



# A Season of Happiness

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There's more to a healthy lifestyle than simply getting diet and exercise right. In fact, there's nothing simple about life in general. Feeling good is what everyone wishes for and is much easier in a body that is as fit and durable as it needs to be. But, despite being the most important asset a human has, the mind tends to be forgotten and is left to its own devices. It works away, quietly monitoring every part and activity of the body, frequently sending messages about the well-being of organs, muscles, about varying states of tiredness and hunger, invasion by disease, and so on. And it converts needs and desires into actions that will help satisfy them. We have to walk from A to B – leg muscles flex, feet tramp, arms swing, all because it was what we had *in mind*.

There is, however, more in the top paddock than just a control centre for bodily functions. Whereas the brain takes care of the basics, the mind is far more sophisticated. Even medical science is in the dark about many aspects of it, but we all know the effect it has on the way we approach life and how we feel about it.

## That Certain Feeling

A lecturer once advised a class I was attending not to express an opinion using the word “feel”. To begin a statement with: “I feel that...,” she claimed, made nonsense of whatever came after because it wasn't literally true. At the time, I accepted this pearl of wisdom, but then I got to thinking and realised the advice was flawed. Physical sensation plays a huge role in the way all living things respond to situations. “That certain feeling” is a very real indication not only of where we stand on a subject, but also points clearly to the effect that the possible outcome is likely to have on us.

Imagine a simple scenario. The day has been a hard one and all you want to do is unwind. The phone rings and the caller asks if it is okay for them to come round. You will “feel” something, a sudden physical change. It may be a tightening of the stomach because the prospective visitor is the last person you want to see and to put them off might instigate resentment on their part, damaging your relationship with them. Conversely, it could be someone who always cheers you up and you experience sensations of relief and elation at the thought of pleasant company. However you respond to the request will, in turn, cause a further reaction which will evolve in a good or bad way, dependent on your final decision.

By taking more notice of our feelings, we ought to be the happiest creatures on earth, always assuming a sensation is interpreted correctly and acted on selfishly. We would do and say the right thing for ourselves every time. But we don't, not always. Frequently, decisions are shaped to satisfy external parameters and long-term, rather than immediate, outcomes. So, we accept the feeling is telling us to do one thing, but still do something quite different because that's what is required of us.

By whom, though? An antagonist threatening us with a big stick? Convention with promises of social disapproval for a wrong move? The latter is often the case. We tend to do what is expected, what everyone else does, or should do, because that's the way civilisation works best. As individuals, we may not like it, but we toe the line. I believe this point is where many lose sight of true happiness and compromise good health into the bargain. The more personal feelings have to be side-lined in favour of some higher ideal, the deeper the dissatisfaction. Left unchecked, it can easily change a positive, normally cheerful person into a gloomy cynic. They then trudge snapping and snarling through life, affecting and infecting others with their bad attitude. And this particular aspect of personality tends to be worn like a suit of armour, too rigid to adjust properly for comfort and getting harder by the minute to climb out of.

One of the problems with respect to attitude is that it is frequently mistaken for feeling. Whereas feelings are stimulated by our inner-self and indicate our heart's desire, attitude tends to make us act according to the requirements of the bigger picture rather than our own small part of it. A feeling of sadness and compassion for an employee about to be sacked has to be weighed against expedience. No matter how much of a nice-guy the employer is, he must think of the business and change his attitude to perform the dastardly deed. Both sacker and sackee then experience powerful physical changes which adjust their attitudes to one another and the situation that has forced this event on them. Possibly the dismissed worker now hates the boss he once respected, and the employer probably despises himself. These two unfortunate individuals will take their respective upgraded attitudes with them from this point forward and it will impact on all future actions and reactions. One bad day at the office has changed the way each views and responds not only to the world that surrounds him, but also to the way he feels about it.

What does all this have to do with healthy living? Think about it. Everyday, decisions need to be made, actions performed and problems dealt with. Warm, comfortable sensations after the resolution produce an overall feeling of satisfaction for a job well done. Following a good outcome, attitude towards relationships and self-worth, even what to have for dinner, is positive. Not so if the decision made was a bad one. There is a tendency towards aggravation, and that growing incidence of acidity in the stomach predicts that the evening meal will be less enjoyable than usual. All-too often a bad attitude is carried forward to the next day and future situations, feeding on its own negativity, causing both life and general health to deteriorate.

Knowing and admitting that the wrong attitude is making life miserable would seem to suggest its own solution – change it. Here's where the old excuses come in. There's nothing we can do to make our lousy job more bearable, or be less concerned over peak-hour traffic and inflation. Maybe not, at least initially, but a change in attitude towards one or all can make a big difference to the way we "feel" about things in general. Analysing feelings, both before and after the event that sparked a negative attitude gives a pretty fair indication of how to reverse it, or at least avoid making it worse. There might be something good in it, no matter how small, amusing even. If there is, looking forward to that aspect, or recalling it afterwards, can lessen its negative effect.

Identifying this little bonus can have a cumulative effect. It will certainly put the unwanted task in a better light which, in turn, lessens the risk of carrying the associated bad mood to other areas, especially those which promise to be relatively enjoyable. They should be regarded as safe havens, sanctuaries to be preserved. The support of associates, partners and family will be more positive towards someone who is at least trying to look on the bright side. That in itself is worth cultivating. And if they know of and can identify with the initial problem, they may even regard the one who is tackling it with a smile and head held high as a bit of a hero. It may even encourage them to follow the example.

**Next issue: Solutions In Dreams – how dreams can reflect both problems and answers.**

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