

Lasting Joy is Your Spiritual Birth-right

How is this year going for you? How happy have you been so far in 2022?

Lesson 101 in *A Course in Miracles* is entitled *God's Will for me is perfect happiness*. Now I don't know about you, but when I first read that sentence it did not make any sense to me. I was convinced that there was way too much horrendous suffering in this world for *God's Will for me is perfect happiness* to be true.

In fact, I spent most of my adult life insisting that God could not possibly exist, which thinking about it now, was actually my way of angrily turning my back on a God whom I blamed for all the terrible suffering in the world, especially The Holocaust.

How could a supreme, all-powerful being allow such unimaginable suffering on such a vast scale? The only logical answer my young mind could come up with was that such a God simply did not exist. There was no way an all-powerful, infinitely loving creator would allow so much pain and suffering in a world He created.

Well many years later I have had a complete change of heart and mind. I now firmly believe that we were all created by an infinitely loving creative power that wills all its creations without exception to be perfectly happy. However, we are not our creator's slaves. We have been granted the freedom to make as much mess in this world as we choose, including the appalling mess we make when we indulge in any kind of physical violence or conflict.

Without this freedom to make a terrible mess, we would all be like the children of a totally controlling parent who allowed us no free will whatsoever. We would be bossed about to such an extent that we would never be free to learn from our own mistakes in life.

So for now, let's go with the premise that God really does will us perfect happiness, but is not going to impose perfect happiness on us if it would interfere with our freedom. What then is stopping us being supremely joyful at all times? Well, I think there are a number of interesting possibilities for us to consider here.

First of all, could it be that we all suffer from a kind of existential guilt that is pretty unconscious, but so deep, that we all secretly decide that we had better punish ourselves by suffering in this life in order to avoid being punished eternally in hell? Now you may well scoff at such a farfetched and old fashioned

idea as a fear of burning in hell eternally. However, that fear is deeply etched into the Western psyche.

Even though we no longer use the word sin as much as we used to do, we are still pretty quick to condemn our enemies as wickedly sinful. But if even one person who has ever lived on this earth – Hitler for example – deserves to burn in hell for eternity, who is to say that we do not deserve to spend at least a little time suffering terribly for our own far lesser misdeeds?

If the above is a bit too fanciful for you, how about trying this explanation for our lack of perfect happiness? Maybe we don't allow ourselves as much joy in our lives as we could because on some level or another, we feel that it is wrong to be happy when others, particularly those close to us, are suffering quite severely. For example, if a mother of a child going through treatment for leukaemia were to say to you that she was perfectly happy, wouldn't you immediately think to yourself, 'My goodness, what sort of mother *is* she?'

But does it really make sense to deny ourselves some joy in our own life because other people in our world are suffering badly at the moment? I really contemplated on this when the war in Ukraine broke out because a few days later, I found myself thinking, 'I feel happy today, but that is awful given how much pain and suffering there is in Ukraine right now!' However on reflection, I realised that my being miserable would not make one iota of difference to those caught up in that terrible war. It was really quite irrational to try and put a lid on my own joy as some kind of virtual signalling about the horrors of the war in Ukraine.

A third possible reason why we may block joy as we go through life is the idea that there is only a limited amount of goodness in the world. So, if we go through a period of intense happiness, we may believe that we are going to use up all our allotment of joy pretty quickly and end up feeling awful again. This too is an irrational idea. But we have all been brought up to believe in scarcity and limitations, and so we all believe, at least subconsciously, that there is only so much happiness to be found in this world.

We convince ourselves that we will suffer sooner or later if we greedily use up our small allocation of joy in one big binge session – such as eating all our limited supply of chocolate Easter Eggs on Easter Sunday and having none left to enjoy on Easter Monday! Now I am not suggesting here that you spend this Easter binging on chocolate eggs, although if that gives you real joy, go for it! However, I am suggesting that we should all challenge any long-held beliefs we may be

holding that convince us that we do not have an absolute right to lasting joy in our lives.

We might also spend as much time as we possibly can this beautiful spring month seeking out many, many little moments of joy. We might then simply pause from time to time to breathe that joy deeply into our hearts. Maybe our long term goal this month, and indeed this year, might be to learn how to keep flooding our whole system with a limitless supply of inner joy, whatever chaos or conflict is going on in the world around us?

Maybe this month, we could even find joy in gentle rain dropping down on us from heaven during an April shower? Now I admit that practice might be quite a stretch for me because I am always worried that getting wet in the rain is going to mess up my hair. But my energy always rises in spring, so I think I am up for the challenge of being joyful even on the rainiest of April days. How about you? Would you like to join me in gently focussing on all that is good throughout this beautiful month of April? You would certainly be most welcome!

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