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Finding Happiness

Is it far off in the future, or here right now?

What is happiness, where is it, and how can we find it? It seems to be one of those vague concepts that can only be defined by its absence; and yet it is an emotion we have all experienced since birth. Happiness was that sensation of comfort and warmth; the contentment of being safe within our mother's womb. It was the reason for our first smile that delighted others. When we eventually became aware of our surroundings and something made us laugh, that was true happiness. This simple feeling was accepted without question; even though what prompted it was beyond our level of understanding at the time. Happiness just was.

Now we've grown up, the business of living is complicating matters; and for many it seems happiness has faded somewhat. It is still here, hiding between the lines of responsibility and basic survival. It re-emerges sporadically as an amusing interlude in the busy schedule. There are also times of extended joy, maybe shared with friends on a social occasion; or a few minutes borrowed from a feel-good movie. These fleeting moments of enjoyment are where the season of happiness begins.

Being individuals, we have differing views on life and expectations. Some are driven by materialism, the accumulation of wealth and possessions; so happiness will be experienced each time a goal is achieved. Others are charitably motivated, knowing happiness when their contribution has made the life of someone else better. Most are a combination of these two, discovering varying levels of happiness by juggling money-making with unselfish deeds. What we all have in common is a sense of purpose that reflects our characters and personalities. That should be our guide – at the end of the day, what do we really want; when will we be satisfied to simply be content and at peace with ourselves?

We know about pain and sadness, of feeling despondent, even depressed; and the sources of these periods of negativity are usually obvious. Once they have passed, there is generally a sense of relief. Obviously under these circumstances, being happy is a direct result of not being unhappy; so, to repeat the experience, we look at the negative cause and try to avoid it in future. Other instances are less specific; just part of normal life; but they can be regarded in a similar way. Feeling grouchy and irritable through pressure of work, wishing to be at home where life is less demanding; then arriving there to find that it actually is – that must tell us something about what we need to be happy.

The essence of happiness is only a secret in the minds of adults. To discover the keys that unlock it we should go back to the beginning, to when we were born. What brought on that very first smile? It might have been a sound, a flash of light or colour; or maybe was a response to a

smile on the face of someone in front of us. Whatever, it made us happy for that instant. The sensation developed as we grew, experiencing new elements of life as they came along – the taste of a particular food that delighted; the amusing antics of a pet or a friend; and we also found joy in anticipation. As a child, did any of you stand looking out of a window on a Winter's day hoping for the first snow to fall; or couldn't go to sleep at night because tomorrow was your birthday and you were really hoping to get that new bike as a present? Then, when the wish came true and the waiting was all worthwhile, how did you feel?

That was happiness; and as it was then, it is now. It might be fragmented, distributed amongst the clutter of everyday life; but if you take the time to look into the jumble of daily routine and what you believe to be necessities, it is still there: in plain sight and very clear by virtue of its simplicity. It is relaxing in a favourite armchair while allowing the world to go by of its own accord without your assistance. It is having the love of someone who is always there for you, come rain or shine; and truly enjoying being there for them. These are simple things that require no concerted effort, just the time, the awareness, and the insight to appreciate them as the building-blocks of a future that awaits you – if you are prepared to take notice.

The longer these moments can be made to last, and the more of them that can be identified so that they can be enjoyed again and again, the sooner your personal season of happiness can become a reality.

You may not realise at this very moment what you have always wanted; but when you find true happiness, you will know. Believe me, because I have.

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