

## 5 Questions That Will Make You Emotionally Strong

*This is an edited article by Jacqueline Hogan – originally sourced from bakadesuyo.com, - published 03/17*



Have you ever been caught in the grip of extreme emotions? I'm guessing whatever decision you made next probably wasn't a good one.

When we're anxious, angry, or sad, we rarely do the smart thing. And that can seriously mess up our lives. At work, in love, or pretty much anything we do, we need emotional strength to stay cool and do the right thing.

Now dealing with the ups and downs of feelings isn't anything new. And nor are some of the best solutions. So what does ancient wisdom have to say about dealing with difficult emotions?

Studying Buddhist mindfulness or Stoicism can take a heck of a long time. So we'll prune their insights down to 5 questions that can help you when emotions hijack your brain and send you into a spin.

Worrying. When your mind is filled with anxious concerns and doubts, what question do you need to be asking yourself?

### **Question Number 1: "Is This Useful?"**

Let's face it; your brain can be a pretty crazy place. All kinds of things bounce around in there. And you're usually pretty good at culling the wacky thoughts. But then you get worried...

And your brain starts multiplying negative possibilities like crazy. And you make the mistake of taking them seriously. Every. Single. One.

Remember: you are not your thoughts. Neuroscientist Alex Korb made an interesting distinction:

*If you were to break your arm you would not tell people, "I am broken."*

*But when we feel worry we're quick to say, "I am worried."*

Your brain produces thoughts. That's its job. But that's not directly under your control. Buddhist mindfulness expert Sharon Salzberg puts it this way:

*"I think one of the issues that we have is that we don't necessarily recognize that a thought is just a thought."*

*We have a certain thought, we take it to heart, we build a future on it, we think, "This is the only thing I'll ever feel", "I'm an angry person and I always will be", "I'm going to be alone for the rest of my life", and that process happens pretty quickly.*

So if you are not your thoughts, who are "you"? You're the thing that decides which thoughts are useful and should be taken seriously.

The ancient Stoics believed that you are just your reasoned choice; because that's the only thing fully under your control.

***So those worried thoughts aren't you.***

***The decisions you make regarding them are.***

You're not your brain; you're the CEO of your brain. You can't control everything that goes on in your mind but you can decide what gets your attention and action.

So when a worry is nagging at you, step back and ask yourself: **"Is this useful?"**

Buddhist mindfulness expert Joseph Goldstein said:

*This thought which has arisen, is it helpful?*

*Is it serving me or others in some way or is it not?*

*Is it just playing out old conditions of fear, judgment or things that are not helpful for ourselves or others?*

*Mindfulness really helps us both see and discern the difference and then it becomes the foundation for making better choices and why the choices lead to more happiness.*

If the worry is reasonable, **do something about it**. If it's **irrational or out of your control, recognize that**. Neuroscience shows that merely making a decision like this can reduce worry and anxiety.

But maybe you're not worried. Maybe you're angry! Furious even.

**What is anger?**

**Where does it come from?**

**And what question can make these HULK SMASH feelings go away?**



## **Question Number 2: Does The World Owe Me This?**

Anger comes from entitlement. You feel you're entitled to something, reality doesn't bend to your expectations and boom — you're punching things. Or people.

Traffic is bad. You get angry. Let me translate that thought process for you: "Traffic should never cause me problems. The world owes me that." Sound reasonable? Hardly.

Or someone doesn't do what they said they'd do. You get angry. Now you might reply, "People should do what they say they'll do! I have a right to be angry!"

Yes, it would be nice if people always followed through, but is that a reasonable expectation? Of course not. You know people don't always do what they say. Now you can definitely call them out on it. You can decide to do something in response. ***But the anger?***

That awful feeling is all yours. You had an unrealistic expectation ("People will always do what they say") and now you're shocked — SHOCKED! — that they didn't.

So the solution to anger is to ***ask yourself.***

## ***"Does the world owe me this?"***

Yeah, it's a trick question. Because the world doesn't owe you anything. And the more you think the world owes you, the angrier you will be.

Again, it's all about reasonable expectations. And that's why Marcus Aurelius said:

**Begin each day by telling yourself:**

*Today I shall be meeting with interference, ingratitude, insolence, disloyalty, ill-will, and selfishness...*

Not a pleasant way to start the day — that I grant you. But he was on to something. Expecting everything to go your way, let alone insisting on it, is a prescription for anger.

I know what some people are thinking: feeling you're entitled to nothing in life seems unfair and sad. But don't forget that you take for granted what you are owed. Not being entitled makes every good thing in life a prize. You either achieved it or you were lucky, and those lead to feelings of pride or **gratitude**.

When you're entitled, you don't appreciate anything, and you're frequently disappointed. Not a good combo. And when psychologists are evaluating if someone is a narcissist, guess what one of the four criteria is? Yeah, entitlement!

Maybe you're not worried or angry. Maybe you're just overwhelmed by sadness about something. Well, I have a question for you...

### **Question Number 3: Must I Have This To Live A Happy Life?**

Plenty of people have a lot less than you and live a very happy life. If happiness was all about money then every single person in the developing world would be miserable. People who have lost a loved one, who have become handicapped or heaven forbid, had a bad hair day, are all capable of living happy lives.

What do you truly need to live a happy life? (Hint: the longer your list, the more miserable you will be.)

As Marcus Aurelius said:

*"Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking."*

So next time you don't get something you want and it makes you sad, ask yourself:

***"Must I have this to live a happy life?"***

***The answer is almost always "no."***

Maybe you didn't get that promotion. And when you ask yourself the question, your first thought is "But my career is important to my happiness!"

Yes, your career is important. But is this promotion, right now, vital to the happiness of your life? No. Who knows what the future holds? And some of that is under your control. There are many ways to live a happy life and very rarely will this one thing make or break you.

Now when you're consumed by negative emotions it can be very hard to make good decisions. Which means more bad stuff happens, which means more bad feelings. It can become a downward spiral.

**So how do you make smart choices when you feel awful? Just ask...**

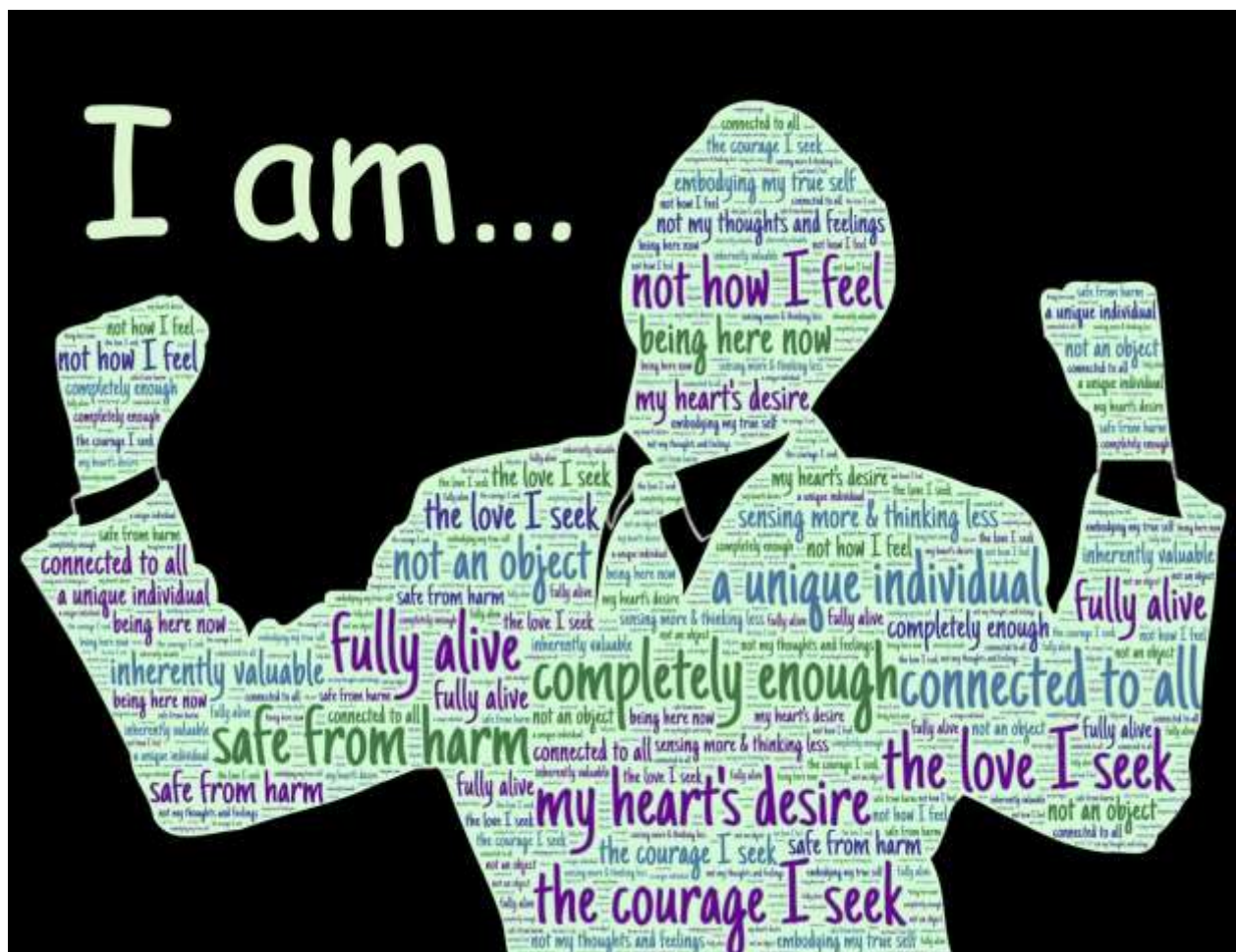
### Question Number 4: "Is This Who I Want To Be?"

News flash: there is no singular, concrete "you." Neuroscientists have poked around at plenty of grey matter and there's no spot in there that contains a stable "you." And Buddhists were saying this over a thousand years ago.

Neuroscientist and Buddhism practitioner John Yates explains:

*We often believe we should be in control, the masters of our own minds. But that belief only creates problems for your practice. It will lead you to try to wilfully force the mind into submission. When that inevitably fails, you will tend to get discouraged and blame yourself. This can turn into a habit unless you realize there is no "self" in charge of the mind, and therefore nobody to blame.*

Many things affect your decisions every day. Context, friends, and moods all affect what you do and who you are. This is a good thing, because it means you can change.



But it presents a challenge because it means you need to decide which person you will be today and this isn't something you want to get wrong.



What is the #1 regret people have on their deathbeds?

***“I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.”***

Wow. So who should you decide to be? We can turn to modern science for this answer: Be you on your best day. So when making tough choices think about whether what you plan to do is aligned with the “you” you’re most proud of.

Merely thinking about your best possible self makes you happier:

Results generally supported these hypotheses, and suggested that the [Best Possible Self] exercise may be most beneficial for raising and maintaining positive mood.

And don’t worry about seeming inauthentic either. When you act like your best self, you end up showing people what you’re really like:

***...positive self-presentation facilitates more accurate impressions, indicating that putting one’s best self forward helps reveal one’s true self.***

I often tell my clients to “fake it till you make it”.

So far, this has all been very focused inside your head. How can you be emotionally strong when someone you’re dealing with is being emotionally weak or difficult? If someone else is anxious, angry, or sad, and it’s making your life rough, that can bring you down. How do you help both of you? Ask yourself...

### **Question Number 5: “Have I Ever Felt That Way?”**

Whatever they are going through, you’ve probably felt something similar. So be compassionate.

Both Buddhism and Stoicism believe in doing your best to reduce the suffering of others. Buddhism has the four divine abodes: - loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Marcus Aurelius said:

***“Be tolerant with others and strict with yourself.”***

Compassion sounds nice, but does it really produce results?

**Absolutely.**

And you get bigger benefits if you do it when you are least likely to want to — during an argument.

People who maintain a compassionate spirit during disagreements with their partner, considering not just the virtue of their position but the virtue of their partner, have **34 percent fewer disagreements**, and the disagreements last **59 percent less time**. (Wu 2001).

This is an important point for loving relationships and long lasting happy marriage. In a fast paced and stressful life it can be easy for worry, anxiety, fear, sadness and other negative emotions to overrule your decisions. Robbing you of happiness and being emotionally strong.



Okay, we've learned a lot. Let's round it up and learn the most important part of being emotionally strong...

## Sum Up

Here are the 5 questions from ancient wisdom that will make you emotionally strong:

- **“Is it useful?”**: Most worrying isn't. Make a decision to do something or to let it go.
- **“Does the world owe me this?”**: No. Don't be entitled. Have realistic expectations and you won't get angry.
- **“Must I have this to live a happy life?”**: Probably not. It takes little to make a happy life and there are many ways to get those things.
- **“Is this who I want to be?”**: Act the way you do when you're at your best.
- **“Have I ever felt that way?”**: Respond to others' problems with compassion and you'll both have fewer problems.

The most important part of emotional strength is not calming your mind. It's being resilient. It's trying again after you've been shaken by negative feelings. It's asking yourself the right questions at the right time. It's about putting yourself in other people's shoes.

There are plenty of areas of your life where this is critical, but none is more important than your relationships - research shows 70% of your happiness comes from relationships.

Sometimes you will be hurt, you will feel bad, that's life, there's no avoiding it.

So the question is:

***Who is worth it?***

***Who is most meaningful to you?***

So when things are hard, have the emotional strength to care for them and help them. So now that you know of the key 'tools' to weather the storm, what are you going to do?

Earlier I mentioned the biggest regret that people had when they were dying. Know what #3 was?

***I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.***

***So go first. - Let someone know how much they mean to you.***

Who are we most likely to love?

Research says it's the people who first show us love.

So to put words into action, have the emotional strength to tell someone important how you feel, to forgive someone, to let someone back into your life, or to reconnect with someone you miss. Do it today!

Don't wait around for something negative to happen before you develop emotional strength. Flex some emotional muscle now and see how happy it can make you.

To develop your emotional strength further and uncover deeper insights into 'you' and your relationships call me (Jacqui) for a free chat. I have developed three programs I lead you through, one-on-one to:

1. [\*\*Awaken Your Authentic Self – Live with Satisfaction & Purpose. Discover and Release Self-Limiting Beliefs.\*\*](#)
2. [\*\*Save My Marriage – 7 Step Program to Restore Your Loving Relationship Built on a New Foundation of Trust Respect and Forgiveness.\*\*](#)
3. [\*\*Personal Life Coaching – Achieve and Exceed Your Goals. Define your own life blueprint for success.\*\*](#)

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