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Paulo Coelho looks at whether pursuing happiness is actually worth the effort...

A comment that is very often heard in interviews is: "... and now that you are a happy person ...", which provokes the immediate reaction: "Did I say I was happy?"

I am not happy, and the quest for happiness as a principal objective is not part of my world. Of course, ever since I can remember, I have done what I felt like doing. That is why I was admitted three times to a psychiatric clinic, spent a few terrifying days in the dungeons of Brazil's military dictatorship, and just as quickly lost and won friends and girlfriends. I walked down paths that, if I could turn back, I might avoid today, yet something always pushed me forward, and it certainly was not the quest for happiness. What interests me in life is curiosity, challenges, the good fight with its victories and defeats. I bear many a scar, but I also carry with me moments that never would have happened if I had not dared beyond my limits. I confront my fears and moments of loneliness, and I think that a happy person never goes through this.

But that is of the least importance: I am content. And contentedness is not exactly a synonym of happiness, which to me seems like a dull Sunday afternoon without any challenges, just rest that in a couple of hours grows into tedium, the same evening television programs, the prospect of Monday waiting with its routine.

I mention all this because I was surprised by the long leading article in one of the most prestigious magazines in the United States that is normally dedicated to political matters. The theme was: "The science of happiness: is it in our genetic system?" Aside from the usual things (tables of happier or less happy countries, sociological studies on man's search for a meaning to life, eight steps to finding harmony), the article includes some interesting observations that for the very first time made me see that I am not alone in my ideas:

A) Countries where income is under US\$ 10,000 a year are countries where the majority of the population is unhappy. However, it was discovered that from that figure upwards, monetary difference is not all that important. A scientific study conducted on the 400 richest persons in the United States shows that they are only slightly happier than those who earn US\$ 20,000. The logical consequence: of course, poverty is something unacceptable, but the old saying that "money does not bring happiness" is being proved in laboratories.

B) Happiness is just another of the tricks that our genetic system plays on us to carry out its only role, which is the survival of the species. So, to force us to eat or make love, it is necessary to add an element called "pleasure".

C) However many happy people say they are, nobody is satisfied: we always desire what we do not have. This is also a subtle manifestation of the instinct of survival: at the moment when everyone feels completely happy, no-one will dare to do anything different and the world will stop evolving.

D) Therefore, both on the physical plane (eating, making love) and on the emotional plane (always wanting something we do not have), the evolution of humanity has dictated one important and fundamental rule: happiness cannot last. It will always be made of moments, so we can never get comfortable in an armchair and just contemplate the world.

Conclusion: better forget this idea of seeking happiness at any cost and look for more interesting things like unknown seas, strangers, provocative thoughts, risky experiences. Only in this way will we live our human condition to the full and contribute to a more harmonious civilization at peace with other cultures. Of course, everything has a price, but it is worth paying.

Translated by James Mulholland ■ www.paulocoelhoblog.com

living in harmony...

When faced with the question "What is Spirituality?," we often struggle to define something which, ultimately, can feel a little illusive. Taoist monk, **ven. Jing Attiig**, shares his view, and reminds us that taking time out to reconnect with our spirit is, without question, for the higher good.

Spirituality provides the means of reconnecting with a way of life that flows in harmony with great and pure energies of the universe. Each and every person is a living spirit and so spirituality allows for the individual to become aware of certain aspects of divinity that are inherent in human nature.

small steps

We encounter many circumstances in life that can do a great deal of harm to us. By learning how to recognise these circumstances beforehand we can avoid falling into unnecessary distress. Spirituality provides the means for approaching any situation with acceptance and understanding, which allows for maximum benefit to all involved. The one who works in this manner does so due to an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, and of the obvious advantages of living harmoniously with others.

In observing the natural laws of the universe one learns to approach life without fear. Supreme confidence in one's own being allows for a truly inspired existence, and is the natural result of a spiritually oriented life. By taking time out of the stressful lives that we live and in making room for activities that cultivate body and mind, we restore the balance that is necessary for peaceful living. In developing such tools we have a constant remedy for anxiety, stress, disorder and disease.



replenish & revitalise

Simple physical exercise and correct diet serves as the easiest approach to revitalise the body and practical forms of meditation, like focused breathing and slow, graceful, dance like movements, will serve to replenish energy and revitalize the mind. As a result of such activities one's spirit is overwhelmed with joy and acts to reinvigorate one's entire existence.

a fearless world

When an individual practices a life of spirituality, amazing improvements in health and well being are observed. When a whole household practices such a lifestyle there is a peaceful and happy aura to the entire home. When a community practices such things, destructive behaviour diminishes and people live without fear. When the rest of the world sees such a way of life, everyone feels a deep yearning to cultivate. The benefits of this cannot be limited to mere concepts, at this point. Due to the overall effect on consciousness, the energy of the entire planet shifts.

A life of spirituality creates inner and outer harmony, and leads one into a world of peace.

ven. Jing Attiig is an ordained Taoist monk living in the Tao Wu Shin Monastery, on Tamborine Mountain in Australia. The Monastery is also a school for training chi gung, meditation and many personal trainings, specialising in Taoist Mysticism and Enlightenment. See www.taowushin.com for further information.

"Flow with whatever may happen and let your mind be free. Stay centered by accepting whatever you are doing. This is the ultimate"

Chuang Tzu