

CONDITIONAL HAPPINESS

My problem today arises when I put conditions on my happiness. Many people we read nowadays refer to happiness as “an inside job”. Therefore, no matter what the situation is outside our brain, we can be happy.

Now, **let us see how we define happiness:**

1. Dictionaries define it as: feeling or causing pleasure, being satisfied with what we do, willing to do something, wishing someone a good time.
2. Happiness comes from the word Middle English word **hap**, which meant good luck. Webster’s dictionary denotes that in the old days happiness meant good fortune; good luck; prosperity. It states “a state of well-being characterized by relative permanence, by dominantly agreeable emotion ranging in value from mere contentment to deep and intense joy in living and by a natural desire of its continuation.

Let’s contemplate these words:

Aristotle (384-322 BC), in his Nicomachean Ethics, mentions, **“All human beings want “happiness”, an active, engaged realization of their innate capacities, but this goal can be achieved in a multiplicity of ways”**. Aristotle identified happiness with goodness, which brought him another problem, defining what he meant with the word *goodness!*

A student asked a Zen Master **“How can I achieve Enlightenment?”** The Master replied, **“Enlightenment can be achieved when we quit desire”**. The student quickly questioned this by stating **“yes, Master, but isn’t desire not to desire a desire itself?”** the Master smiled and said **“Yes, the point is that you are getting the idea...”**

Proverb 10 in the Bible mentions, **“Happy is the man with a level-headed son; sad is the mother of a rebel. Ill gotten gain brings no lasting happiness; right living does”**

When asked what happiness was, Mother Theresa said **“Happiness is Love”** and when asked what **Love** was, she replied **“Love is Service”**

These paragraphs illustrate how different cultures actually talk about the same thing when referring to happiness; nevertheless, it is amazing how their people struggle to define the “ideal goal” in life, or whatever you want to call it. There is a song in Spanish that says “Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar”, which means “For you who walk, there is no path; we make the path as we walk”. To me this means that trying to find “happiness” the way other humans define it is a trap, a dead-end alley.

Aristotle, the Zen Master, the Zen student and whoever wrote the proverbs are LIMITED HUMANS, JUST LIKE YOU AND ME. They cannot tell us how to live our lives and they cannot define our happiness. They had the same questions and demons you and I have as we “chase” a feeling of well-being that we believe, once we get “it”, will stay with us ONCE AND FOR ALL! The question is what are we chasing? My impression is that we are running after something we made up, something that is “make-believe” and therefore unreachable; just as the carrot we put hanging on stick in front of the head of the donkey so the donkey walks hoping to reach it and never gets it, we walk along life trying to reach the “invisible”. The goo thing is that we do not need to despair; today **we can choose and make our definition of happiness without condition**, without expecting our children to be good, without expecting the world to be free of criminals, without expecting our economical situation to be improved, without expecting better health, a better face, a younger age, better weather, more approval, less work, more work, more rest, less rest, etc.

Sometimes it is a good idea to sit down, take a deep breath and look at our surrounding as if we were newborns. Pretending we haven’t learned anything good or bad in this world. Only this way can we learn to diminish our degree of life judgment and condemnation. The result will be that we will have learned a way not to judge and condemn ourselves as rigidly because we have not been able to live life up to our expectations beyond reality.

Rigidity is the resistance to be flexible. Flexibility allows us to “bend” with the harsh winds of life without breaking. A dry rigid limb in a tree easily breaks with medium-strength winds; a tall and flexible palm tree may even withstand strong hurricanes without breaking!! Thus, it seems that aiming for “flexibility in our lives makes some sense.

The secret of becoming more flexible is **trusting** that all of us, **without exception**, have a “built-in” ability to cope –no matter what. Reality is that the human being was designed to cope with everything except not eating.

Have a “happy” life; it’s later than you think!

Happiness is not something we can demand, it will come to us quietly while we serve others.