

the quest for

HAPPINESS



By Dr. Pier Albrecht

In this new chapter on the quest for happiness, we shall continue to delve deeper into this important item that is of interest to everyone. We will attempt to define concepts such as “happiness” “interior joy” or “wellbeing”, and also to discover how this subject has been dealt with during the course of humanity.

What happened when I asked someone to read this chapter on definitions could serve as a good example of how difficult it is to give a precise meaning to these words.

It involves a patient of mine, Ana M^a V..., a 36 year old psychologist who read this chapter on the quest for happiness. Her comment was “It’s not bad... I agree with what you say, but from my point of view, joy is something momentary whilst happiness is something more lasting”. As happens all too often in our personal and professional lives, her opinion is based on the words used and not on their significance. To avoid this kind of problem and to not give so much importance to words, you could try to invent a more fluid concept, imagining a continuous interior state of well-being that makes you feel good whenever and wherever you are. Therefore a deep interior feeling of continuous wellbeing exists, or might exist. Again I have used the word “well-being”, and each of you can interpret it as you wish, but to me it seems to be the most neutral expression. This is what I would call “interior joy”.

So, apart from this permanent feeling of wellbeing, we can also experience moments of “well-being that are more intense than usual”, which would contrast with the normal state of wellbeing. This condition is characterised by the implication that it cannot last for long because it depends on one or several external factors that are not permanent.

For some people the external factor that generates those famous endorphins released by our brain to make us feel good will be artificial, such as the use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco. For others it could be natural, through sex, music or sports. For me, this feeling of intense, specific well-being is what I would call pleasure, I do not consider it to be happiness. But for most people, happiness still depends on external factors like, for example, the fact of having money, a partner, a house, children, material assets, travelling, or not doing anything, lying on the beach, enjoying the sun, the sky and the birds.

When I mentioned joy in the introduction to this article, I was referring to the concept of joy that is used in religious books. These books make reference to joy, not to happiness. The scholars and the prophets who have dwelt upon this subject claim that it is not possible to find happiness on this earth, although you can find interior joy. As you see, different names can be given to it – the concepts can even be confused – by calling joy what others call happiness. The essential thing is to understand that it is possible to attain an interior state of permanent wellbeing that does not depend on the external conditions of life, and that this deep, permanent state is more intense and will fulfil us more, bringing us peace. It would be impossible to achieve this if our state depended on external factors, that



we could call stimulants (either physical or emotional). We all have friends or relatives who are full of “joy” and transmit this to others. Always happy, they are extremely positive, they like everyone and almost everything.

Well also know other people who are never happy, there is always something that they are missing, something they need to be able to fully enjoy life. They complain constantly, they criticize the world, life and everyone else. It's always the world that is to blame if they are not happy, because they do not receive what they think they deserve.

Between these two extremes there are thousands of different cases, like ourselves. Scientists and brain specialists claim it is a question of chemistry and that the solution lies in medication known as “happiness pills”, such as Prozac. Others, like psychoanalysts and psychologists, think it depends on the early years of our lives, and they propose sessions of regression, either with patient being conscious or under hypnosis. Freud would have said it depends on the subconscious and others would say it involves the tendency of the soul.

The fact is that the quest for happiness continues and we all take part in the search, even those who try to hide it behind physical and/or mental hyperactivity. I don't think there is one answer, but many answers. In any case, anyone who manages to love himself and others, without expecting anything in return and with compassion, comes close to achieving his own personal and permanent happiness.

The quest for happiness, an age-old concept.

Since ancient times, Man has been trying to improve his quality of life. In the beginning, to protect himself and to have a regular food supply. Little by little, once the essentials for his day to day life were more or less guaranteed - i.e. his basic needs - he began to have time to think and redefine his life. From that moment on, the notion of happiness appears. It could almost be said that the search for happiness appears once the fight for survival disappears.

In other words, once the dangers are removed, temporarily or almost permanently, he can start to look for ways in which to improve his living conditions : food, housing, dress, love, play. From this, first the concept, and later the philosophy, automatically emerges.

The division of the world

At any period in time, the world has always been divided into two categories of people: those who have tried to find happiness through material belongings, and those who have remained either partly or completely on the outside of the material world, trying to find a spiritual evolution.

Since the most distant times, and in all civilizations, politicians have co-existed alongside the holy men. The politicians organized the world and daily life. The priests were there to guide us, acting as intermediaries between the visible and the invisible worlds, between the world from where the soul comes and to where it goes.

In certain periods of history, these two worlds have sometimes come close, bringing spiritual and political power together in the same hands. On other occasions they become distant, like at the present time - at least in the Western world - when the spiritual leaders do not enjoy any political privileges other than, very occasionally, acting as mere advisors.

To be continued in the next issue...