

Chapter Eight

Habit of Happiness

Epicurus defined happiness as the absence of pain, both physical and mental, and this raises some fascinating questions for the philosophically minded of every era. One could argue that the absence of pain brings a person up to only zero on the happiness scale; to push the meter into the positive zone, more is required, say a plate of roast lamb with all the trimmings. But Epicurus would shoot back that the pleasure of eating lamb has all kinds of future pains attached to it, like a bloated stomach, or, worse in the long run, a hankering for more lamb and lamblike delicacies, putting a person back in the position of the perpetually frustrated individual for whom enough is always too little.

—EPICURUS, *THE ART OF HAPPINESS*, FOREWORD BY DANIEL KLEIN

In his book *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind* (1963/2001), 188, Joseph Murphy reports the following anecdote:

A number of years ago, I stayed for about a week in a farmer's house in Connemara on the west

coast of Ireland. My host seemed always to be singing and whistling and was full of good humor. I asked him the secret of his happiness. 'Sure, it's a habit with me,' he replied. 'Every morning when I awaken and every night before I go to sleep, I bless my family, the crops, the cattle, and I thank God for the wonderful harvest.' This farmer had made a practice of this for over forty years. As you know, thoughts repeated regularly and systematically sink into the subconscious mind and become habitual. *He discovered that happiness is a habit.* (Emphasis mine).

Have you ever thought what happiness really is? Is it satisfaction of desire? Is it the feeling to have plenty? Does happiness derive from being rich and wealthy?

I believe it is not difficult to answer these questions. Fact is that there are many rich and wealthy people who are unhappy. One reason why I included this chapter is to find out why, and then, to give rich and wealthy people a reason for being happy. And more than a reason.

If many rich people are not happy, what about poor people? Are they happier? *That's a comfortable myth.* It was for me, for almost twenty years. It was only after I studied the lifestyle of tribal peoples that I

became gradually aware that their happiness is not derived from 'having' or 'not having' but from 'being.' Erich Fromm explicates this brilliantly in his book 'To Have or To Be.'

The state of 'not having' is not equal to the state of 'being.' When I feel deprived of anything, be it love, be it a decent job, I feel like life is nagging me. I feel betrayed in a way. It is certainly not a happy state of being.

Now let us ask then, what *is* a happy state of being? Let us look at small innocent children. Are we not perceiving their happiness in their presence, is it not infectious? When we look at them, their ability to play with whatever they have in hand, even if in their real environment chaos and disaster reign, even if they are in the midst of war and civil war, they are basically happy. Why are they happy?

They are *carefree*, not burdened with the strange ways of the world: they simply accept the world. Many of us wish to change the world, this 'bad world,' this world of injustice and violence, this world of oppression and persecution, of intolerance. We wish to make it a better place. And it's exactly this striving for 'bettering' creation that robs us of our

innate happiness. Why is that so? To answer this question, look at what we do when we have come to that point of activism.

What we do is to focus on the 'bad things' out there, ignoring by and large the good things, the positive stuff. We all know that the world is both bad and good, depending on our

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look at it. But those—and I was among them for decades—who wish to make the world a better place, those idle heroes, are looking at the world in a one-sided manner. They look at what is not perfect, overlooking what is well perfect—namely nature!

Even though man has erred quite substantially over the ages, there is a consciousness in the human being that is evolving. This consciousness is based upon perception, but perception is not only sensual but also extrasensual and metasensual.

When we perceive life and the world *in a complete fashion*, not just with our five senses, we see that our quest for happiness is truly spiritual, and that for that very reason the focus upon material things, situations, and circumstances, is quite short-sighted. To judge

that life on earth is such and such then reveals to be a perception error, for such a statement is way too general and restricted in perspective.

Children do not know that, they cannot reason this out, and yet, they are basically happy. Their perception of the world is not yet fragmented as the perception of most conditioned adults. Happiness really is related to this unlimited and unfragmented perception of what-is; it's derived from the holistic and non-dualistic perception of what-is.

William B. Irvine writes in his book *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (2009), at p. 74:

One reason children are capable of joy is because they take almost nothing for granted. To them, the world is wonderfully new and surprising. Not only that, but they aren't yet sure how the world works: Perhaps the things they have today will mysteriously vanish tomorrow. It is hard for them to take something for granted when they can't even count on its continued existence.

Now, of course, we may ask further why this is so. The answer is difficult to give.

What we can learn from the question is that somehow human beings are programmed to be non-judgmental and open-minded. As long as they

haven't build a defense shield in their character, it seems that humans are basically happy.

Unhappiness sets in when content is censored by the conscious self, when large parts of what we perceive is discarded out as 'negative content' and thereby suppressed from conscious awareness.

It seems to me that this kind of distortion of perception is at the root of unhappiness in the human. And man really has come up with all and everything to distort perception, through its religions, ideologies and doctrines that judge and deny instead of accepting and embracing.

Happy children do not know about religions, ideologies and the hundred doctrines that deny life instead of accepting it. They ignore all of this burden, luckily so.

Some scholars call this burden 'culture,' thereby setting culture against nature; while an emotionally intelligent culture of course is embedded in nature and not against nature. So in a way, when we live in a cultural paradigm, such as patriarchy, that is by and large founded upon a distorted perception of nature, we are at pains to be happy.

This is a conundrum as culture is supposed to bring us relief and development; it's supposed to bring us closer to civilized behavior, consciously banning chaotic and psychopathological behavior. But when the cultural paradigm is hostile to our imbeddedness in nature, for after all we *are* nature, then that culture can't possibly bring us relief. It will bring us conflict then, it will bring us distorted perception of natural phenomena, it will bring us collective mental illness instead of sanity of mind.

Hence, children are happy for a reason—however not Reason written with a capital R, the hyper-rational idea that situates the human above nature's innate intelligence, which is the intelligence of our emotions.

Children are happy because they do not allow a cultural paradigm to mutilate their emotional integrity; but this changes when children grow beyond the 'age of reason' (Piaget), that is, the age of seven. Adolescents are very often unhappy people, for they are bound to suffer the 'cultural burden,' having lost their childlike innocence and being exposed to all the cultural madness of modern man.

As this chapter is not addressed to adolescents but to adults, and actually to those of you who are rich and wealthy, famous and celebrated, and yet unhappy, let me state here that there is no conflict between begin wealthy and being happy. While fundamentalist religions all declare being wealthy to be a major sin, it's surely not those religions who hold the truth in their hands, but nature.

And nature is wealthy, nature is abundant, nature is even wasteful.

That's why, when you are wealthy, you are actually in alignment with the cosmic order, not against it, as those religions tend to tell you.

However, when your religion is money and accumulating money, without more, you are actually barring yourself from receiving more. Part of your unhappiness might be the impending insight that you have enough for being

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happy, on one hand, but not enough for being happy, on the other. As this sounds highly paradoxical, let me explain what I mean. When I say that you have enough for being happy, I want to convey that you have enough for basic needs to be met, that you do not suffer from major restrictions, as most people do in this world. You have your basic needs met, your family does, your children do.

But on the other hand, you do not have enough for being happy means that you do foster an illusion which says that if only you had *more of the same* — more money, more riches, a bigger bank account, more inflow of resources, you would be more happy.

Let's acknowledge that you would be more content, that you would certainly feel safer in your overall worldview, you would surely be more comfortable in your skin.

But does that mean you would also be more happy? It could well mean that you will be less happy than ever before. Why is that so?

Well, it could well mean that you realize that true happiness is after all not the result of safety, but of being carefree, that it's not so much a matter of satisfaction but of dissatisfaction, that it's not the fact

you can 'buy into' such and such leisures that attributes to your happiness, but rather the fact that you are free of those leisures altogether.

Have you been to refugee camps, or watched any films about them? If you ever did, you may have observed how happily in those camps children jump and dance around the place, despite the utterly destitute condition of their parents.

Children don't care about their parents being destitute, but they do care for being loved! And perhaps, as a matter of fact, people in camps, because they have nothing to do to earn a living, have more time for their children, and express their love for them more freely, which could be the explanation why you see those scenes over and over on television, while this very fact may puzzle you. You may indeed ask why you are not as happy as them, and you may search for answers.

The questions produce the answers. Have you ever inquired why there are questions and answers?

I did so, as early as in high school, and came up with an uncanny concept. I said in my foolish youth that answers are the direct result of questions and

that, for that matter, what really counts are the questions, not the answers.

I was not that foolish after all as it turned out that later other people had the same view, people of fame and renown, like quantum physicists. They kept saying that the result of an experiment is pretty much the outcome of the setup of the experiment.

In other words, the observer in that experiment has to be accounted for, and cannot be wiped under the carpet of 'scientific objectiveness.' It has a very precise impact upon the observation in that it manipulates its outcome according to the general mindset of the observer, not just his scientific opinions, but his overall life paradigm.

So nature actually turned out to *behave differently when being observed by different people*. This was of course one of the many paradoxes of quantum physics to be revealed to us in the last fifty or more years.

We invariably feel puzzled when we first hear about it. We are shaken in our common assumptions, in our phlegmatic sides taken for this or the other option in life. Most of us are pro-morality but need to heed the advice given by nature that life is inherently

anti-morality or rather, it bears its own morality which is different from ours in that it is not coercive, in that it is not based upon judgmental views, in that it is accepting all life, and all desire. Hence, it is inclusive, not exclusive.

To conclude, one matter *does* infringe upon your happiness: it is judgmental thinking and resulting actions targeting at discarding out people or situations from your life.

The secret to happiness is *permissiveness*, a mindset that refrains from judging others and life, a mindset that embraces all possible situations, a mindset that accepts life rather than judging it.

Now let us ask how to build such a mindset? Is it a heroic task to change one's mindset? It is. It is not easy, really. It is not something most people would want to do. It is not something encouraged by the mass media either, quite to the contrary.

It is something only a few select people can do because it requires a stoic attitude and a lot of persistence. But you can do it for improving your life, and for being more happy. You can *become non-judgmental* in your overall view of the world and of people. The Bible is rather explicit about it.

‘Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.’

Judging is an attitude that is defensive and that cuts relationships short. For relationships to develop, smoothness and lightness of touch are needed. Relations can’t be forced, nor do they develop when there is no mutual interest. What is needed is simply involvement. When you are involved with others, relations develop as a matter of time and as a result of mutual interest and motivation.

The motivation for bonding often but not exclusively is a consequence of shared interests, or at least one common interest.

But commonality is not all there is to build good relationships. People are reported to be friends for years and decades who have no interests in common and are rather different characters. So why are they friends?

Because there is motivation on either side for a friendship, for reasons that may be not consciously reflected upon, such as shared karmic roots and experiences.

But this is not all. As I already pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, by quoting Dr. Joseph Murphy, an authority on the matter of handling our subconscious mind, we must see to *making happiness a habit*. How to do that? Logically so, for making something a habit, you first of all need to choose it. You must choose happiness over unhappiness, which means you must sincerely desire to be happy. As Dr. Joseph Murphy writes on page 194 of his book:

Nothing is accomplished without desire. Desire is a wish with wings of imagination and faith. Imagine the fulfillment of your desire, feel its reality, and it will come to pass. Happiness comes in answered prayer.

But how is it that some people are happy and others not, independently of their fortunes and their status in life?

As we have already seen, happiness requires you to be tolerant toward yourself, to suspend judgment about others as much as you can and to build peace of mind. We can say that happiness is a fruit of peace of mind; when your mind is focused upon peace, poise, security and constant inner guidance, you will experience happiness, for it's an *inner state*,

independent of all of your conditions and circumstances. As we have seen, external reality is not causative, as the cause is in our way of thinking.

Q & A Session

Q. Have you ever thought what happiness really is? Why do you think many rich and wealthy people are unhappy?

A. You may be aware already that you cannot buy happiness and you may have observed that there are some millionaires who are happy, and others not. You may have observed the same among the poor. You may also have seen that some married people are happy and others are not, and that among singles it's the same. These observations may logically have brought you to the conclusion that outside circumstances are not making people happy or unhappy, but that happiness is an inner quality.

Q. Are poor people happier than rich people?

A. For many of us who are close to communist or socialist parties, as it was for me in my youth, it is a comfortable myth to believe that poor people are happier than the rich. But it's really an illusion, and it's not what Karl Marx said in his books. To say the least, it's an oversimplification of what he wrote in his critique of capitalism. It's not any political system that makes

people happy or unhappy, but the state of their inner minds, what they think and hold as true on a daily basis.

Q. What did Erich Fromm mean with the dichotomy of 'To Have or To Be'?

A. He basically emphasized that when a person is authentic, thus in a state of 'To Be' that person is also happy, but it's the striving of our inner self to be true and authentic. However, when a person is solely focused upon material things, and thus in a state of 'To Have' the person will be at pains to achieve happiness for he or she will be constantly sidetracked by their material wishes and the satisfaction of those wishes, but all of material things are temporary. And something that is temporary cannot reasonably bring something about that you want is long-lasting. You want to be happy over longer periods of time, not just at your birthday party, but for this true happiness to build, you need to be authentic and you need to be connected to your soul values, what you are truly interested in and what brings you deep satisfaction when you do it. This is how you will achieve happiness in your profession; it is by doing what you really love.

Q. Why are children happy, especially small children who haven't yet been conditioned by school?

A. The happiness of children can be called *carefreeness*. It's something spontaneous. Children do *not* consciously choose happiness because they are not mature

enough to reflect about what happiness possibly is. They are happy when they play and they are properly cared for, and astonishingly, many children are even happy when not being properly cared for. Their happiness is so strong that it tolerates imperfection in their lives, including the imperfection of their parents. This is because children's happiness is a result of their *carefreeness*, not upon conscious choice. However, as adults, when our awareness is reflective about our choices in life, we can't be carefree to that point anymore. That is why we need to deliberately choose happiness by sincerely wishing to be happy, so that we can be happy.

Q. What is the one single attitude and behavior that robs us of our innate happiness?

A. It is to judge ourselves, others, and the world at large, to judge life, to say that life is not good enough, that creation is faulty and needs to be improved, that life is dependent on political systems and other exterior circumstances, and that, as a result of those circumstances, one cannot possibly be happy without this or that (high position, money, influence, good connections, free time, allocations, government support, funding, etc.).

Q. Do you wish to make the world a better place? What is the essential fallacy of such an intention?

A. It directs our focus upon the outside world, circumstances, conditions, and so forth, and robs us from focusing upon the content of our thoughts, and the way we fuel and energize them with your recurrent emotions. When you want to change the world, you behave like Don Quijote, and you are fighting against windmills. The world changes by itself, and it is today war and tomorrow peace. Everything changes, not only the weather, people change, cultures change, relationships change; there is one single characteristics of life: it is change. When you get to accept the world, you get to accept yourself, and you do that by *accepting change*.

Q. Have religions, ideologies and doctrines that judge life contributed to humanity's happiness, or rather to our collective predicament?

A. I think the answer is obvious. They have made it only worse and they continue this negative influence upon our peoples, societies and life at large to this very day.

Q. How can greed interfere with happiness?

A. Greed is an excessive form of acquisitiveness. To paraphrase Erich Fromm, greed puts the 'to have' response prior to the 'to be' response, thus distorting the natural way to react. It is also a response that comes straight from the ego, without the participation of our higher self and as such is an imbalanced attitude. Every

imbalance, not only greed, but all strong emotions that are not balanced by a poised attitude will interfere with your desire to be happy. Without having observed that as yet, you may want to be watchful to find out how a particular focus on anything may interfere with a worldview that is basically balanced and that thus represents what Buddha called 'the middle way.' All extremes bring harm to your mind and soul, and that's why they interfere with happiness for they pull you out of your center.

Q. Why, paradoxically, parents and children may be more happy in their relationship when they are removed from daily strain and live sheltered in refugee camps, where their material wellbeing is cared for?

A. **It has less to do with the children, per se, but a lot with the parents. Many parents in normal circumstances of daily life put too much focus upon acquisitiveness, financial matters, health issues and what more, instead of putting the relationship with their children first. In a situation where parents are by circumstance removed from being responsible for material welfare, they will have their minds free to see and feel the importance of their daily bonding with their children, and they will realize how much that contributes to their happiness.**

Q. In which sense are questions more important than answers?

A. Answers create the illusion of being definitive, while in reality they are not. But usually only very highly educated people realize that. Most people are stuck when being focused on answers, while if they focused on the questions instead, they would realize that questions do not block inquiry as answers do but keep you curious; and curiosity is the most important for personal evolution for it leaves the door to the unknown open. In this sense questions are much more important than answers for they keep us 'on our hunger' while answers too easily (and dangerously) keep us 'satisfied.'

Q. How has judgmental thinking interfered with our collective happiness?

A. Judgmental thinking has led to war and civil war everywhere in the world, it has fueled the crusades, it brings one religion up against another, one race against another, and one nation against another. All religions to this very day have fostered judgmental thinking and that is why they are so destructive and why they foster separation and mistrust instead of unity and trust. But this is not only so on the outward level of life, it is also, and even primarily so in our relationship with ourselves. Judgmental people live in a constant inner war and that state of mind tears them up inside and creates inner tension, stress and emotional turmoil. People who are in

this state of inner war are unable to make peace with others, with the world, and with themselves, for they believe that this inner war was an existential condition, something they regard in their ignorance as the 'natural state' of the human being. It is not the natural state, but the result of moralism, and moralistic education that brings people into an inner conflict with some of their emotions that they are told to repress and 'keep in check.' It is the plague of moralism that has created judgmentalism as a matter of logic, and it has created the idea of being 'superior' over certain other races or groups of people, it has created the idea of self-righteousness, and the domination of nature, until recently it even has dominated our science and declared us being machines and wheels in a clockwork.

Q. Which value has permissiveness for promoting personal and collective happiness?

A. Permissiveness is a form of tolerance toward oneself; it is based upon the insight that it is destructive to judge ourselves, to judge any process that goes on in our mind, in our thoughts, or any emotions. It is a state of acceptance, for it's only acceptance that can bring inner peace. Permissiveness thus can be said to be a motor for inner peace.

Q. How do we bring about happiness? How can you yourself bring it about in your life?

A. You need to first sincerely desire it, then you need to build a habit, which in a slogan you may call 'Habit of Happiness.' What is a habit? It is a constant behavior, something ingrained, where a certain automatism is built that has been carved or grooved in your subconscious mind. If happiness is anything less than a habit, the circumstances of your daily life can too easily distract you from your desire to be happy, and you are again on the worry track, the complain track, the negative track. When happiness is habit it's like you a driving a car and suddenly a child runs after a football right in front of your car. You hit the brakes without thinking, as a matter of sheer automatism, because driving has become a habit. And the child was saved, and you yourself from trouble. That is how important habits are, positive habits. That's why you better make out of happiness a habit!
