



By Silver Rose

Do you have competing realities living inside your head? On the one hand, you have complete confidence that everything is going to work out while, in the background, a tape of doom and gloom is running.

Welcome to my world.

I'm usually holding the possibility of two "realities" in my mind. The first is of the "happily ever after" variety, the second is "my world is coming to an end." What's true about both of these "realities" is that neither has happened—I made them up!

I think everyone has competing scenarios. It's likely a survival mechanism passed down from our ancestors. Be too optimistic, you're liable to let your guard down and get eaten by a hungry lion. Be too pessimistic and you won't come out of the cave at all. Two extremes, both potentially deadly.

What's interesting about this survival mechanism is that the quality of your life is determined by the amount of attention you give to each scenario.

When I was in the throes of my clinical depression, the ratio of my pessimism versus optimism hovered around 80/20. (By the way, if you'd like to figure out where *you* stand, check out the free questionnaires on <http://www.AuthenticHappiness.com>).

Today, I would say I'm 85% optimistic, 15% pessimistic.

This is why I love the question, "Is everything okay right this minute?" It gives us great perspective. An important teaching that helped pull me out of my depression is that living in the past is ridiculous because it's over and done and dreading the future is equally ridiculous because we make ourselves sick over something that likely will never happen. If you choose to "future trip," (making up a story of what will happen in the future) why not make up a story of the "happily ever after" variety? After all, they are just stories and you are the author of every one of them!

My friend Sandy obsesses about what her financial situation will be when she is old. I ask her, "Is everything okay right now?" and the answer is a resounding, "Yes!" The mortgage is paid, she has business coming in, there is plenty of food and even some money left over for fun. But all of it is ruined by the pessimistic view she holds of her future, even though she is taking action about it—putting money away and planning for retirement.

Am I advocating for turning a blind eye toward important issues? Not at all. I think we *should* plan for both our

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immediate and distant futures. Action cancels fear every time and planning is an action—worrying is not.

Being pessimistic serves a very useful function. It alerts us to the need for protective strategies and motivates us to be proactive. But when pessimism turns to worry, it has outlived its usefulness. At that point it changes from being an advantage and becomes, instead, a detriment.

Worry is a detriment to your physical health, emotional well-being and peace of mind. It is not simply a bad habit; it can seriously hurt you if you don't develop some strategies to counteract it. In my case, it turned into a clinical depression that lasted for three decades.

I am living proof that it's possible to replace the habit of worry. I say replace because you cannot actually break a habit. Instead, you replace it with new, habitual behavior.

So what is worry? It is a pattern of obsessively thinking about worse case scenarios. Before I offer some alternatives, stop for a moment and ask yourself, "What could I do instead of worrying? What might be some behaviors that would be more useful?" Write down your answers. I'd rather have you come up with alternatives than use my strategies because, if the idea comes from you, you're much more likely to put it into action.

Here's a clue. If worrying is what you DON'T want to do, what is it you WANT to do instead?

I'd love to hear some of your ideas. Email them to me: Silver@SilverSpeaks.com and I will post them. If you're stuck, and that often happens when you're in the throes of a worry cycle, email me anyhow and I'll send some suggestions, things that have worked for me.

Consider for a moment what life would be like if you could significantly reduce the amount of time you spend worrying. The benefits for me have been many:

- I sleep peacefully through most nights (for many years, obsessive worrying kept me awake into the wee hours);
- Nightmares, once frequent, are now rare (think about it. If you are in the habit of worrying all day, how would your subconscious know that it's time to turn it off when you sleep?)
- I feel more in control. Worry is focusing on something about which you feel you have no control. Since you get more of what you focus on, worrying *ensures* that you will notice even more things you can't control.

You will *always* live with competing realities. The trick is to stack the decks so that "happily live ever after" is always miles ahead of "doom and gloom." It's a competition—ONE of them has to win! Your choice.

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