

# AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS

— IN —

## Seven Emails



*A philosopher's simple guide to the psychology of joy,  
satisfaction, and a meaningful life*

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# Foreword

I was asked to write a foreword to this book. I'm not a writer and I really don't even know what a foreword is, except that books often have them at the beginning. I was also told that it should contain my sincere thoughts and that my thoughts are supposed to tell you something about the book that will make you want to read further.

So here goes:

It is a bit surreal thinking about how my life has changed since I first reached out to Professor Wong asking about his course on happiness. I feel like such a different person now and my days feel as if they are tinged with a little brighter color. I would like to say that the quality of my life before I began receiving his emails now seems like a distant memory. The truth is that I'm still reminded of it on a daily basis, but I feel better equipped to handle it all.

Before my initial email, I was distressed that I would never find a way to deal with what I was going through. And then our email exchanges had a rocky start.

Do you know how when you send an email to a stranger (kind of like a cold call), you have no idea how they will respond? Maybe you got their email from a friend or relative and you're asking for a favor, like, "Hey, I'm a friend of Bill and he said you had some extra tanbark you are no longer using because you've decided to lay down some sod."

Then you start wondering about their response: *will they be nice and give me the tanbark, or will they at least let me down easy, or will they ignore me, or worse, will they treat me like dirt?*

## Authentic Happiness in Seven Emails

And have you ever had it happen that after you send the email they actually respond back to you, not just with an answer, but with another question, and they keep doing that after all of your emails? And then you never know when you should stop responding because you guys aren't really friends?

Our email exchanges, and so this book, started off like that.

To be completely honest, I thought the professor was a bit of an ass after his first few responses. And who in the world writes emails that are several pages long, anyway? Do all humanities professors do that?

But now, after having read the email exchanges again, I was the one who sounded like the ass. That's okay. It was worth it.

I also know how odd it will seem that I stopped responding to his emails for over a month. Believe me, it's not that I wasn't reading them. In many ways it was BECAUSE I was so absorbed by them, so excited to read them that I wasn't able to write back until I did. And yes, during some of the longer breaks between his emails I was worried he may have forgotten about me. Even if I could have written back earlier, what was I supposed to say to somebody who was gracious enough to share as much as he did? "Hey, Buddy, where's the rest of my free stuff?"

Other than a few minor edits, I think you'll be reading them just as I did. I am excited to know that you may be undertaking the same interesting journey that I experienced.

To help make you want to read further, I can honestly say that the seven emails in this book (more like a dozen really, if you count the introduction and epilogue) opened my eyes to the possibility of a better life. You don't need to be miserable to make use of them. I think you just need to be curious and open to new perspectives.

Does that make you want to read further? I don't know.

What I do know is that I'm so happy I had the courage to ask that one simple question that most people are not just afraid to ask because the answers seem obvious, but never really even think of asking.



## Foreword

What I also know is that if you are like me, after reading these emails you'll never see happiness the same way again.

With gratitude,

-Vickay D. M.

P.S. You know how sometimes you come across differently in an email than you do in real life? This idea definitely applies to me here. Please be kind and keep that in mind. ☺



### *Editor's note:*

Though the book contains the emails as they were first written, to make it more valuable to the reader a few alterations have been made. For one, some grammar has been corrected and certain words or phrases have been emphasized with font style changes that may not have been part of the original email exchange. Two, some section headings have been added throughout to make the long emails easier to digest for the general public. And three, definitions have been added to the beginning of some chapters to better frame the discussion that follows. I hope they help.

Lastly, on a side note, I never thought Vickay sounded like an ass – at least not any more than is considered culturally normal behavior. ☺

-JW



# *Psychology of Happiness*

## *(Syllabus Excerpt)*

### **Course Description:**

This course will provide an introduction to the psychology of human happiness. Students will explore the latest research in the field of positive psychology and learn practices that can be used to enhance a person's quality of living. Through lectures, discussions, videos, and hands-on exercises, students will gain knowledge of how to help themselves and others live happy, satisfying, and meaningful lives.

### **Course Learning Outcomes:**

*At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:*

- Describe the psychological roots of human unhappiness.
- Explain why happiness is more of a choice than an object to pursue.
- Teach others, or implement in their own lives, scientifically backed exercises and habits that lead to experiencing a life full of more joy, satisfaction, and meaning.
- Compare and contrast the findings of modern positive psychology with the wisdom of Eastern psychology and other spiritual traditions.
- Create a *Personalized Inspirational Guide to Well-Being* for themselves or clients.



# *Introduction*



**Sent on 9/15/2013 10:32 AM**

Dear Professor,

I heard that you teach a quarter-long course on the psychology of happiness. I have a quick question regarding this topic that I hope you can answer for me.

I'm currently a little past middle age. My life experiences have left me very confused about happiness.

I've done everything I thought one is supposed to do to be happy. I went to school, got a degree, found a high-paying, stable job, and made some good investments that afforded me a fairly wealthy lifestyle. I found a wonderful partner, started a great family, and lived in a picturesque home in a pleasant neighborhood. While we were married, my spouse developed a successful startup and we became the envy of all our friends and family.

But this did not lead to happiness.

Eventually I left my job for one with lower stress and convinced my partner that we would be happier if we lived a simpler life. But after making this drastic lifestyle change, we slowly drifted apart. I thought the opposite was supposed to happen! Eventually, I left him. (It could have been the other way around, but that doesn't really matter, right?)

So even when I stopped focusing on money and lived a more modest life, I still wasn't able to find happiness.

## Authentic Happiness in Seven Emails

I was depressed for a while, but never broke down or hit the med-line. I was just caught up thinking *woe is me* until one day when I looked at the world and noticed the world isn't really happy either. People suffer every day with illness, accidents, and natural disasters. Think about all the violence in the news, all the threats of war, all the corruption, crime, greed, terrorism, etc. These are all signs of people trying to make themselves happy at the expense of others and failing miserably at it.

I see this all the time: people reacting angrily or out of frustration to trivial things, holding onto grudges, or looking at everyone as if they are about to wrong them. I constantly see people worrying about matters outside of their control, or stressing out over decisions long past, replaying them in their minds as if addicted to a bad movie, living every day afraid they'll catch a cold.

I remember a specific day not that long ago when I saw all of these happen in the span of a few minutes. A customer in line at Starbucks just blew up, screaming when another customer accidentally brushed his shoulder as he walked by. The person behind me was depressed that he was only able to afford one Grande Mocha Frappuccino a week on his current salary. The couple in front of me were complaining non-stop too. The husband complained about how the line was moving too slowly for them to make it to their movie on time, while the wife was talking about how their friends at the theater were going to be so mad about their lateness. To top it off, the cashier was giving his life story to each customer, talking about how he accidentally shaved off too much of his dog's fur last night, which was somehow his mother's fault.

It just seems all so stupid. And this isn't just a one-time occurrence, professor. I see similar scenes all the time. Most people seem lame when it comes to life.

When I found out that you *taught* a class on the psychology of happiness, it piqued my interest, but I also kind of cringed. I think most people fool themselves into thinking they're happy, when they're really miserable most of the time. I just don't believe it's nor-

## Introduction

mal to be happy. It doesn't seem like real happiness exists for most of us. What do you have to say about that?

Warmly,  
Vickay D. M.



**Sent on 9/15/2013 12:23 PM**

Dear Vickay,

I greatly appreciate your thoughtful email and the time you spent writing it.

To answer your question: I agree with you.

Thanks,  
-JW



**Sent on 9/15/2013 3:10 PM**

Dear Professor,

I have to be honest. Though I don't believe in the existence of happiness anymore (or at least, long-term happiness beyond the occasional win by my favorite sports team or the momentary feeling that comes with a well-timed cigarette), I was kind of hoping you would give me a longer response that proved me wrong.

I missed the opportunity to take your course the last time you taught it, and I haven't been able to find out when you're teaching it next. So, I was hoping you'd share a few insights from your class to help me out.

But, if happiness doesn't exist, then **WHAT THE HELL DO YOU TEACH!?**

Warmly,  
Vickay



**Sent on 9/15/2013 5:23 PM**

Dear Vickay,

[FYI, this email turned out longer than I had planned.

Please bear with me.]

I greatly appreciate your warmth and your curiosity on this subject.

But before you read further, if you feel like you need immediate help, rather than email me, I suggest you see a counselor. Because we are not speaking in person, it's hard for me to gauge your emotional state at the moment. Learning about my course may not be of much help if what you need is more immediate personal attention.

I am primarily a philosophy and humanities instructor who has also taught introductory psychology and statistics courses. As a humanities instructor I'm interested in questions like, "What makes life meaningful?" and "What do we value and why?" Like you, I am curious about happiness.

What I have found out with my students is that in order to engage them in course material (whether it's a discussion on Taoism, Descartes, the workings of the nervous system, or how to analyze an artifact of popular culture) I must communicate how the material will be of use to them. They need to see how the material is meaningful to what they go through in life. Oddly enough, people seem engaged when I find a way to show how the material is related to heightening their experience of happiness. I can be enthusiastic and creative with the way I teach how to find the standard deviation of data, but it still may not stir a bone in my students' bodies. But if I say, "and this is how you can make a million dollars with this knowledge" or "and this is how you can have unlimited orgasms," their eyes widen as if they were jabbed with a shot of adrenaline. I first discovered this with my introductory psychology courses. One quarter, I started to teach the course by focusing on how knowledge



## Introduction

of all of these disparate psychology topics (psychodynamics, personality theory, perception, brain functioning, classical conditioning, etc.) can be used to help us live life *more elegantly*, as I phrased it. We often don't study how to be a more skilled life-liver as directly as we learn how to be a better mathematician and writer.

As I began to reframe the course as an exploration of how to achieve a positive engagement with life, I submerged myself in the psychological discipline where many new happiness findings were occurring – the study of positive psychology. What I found was very enlightening. I thought it would be wonderful to summarize some of the findings and help disseminate them to the public through a graduate course. So I proposed one to my department and was lucky enough to be given the chance to teach it.

However, as I said, I'm not primarily a psychologist, but a philosopher. After reviewing several studies presented in positive psychology texts, it occurred to me that this research has significance beyond the study of psychology, to philosophy and humanities courses in general.

In my graduate course, we not only explore these results objectively, we think critically about what they mean for us subjectively. We try to see how we can personalize the results, trying to make meaning of them in a way that can improve the quality of our individual lives.

My students and I also take these results and explore them in the contexts of cultural paradigms, wisdom traditions, spiritual practices, and self-help belief systems to see what place they have in a life well lived.

In a nutshell, this is what the hell I teach. ☺

Thanks,  
-JW

P.S. I never said that happiness doesn't exist. I just agreed that it isn't necessarily normal in our society to be happy all the time. But why should we settle for just being normal?



**Sent on 9/16/2013 10:14 AM**

Dear Professor,

Thank you for your own thoughtful response.

Believe it or not, I do speak to a counselor on a weekly basis, but she isn't exactly an expert on happiness. (Part of me wonders if counselors are experts at anything, but maybe I'm just a bit hard to deal with.)

It's not that I'm suicidal or anything. I don't think of myself as a head case. I'm just fed up with the way I've been living my life. I can feel so trapped in stress, negativity, and dissatisfaction. I fall into lulls where I don't feel motivated to do much of anything other than get angry.

It often feels like I've been imprisoned by my own unhappiness.

I know you must be a busy person and, reflecting now on my past emails, I think I've been beating around the bush and have been asking the wrong questions, assuming you would know what I was really asking. I'd like to cut to the chase.

Due to circumstances beyond my control, I was unable to attend your last course sessions, and will be unable to attend any in the near future. Because of my limited access to your course, and because of all the positive things I've heard about it, I was hoping you could provide some knowledge that could help me answer one important, simple question:

*How can I be happier?*

Or to not seem so selfish: How can *we all* be happier? I'm not asking for the keys to Nirvana or a hand to walk me up the stairway to heaven. I'm just looking to see what you might have to say to point me in the right direction.

Sincerely,  
Vickay



**Sent on 9/16/2013 2:38 PM**

Dear Vickay,

I greatly appreciate your honesty and your directness. I can't really impart everything we cover in the course in a single email, nor do I think anyone who claims to be able to teach people how to have a happy life through one email (or two, or three, or six emails for that matter) should be taken seriously.

You can imagine that I frequently receive random emails concerning material from the courses I teach. I usually do not have the time to provide nonstudents with responses. But fortunately, I've taken the summer off from teaching in order to work on a new textbook for my class. Your request has come at a very good time.

Let me first say that the final project for my class is for the students to design their own well-being guide: a simple summary of key ideas that resonated with them from the course that they hope to never forget. As I write my textbook, I find myself often referring to my own guide – what has resonated with me from all I've learned and taught about the psychology of happiness. To keep it simple and inspire me to take action, my personal guide is narrowed down to seven reminders: three important (and maybe counterintuitive) ideas about the pursuit of happiness and four skills for living a happy life.

This I can share with you in a series of seven emails. I'm not offering any official advice, just a chance to peek into my personal notes and see how I plan to live life a little more elegantly.

Many people just intuitively live this way. The rest of us can become so used to a life of negativity and dissatisfaction that we become resigned to it. Even if our lives aren't miserable, they aren't optimal, and we take it for granted that happiness is only an *occasional* state. You used the word "trapped," but you could also say "entranced." To escape, I think one first must open her eyes to the possibility of a better way of living. So whenever anyone shows interest in this information, I'm excited to share it.

## Authentic Happiness in Seven Emails

Also, since I was the only intended reader of my guide, I left out some ideas, having already absorbed them. Now that I am using it as a basis for the textbook, I need to look again at these concepts, and decide how best to explain them to the general public. I would greatly appreciate it if, at some point after reading these lengthy emails, you could provide feedback so that I may improve my textbook. I just ask that you be patient, since I'm not sure how long it will take me to send each section.

Does this sound good to you? I can also just recommend some other books for you to read if you prefer.

-JW



**Sent on 9/16/2013 3:27 PM**

Professor, I would be honored and grateful if you could share excerpts from your guide. I can't tell you how much it would mean to me, especially after finding out about your course. I'd much rather read what you have to say first before reading other books.

I will definitely provide you with feedback, but I imagine having more questions than anything else. Either way, I promise to get back to you in one way or another after reading your emails.

Thank you!

-Vickay



**Sent on 9/16/2013 5:34 PM**

Hello, Vickay,

It's settled then. Over the next few emails, I will try to send some information that I hope helps you develop *your own way* of living life more elegantly.

I'll begin by first pointing out that the question you asked two emails ago, while direct, may be flawed as it makes an assumption I don't believe is necessarily true.

You asked, *What can we all do to be happier?* In a sense, I don't think people can be happier. Or at least they shouldn't focus on that.

Instead, I think people can be happy – a small, but very important distinction that I'll clarify later.

But your question is a great place to start.

-JW





*Part*

I

# **Know Thyself**

Three Key Ideas to Ponder Concerning the Search for Happiness







## *What makes us happy?*

**Email #**

**1**



**Sent on 9/16/2013 7:34 PM**

Dear Vickay,

*How can I be happy?*

Presumably when you asked me this question the other day, you realized that it's kind of a funny question to ask. Most people think they know what will make them happy, don't they?

If you look at their behavior, you can see them make choices reacting to the world in ways that they believe will make them happier – either in the short term (eat some ice cream) or in the long term (work out, go to work).

I know you mentioned that you have lived life and didn't seem to be able to find happiness. I don't believe that's true. I think you found happiness. I think that most people experience happiness all the time. The issue is that some of us experience unhappiness just as often, if not more often.

## Authentic Happiness in Seven Emails

In other words, the happiness you experienced didn't stay with you as long as you would have liked. Because of this, you are continually feeling as if you are chasing happiness, trying to recapture it, or trying to maintain it. Does that sound familiar?

Let's look at what most people think about happiness. In my classes, one of the first exercises I have students do is form groups, have one member take out a piece of paper, and draw a line down the middle of the paper.

On the far right side, I ask each group to first spend five minutes writing down everything that makes them happy. The only instructions I give them are to write down everyone's ideas and to be as specific as possible, and I recommend thinking about any experiences they have had recently, even within the last 24 hours.

At this moment, I suggest doing this yourself before continuing on with this email. I'll even cue you with a little pause symbol. ☺

~

OK. Now, on the other side of the page, I ask them to write as many things as they can that make them unhappy. Again, I tell them to be as specific as possible and to think about recent experiences.

~

Let's take a look at both lists. If you're like most of my students, the lists are going to sound a lot like the song "My Favorite Things" from *The Sound of Music*.

Here are a dozen typical list items based on the dozen or so times I taught my introductory psychology course.

## What makes us happy? - Email #1

### **Happy:**

- Honest spouse
- Money
- Shopping
- Beer
- A raise or promotion at work
- Sunset
- Getting a new car
- My child's smile
- Good weather
- Good tacos! Good food in general
- My favorite sports team winning
- My friends
- Nice teachers

### **Unhappy:**

- Bills
- Bad drivers
- Rude people
- Not getting the job I wanted
- My kid crying or throwing a tantrum
- Homework/quizzes
- Cheating boyfriends/girlfriends
- My favorite team losing
- Cell phone or computer freezing
- When my boss yells at me
- Broken nails
- Dirty dishes
- Mean teachers

Are these lists similar in any way? What similarities does your list have with them? If you didn't make a list, I invite you to look at your own behaviors and ask yourself *what do I do in my life to be happier?*

Quarter after quarter, student after student, I get the same type of lists. And when I look at my own behavior, and the behavior of people around me, it's similar too.

But what is the similarity?

Here's one way to look at the list: all items mentioned are outside of us. They all refer to the conditions of our lives; our circumstances. They mention either other people – whom we really have no control over – or external things and events.

For most of us, especially in Western culture, the search for happiness is a search for hidden treasure. If I can only get \_\_\_\_\_, I will be happy. If I can only find \_\_\_\_\_, I will finally be happy. If only \_\_\_\_\_ happens, I will find happiness! To be happier, we must change the conditions of our lives.

Based on your first email, you seem to epitomize this as well when you mentioned your striving for the great education, job, financial situation, spouse, etc., and saying something along the lines of “I tried looking for happiness everywhere I was supposed to look, but couldn’t find it there.”

Most of us in the Western world accept this premise of happiness as fact. We may not say it to one another, though some of us do, but if you look at how we live our lives, this seems to be our guiding philosophy.

## **A Different Approach to Happiness**

Fortunately, positive psychologists have done several studies that look to see if this approach is really the right one. After reviewing several of these studies, including studies of twins (to isolate the impact of heredity), a group of university psychology researchers arrived at a very interesting conclusion.

Psychologists Sonja Lyubomirsky, David Schkade, and Kennon M. Sheldon summarized their conclusion in the following formula for happiness:

$$H = S + C + V$$

H is our subjective level of happiness, S is our genetics, C is the conditions of our lives, and V is our voluntary activity (how we choose to think and respond to the world).

You can think of the formula this way. S indicates how much of our happiness level is based on heredity, C is the cards we are dealt in life or the external conditions of it, and V is how we respond to these external conditions or how we play with the hand we’re dealt.

## What makes us happy? - Email #1

Before reading on, take a guess as to what percentage of our happiness is dependent on S? How much is dependent on C? And how much do you think our happiness is dependent on V?

~

Finished guessing?

According to the studies, here are the results:

$$H = S (50\%) + C (10\%) + V (40\%)$$

If you're like my students, a couple of things may have surprised you here.

The first is that 50% percent of our happiness is dependent on our genes. That seems like a lot. It means that some of us are born with a tendency to be pessimistic and more prone to a gloomy disposition, while others are born with a tendency towards optimism and a more cheerful state of mind.

But that really isn't the most important result. A more important statistic is that ONLY 10% of our long-term happiness is the result of our circumstances – the amount of money we have, the type of houses we live in, the type of people that cross our paths, the cars in our driveways, the shoes we long for, or our jobs.

Now, don't misread this. This isn't to say our circumstances do not affect our long-term happiness. It's simply saying they are not as significant as genetics and our voluntary responses to life.

Take money, for instance. Research shows that raising people's income above the poverty line has a significant effect on their long-term happiness. However, the effect of money on long-term happiness after that is minimal.

Compare this idea to the fantasies many have of winning the lottery.

“Oh, how happy I would be if I were to win the lottery. I would be so much happier!”

Well, psychologists studied this too. In a famous study of 22 lottery winners, researchers compared their levels of happiness before

and after winning. What do you think happened to their levels of happiness?

Immediately after winning, their levels of happiness spiked through the roof! Okay, that makes sense. But then what?

Oddly enough, after one year their levels of happiness came back to baseline. They reported being at the same level of happiness as they were before having won the lottery!

Some psychologists believe this indicates that we each have a **happiness thermostat** of sorts. There is a strong pull, based on the factors in our happiness equation (S, C, and V), towards a certain happiness baseline.

With the exception of death, most major accidents, and violent crime, this thermostat also seems to work in the other direction as well.

In one study, the levels of happiness were tracked for those who had suffered horrific accidents that left them paraplegic. It's not just that their lives were altered forever, but simple basic tasks we take for granted, such as feeding ourselves or getting out of bed in the morning, were taken away from them.

Obviously, the moment after the accident they were angry, depressed, and experienced the full spectrum of negative emotions.

Yet, the curious thing is that by the eighth week after the accident, they reported experiencing more positive emotions than negative ones, and after one year, their level of happiness was reported to be close to the baseline before their accident.

It seems as if there really is an internal pull towards a happiness baseline. But you can probably see this for yourself with your own life experiences. Think of that item you really wanted and eventually got. Or that test you didn't do very well in. Do you remember how your level of happiness may have spiked (as in the first case) and dropped (as in the second case), but eventually you came back to baseline?

Have you noticed that in general? Have you noticed those things you really wanted at the store and got gave you that high at

first, but then a week or month later you were back to baseline, now craving something else to make you happy? Heck, there may even be a pair of shoes or a shirt in your closet that you were dying to have last year that's now just gathering dust.

Now, I can understand if this 10% business is hard to believe. It goes against much of what our culture believes (at least what it implicitly believes, based on movies and commercials), but think about tribal cultures who still live without modern technology. While we may stress over a bill in the mail or get upset over a slow Internet connection, they are living with the constant threat of literal, physical danger. One bad storm, one bad wound, and that's it. Those are *real* dangers to stress about. How are some of these cultures able to live happily without modern conveniences? We would certainly think that the conditions of their lives are worse than our own.

You can also think about the concentration camps during World War II. Jews in these concentration camps lived in some of the worst conditions possible, deprived of food and sleep, emotionally brutalized, under the constant threat of execution and painful, excruciating tortures. Many were not able to emotionally deal with this, and committed suicide. And who could blame them?

But what about those who persevered? How, when faced with the worst of worst circumstances, can somebody watch all of their friends and family deteriorate or be murdered yet find a way to continue finding reasons to live?

Viktor Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist from Vienna who, with his family, was placed in these concentration camps and experienced this despair. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning* he provides this answer:

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”

While we can't control many aspects of our life, we can control how we respond to it. We can control how we think and how we perceive our reality.

## Authentic Happiness in Seven Emails

This is where the equation is encouraging. Forget that 50% is set by genetics. Focus on the fact that 40% is determined by us. Focus on the fact that based on how we perceive our circumstances and respond to them, we can drastically change our chronic levels of happiness.

Focus on the fact that we don't have to search for long-lost treasure to be happy (or the long-lost shoes, long-lost sports car, or long-lost romantic partner, or long-lost smart phone for that matter).

Here's the first idea I'd like to pass on to you from our class:

*Happiness isn't something you have to search for in life.*

*Happiness is a way of life you choose to have.*

I'd like for you to reflect on this for a while before I send you my next email. For some, it's a difficult paradigm shift.

Instead of being able to blame the world for our state of happiness, the responsibility lies with us. For some, it's a tough idea to swallow. But, if you really think about it, it's also liberating because it means we can drastically affect the quality of our life without having to change our circumstances.

But of course, the question now is this: *If happiness is a choice, and we say we want happiness, why don't we choose it?*

Or to rephrase the question: *Why do some of us voluntarily choose to perceive the world and choose to behave in ways that keep us away from a happy life?*

There may be several possible answers to this question.

However, here's the approach I'm taking: What I'll show you in my next email is that our thoughts and actions may not be as *voluntary* as we think they are.

Sincerely,

-JW





## *Why do we do the things we do?*

**Email #**

**2**



**Sent on 9/17/2013 9:47 PM**

*Why do we do the things we do?*



This is basically the question I last left you with, Vickay. Again, it may sound like a funny question because the answer seems obvious. When confronted with this question, most of the students in my classes simply say, “I chose to do this or that *because I wanted to choose it.*”

My question to them is whether or not that is really true. To what extent are our thoughts and behaviors the result of our conscious choice?

Scientific evidence is showing us more and more how our behaviors are often the result of unconscious thought processes. This isn't to say we are not awake when we act, but that we don't always consciously think about our behavior before doing it.