

Excerpt from Chapter 4: **“Greenlighting,”** from *Becoming Divinely Human*

The power of loving what is

Consider this: you can't fully control your thoughts and impulses.

There is a widespread idea that we can control our destiny by controlling our thoughts and/or the beliefs that underlie them. Sometimes the message is overt: think and grow rich! And sometimes the message is subtle, as in “Whatever were you *thinking* (that made you do that stupid thing)?” Although the intention of most positive-thinking teachings is to help empower people to be successful in their lives, there is a hidden shadow side to this framework that can be insidious.

In reality, you cannot fully control the thoughts you have, at least not directly. Thoughts are mysterious! Some are echoes of what you've ingested from media—from news, advertising, TV programming, music, movies, books, etc. Some are echoes of things your parents, teachers, bosses, and peers have said to you over time, both positive and negative. Some are repetitions of conclusions and decisions you made (beliefs) about yourself and the world in response to the situations and events you encountered.

Some of your thoughts and impulses will be positive and optimistic, some fearful and pessimistic, some judgmental and critical, some angry and reactive, some creative and playful, some sad and/or dissatisfied with life. Sometimes you will feel healthy, energized, and ready for whatever life brings. And sometimes you will be feeling anything but that, and simply

want to crawl into a hole. Not only do you have a vast array of thoughts, and the feelings that correlate with those thoughts, you also have feelings about your feelings. You probably think it is only natural to like how you feel when you are “up” and to dislike how you feel when you are “down.”

The blame game

Because we have the ability to reflect on our internal states of being, and because we are hard-wired to try to figure out what causes us to feel as we do in order to prevent a recurrence of unpleasant feelings (as well as create more instances of “good” feelings), we tend naturally toward assigning blame for our feeling onto *something*. Commonly, that something will be a person or situation in our lives that appears to be blocking our happiness. It may be something in the present, or an incident from the past that, in our judgment, left us permanently damaged and unable to be happy now.

Problems occur when you eventually get tied up in knots of your own making. There is no longer such a thing as simply feeling whatever you’re feeling: the thought or feeling now has a whole story around it, plus some ideas about how to change it—either to have more of a good feeling or to get rid of an uncomfortable one. You might feel overly responsible for all the thoughts and emotions that you have, and the result is embarrassment or shame when you are unable to deliver the idealized life experience you’ve been taught to desire.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. In the last chapter, we spoke of relaxing out of your conditioned way of being, as you tire of trying to make your life work through your own efforts. The next step beyond relaxing is to begin actively

greenlighting yourself, including all of your thoughts, feelings, impulses, and beliefs about reality.

Greenlighting is not passive resignation

“Greenlighting” is a term borrowed from the film industry. When a producer decides a script is basically good enough to take it into production, they say they are greenlighting the project. It means the project will go forward. It doesn’t mean it’s a final product yet—indeed, it may go through a whole series of rewrites and improvements along the way. But greenlighting means it is fundamentally okay and worthy of further development.

In a similar fashion, we can greenlight ourselves in our fundamental okay-ness and worthiness. Greenlighting is a powerful tool to help counteract all the programming we’ve internalized in our lives that tells us that we are NOT okay or worthy. It’s not about passively resigning ourselves to how things are. Instead, greenlighting is based on a framework that we, like that film script, are a work in progress.

Greenlighting is not an affirmation

Affirmations and positive thinking practices attempt to assert the “truth” of something that is not currently apparent. For example, “I am showered with financial abundance,” or “I am totally healthy.” While this may have some value, the limitation of affirmations is that no matter how many hundreds of times you say or write such a statement, the conditioned part of you that holds a different view will not be displaced and will tend to reject the affirmation as wrong or untrue. It simply doesn’t work to try to stuff feelings or paper over them

with false positivity. What is ignored, or not felt, will remain the same—it will keep coming back, over and over.

With greenlighting, we permit ourselves to think and feel as we do *without trying to change those thoughts or feelings*, or replace them with a different idea. We radically embrace what is with compassion, and then experience how it naturally moves toward greater wholeness.

Greenlighting is an active investigation

You are greenlighting when you actively permit exactly what's happening in you now—all of your faults, failings, and shortcomings as well as your gifts and strengths—in a spirit of curiosity about what can be discovered. Perhaps you feel ashamed of not living up to your ideals, or not being as good a person as you aspire to be. Perhaps you've hurt others, been dishonest, or committed something you (or your family, community, or church) considers wrong or a "sin." As you greenlight the resulting discomfort, you also greenlight the shame itself—meaning you allow yourself to feel it so you can learn more about what's going on. When you embrace whatever you're feeling, you can begin to investigate it in a way that begins to restore your natural wellness of being.

If you've been taught that you're responsible for your thoughts, feelings, and life experiences, you may harshly blame yourself for what you judge to be your weaknesses, limitations, and failures. You will also tend to blame yourself for your lack of success, or your lack of perfection. Self-blame leads to shame, and feelings of shame keep most of us in deep hiding, from one another and from ourselves.

We think of this as only normal. In our daily interactions, we put on a smile and pretend to be upbeat. We speak only of the things that we are proud of, and edit our story to avoid talking about places where we feel less than successful, or the ways in which we are unhappy. We tell ourselves that we don't want to make anyone else uncomfortable, but what are we actually doing? We are presenting a false picture of being someone who has his or her act together. As a consequence, most people go around thinking that everyone else has better lives, are more successful, and are happier than they really are. In our innate tendency to compare, we find ourselves lacking. This leads, in turn, to an even greater sense of shame and a greater impulse to lie to keep others from finding out.

Subtle hypocrisy

Many spiritual organizations foster an especially insidious type of hypocrisy when they outline a blueprint for acting, for example, as a "good Christian," or a "good Buddhist," or a "good New Thought (or New Age) Practitioner." Perhaps the ideal is described as someone who is always even-tempered, generous, upbeat, and never agitated. When there is a value scale around desirable and undesirable emotions, people begin to imitate the desired feelings when others are watching in order to be accepted, and hypocrisy is born. They say the "right" things and perhaps do the "right" actions, but it doesn't come from genuine spiritual awareness on their part—merely from trying to follow "the rules." The downside of this shows up when there is no tolerance for being a real, live human being who feels and thinks things that aren't in line with the prescribed dogma. Feeling this judgment can increase the desire to avoid letting others see you as you are, and increase

your sense of being different or not fitting in. This can, in turn, lead to more shame, or, ironically, more arrogance, or both.

This need to project an image of being happy and successful is especially pronounced in those who take on the role of teachers, ministers, spiritual leaders, or advisors. After all, don't you want those you look to for advice to be accomplished at what they are teaching? In they are teaching about success, their lives must be the epitome of success, and if they are teaching about inner peace, they better not ever be agitated! This kind of expectation can become a prison to such a teacher or a leader, preventing them from being authentic in their expression. And it can perpetuate, for the student, a myth of false perfection that they strive (and inevitably fail) to emulate. (*BDH*, pp. 51-57)