sharing between numbers of people.

About this time, we had the opportunity to lead a three-month residential experiential learning workshop in a rural setting. We closed our offices in the city to lead this innovative program, and we never went back to private practice again. The rest of our professional career has been conducted in groups; we have found that the learning that people have done is much more extensive and enduring when it is accomplished in a group setting.

We discovered that the quality of people's relationships correlated directly with their state of illness or health. People who were isolated or whose relationships were in turmoil seemed to have more illnesses, and when they were ill, they did not cope as well as those who had a harmonious relationship with at least one other person. We hypothesized that by investigating relationships, we could find the keys to illness and health. We began to see that people's communication skills and relationships issues were much more important than diagnosing specific disease states. We purchased a home in the country, and continued our study of our own relationship on a continuous basis, while working on the process of communication with others at the retreat centre nearby. Our theory of personal development began to converge with our medical understandings, and we began to elaborate a theory of life that has clarified for us over the many years we have lived and worked together.

This is a book about health and happiness and fulfilment in life and relationships. From our experience in our own lives, and from working with thousands of people, we have found a clear link between the quality of one's relationships with others and the levels of health and happiness that one can enjoy. We maintain that health, happiness and fulfilment can be achieved through the creation and maintenance of at least one intimate relationship. Just what we mean by 'intimate' will become clear as you read on.

First though, what constitutes human happiness? Freud's view was that the mature person's happiness comes from the ability to love and work; the inability to do so is labeled as 'neurotic.' Humanistic psychologists maintain that the happy person is able to express the Authentic Self; the inability to do so is experienced as purposelessness and meaninglessness ('anomie'). Those who subscribe to a 'growth model' of human motivation would say that people need to express and grow, and that the inability to do so is experienced as an unfulfilled life. From the vantage point of the existentialist philosophers, people are driven to connect; the inability to do so is experienced as isolation. Our proposition, which we will expound in this book, includes much of the above – we propose that health and happiness are integral parts of one another and involve the ability to *love, work, express, grow and connect*. Human beings experience wholeness when they can develop these abilities, and feel incomplete when they have not met these important challenges.

Happiness, health and fulfilment occur when human life energy is flowing, harmonious and free. Disease and unhappiness occur when energy fixates. These are the 'blockages' that manifest as disease states. Undo the fixation, and the disease symptoms will diminish and potentially disappear.

This idea has its roots in classical Chinese medicine, which teaches that illness occurs when there is some restriction of the life force flow. Health occurs when all aspects and dimensions of

our human system are in balance and harmony. Forward thinking western scientists now reflect what Chinese medicine has been teaching throughout its 3,000-year history. Humans are like all living creatures in that they are capable of being in an open, growing state, or a closed, defended state. Recent information from cellular biology suggests that this occurs at the level of the individual cell, as well as at the organismic level.

It seems that people open and close in relation to their perceptions and interpretations of the world around them; furthermore, they are often influenced by historical factors that are not current in their lives. Humans are subject to the vagaries of unconscious prejudices, unexamined assumptions, and memories of past threats. In order to be more fully in charge of when they open and close, individuals need to become more aware of their unconscious motivations to close and defend. A major area where defence and closure occur is in relationship with other people. All relationships go through a series of phases, which could develop into more openness and growth (this is what we think of as intimacy); however, people often get stuck in the early phases of relationship by being defensive, mired in blame and guilt. We addressed this issue in *The Relationship Garden*.²

If fulfilment and health come in the establishment and maintenance of intimate relationships, why do people find this such a challenge? The desire to be right and make the other wrong is often involved in people's tendencies to close off from each other;

this is the underlying motive for defence, and as such is often the root of disease. Over the years we have asked, “Why would people rather be right than happy?” This is a theme that will recur throughout this book.

So, our fundamental thesis is this: people can become healthier, happier and more fulfilled in an intimate relationship. This takes work, dedication and know-how. However, the prize is worth the effort. Individuals need more self-awareness in order to be able to influence this process. Thus, it behooves everyone to know more about what contributes to their being defensive, and what tools they can use to open up and grow.

People’s attitudes set them up for success or failure. Individual will and emotions are deeply involved in states of illness and health. This is a radical proposition that challenges traditional teachings in health care, which maintain that we are victims of external agents such as microbes and chemicals, de-emphasizing the vital importance of personal attitude and lifestyle. We will address this issue in more depth in the coming chapters.

More and more over the years, we have come to the view that human life is a school, in which people can learn important lessons. From this perspective, all issues relating to our physical and emotional wellbeing can be seen as potential lessons in life. No matter how extreme the health challenges, or how severe the setbacks, people can find fulfilment and promise in every experience. This book will address how you can learn to achieve a life

of enrichment and creativity, while experiencing health, satisfaction and wholeness.

When we connect with another person, we connect to all of life. Human beings in deep communion with each other can become involved in a holographic resonance with larger energy systems. Exciting discoveries in modern science involve a holistic world view that suggests deeper meanings inherent in everyday lives. We discuss these ideas more in Chapter Nine.

We recognize that people want answers to their questions, and might hope to find some in a book like this. For us, the questions are more important than quick answers – asking serious questions about life can lead into productive territories. In this book, we want to encourage you to question and think. We don't have easy answers for you; but we have ideas about how to mine the rich ore of your life. We have a firm conviction that life is what we make of it, and by changing our perspective, we can see in much richer and deeper ways. As a consequence, life can be more fulfilling.

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves... Do not seek the answers that cannot be given you, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers.

– Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*³