

Eric
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Speaks

Essay #19

THE SECRET OF LIVING HAPPILY

What do you want more than anything else in the world? A particular object or achievement or goal may come to mind, but essentially you don't want the thing so much as you want what it will bring you. We are told in fable and allegory that man ultimately desires the attainment of the state of being called happiness, the greatest good of all existence.

Because of confusion as to how to reach happiness, the search for it has been one of man's chief sources of unhappiness. He who is searching for happiness is actually searching for things that he thinks will make him happy. But this life brings a series of hopes and subsequent disappointments.

In the dictionary we learn that the root of the word happiness is the same as the word "happen". In this relationship lies the key. Life uncompromised by man-made routines and obligations and rigidities is a flow of experience--of happenings. It becomes set and repetitive when human customs and harsh patterns of conduct make it so. Life is an adventure, and unhappiness always arises when we lose this adventuring spirit. Make life an adventure and you will find the Holy Grail of happiness.

Our minds are so constituted that we weary and worry in settings that are intended to bring permanent happiness. Retirement, for instance, rarely brings it; the whole philosophy of retirement is a kind of wall between ourselves and the flow of experience. To keep happy, we must keep turned to the variation of events. This was one of the great teachings of Jesus: "Except ye turn and become as a little child, you shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." There is no other way. He who, like a little child, lives adventurously from moment to moment and from day to day, experiencing the spontaneous flow of life, is the only one to know true happiness.

The famous psychologist, Piaget, wrote that the only normal mind is the child's mind. He might have added that the only way to happiness is the child's way because the child uses his mind properly. Imagination is the forefront of all natural thinking. We are not literal creatures with our thoughts imprisoned in facts alone. If this were so, we would hate games and sports and we certainly would not risk driving cars on the highway. Through the ages, man has turned to the excitement of adventure, surviving many risks since prehistoric times in attaining dominion over his environment.

Imagination, memory, reason and the five senses are all constituted to deal with changing experiences. So normal life is not fashioned for security. This explains why money, position, and property all fail in the end to give happiness. The more we have, the greater the demand that we live a life of routine. The more security, less spontaneous is our experience. When we back ourselves into a corner of limiting the happenings, we limit our opportunities for happiness.

Think about your own life. Were you ever made happy by sameness? Are not positions of power hard to endure? Do not the so-called pleasures lead to satiation?

We cannot make ourselves, or anyone else, happy. That which is made cannot, by definition, happen spontaneously. Designing a house is a happy experience, but often the great expectations of moving in are lost when the task is done. Putting his son to bed one night, the father blew out the candle, whereupon the boy objected that he wanted to blow it out himself. So, the father re-lit the candle but the boy refused to extinguish it and sobbed, "But I wanted to blow it out before it was blown out." Arranged acts give little pleasure. But he who like one of these little ones has learned to yield to the flow of life and to thrill in every constructive event that occurs, is the one who is using his mind in the way for which it was intended.

A small child is naturally intrigued with life. To him, nothing is impossible and anything can be the means to an adventure. He can spend many happy hours with nothing but Mommy's pots and pans or a spool of thread.

It is unfortunate that we have come to think of maturity as the time to put away childish things, and faith and simplicity are of the first things to go. When the child goes out of us we lose our ability to find happiness in every experience--so, the only way to return to happiness is to become once more as a little child. Elizabeth Akers Allen writes: "Backward, turn backward, O time, in your flight,/ Make me a child again just for tonight."

The art of living happily lies in the art of living adventurously. Think of happiness as not something to have, but something to be. Nothing can make you happy, but anything can provide you with the opportunity to be happy if you want to be so.

You have the power to create your own sunshine--veritably to lift yourself up by your bootstraps. This has been termed "Pollyanna", a term derived from the character created by the novelist, Eleanor Hodgman Porter. This little girl deserves another look because these days her name has come to symbolize insipid and groundless optimism. Pollyanna found gladness in things that meant only dismay to others. Recovering from an accident, she was happy that now she had so much time for reading and for developing a new slant on life. Actually, the Pollyannas of this world have been the innovators, the explorers, the discoverers. Jesus, it could well be said, was the greatest Pollyanna of all time, for He believed in the goodness of all people no matter what they might have done or been. He talked of the well-spring within man that was his true source of inspiration.

Soren Kierkegaard, founder of the philosophical school of Existentialism, said, "If an Arab in the desert were to discover a spring in his tent and so would always be able to have water in abundance, how fortunate he would consider himself. So, too, when the physical being, man, is always turned toward the outside, thinking that his happiness lies outside him, finally turns inward and discovers that the source has always been within him, he discovers that source is his relation to God and to the secret of living happily."

Herein lies the secret place of the most high, in every person. This is the secret flow of inspiration and life and strength and enthusiasm, and the ability to meet the flow of life's experiences without resistance and with an adventurous spirit, adjusting to what cannot be helped, changing the things that can be improved, and always enjoying everything.

Happiness is not an outer achievement, a destination at the end of the road, but rather it is an inner potential, a latent energy which must be expressed at the beginning of the journey. Joy is not something we should try to get out of our work, but something we should put into our work. Stir up your inner spark and let it shine. Know, as Jesus said, that the Kingdom of Heaven is within; start every morning resolving to let that kingdom come through you.

Remember, nothing has the power to give you happiness, but anything can be an incentive to release the happiness force from within yourself. We are dealing with attitudes that can be conditioned by mental discipline. Resolve to put you into everything you do. Do not resist things or try to find joy in experiences; flow with the continuity of life's happenings and put joy and enthusiasm into the adventure of living.