

CHAPTER 2

Do You Want to be Happy?

Everyone without exception wants to be happy. The conscious or unconscious expectation of happiness, joy or satisfaction is implicit in all of our activities. No one ever goes to a party thinking, "I haven't had a miserable time for ages! Maybe tonight will be my chance. I hope the music will be awful, the food stale, the people boring, and I'll be attacked by some drunks on the way home!"

The idea of happiness as a universal pursuit is not new. In fact, more than 2,300 years ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote:

In view of the fact that all knowledge and every pursuit aims at some good, what is the highest of all goods achievable by action? Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement it is happiness; they identify living well and doing well with being happy.

Yet strangely, happiness seems to be one of those things that flee from us when we pursue it directly, and people who seek happiness just for its own sake rarely find it.

*Chase a butterfly,
And it will flutter away.
Concentrate elsewhere,
It will land on your shoulder.*

(Japanese haiku)

That's why it's important to know what the real source of happiness is and what is necessary in order to attain it. One way in which we experience happiness is when our desires are fulfilled. When we are hungry, we desire something to satisfy our hunger. As soon as we find something to eat, especially something we like to eat, our desire is then satisfied and we are happy. If there is someone we love, we yearn to be with him or her. So when we finally meet, we feel very happy. Happiness is the natural result of the fulfillment of desire.

The question is, does the fulfillment of every desire make us happy? We know of some desires which when satisfied make us happy up to a certain point, but make us miserable if we don't stop at the right time. Almost everybody likes ice cream, for example, and just hearing the word may have already stimulated your desire to have some. Most people can easily eat one or



two ice cream cones and still want more. A few people might be able to devour five without feeling ill, but do you think there are many who can eat ten or even twenty ice cream cones without regretting it? We see then that one can have “too much of a good thing.”

What is more, there are desires which we should not try to satisfy at all, because even though we may experience through them a momentary feeling of “joy,” the long-term result is that we become deeply unhappy. Taking drugs is one obvious example, but consider also the times when you’ve done something you know in your heart is wrong. What you experience immediately is a kind of happiness, but it is tainted with a feeling of guilt which tends to remain long after the feeling of happiness has faded away.



For example, sometimes in the moment it feels good to shout at or curse somebody who has made us angry. Later we feel pretty awful about it and about ourselves for having spoken ugly words. But admittedly it’s often hard to resist the urge. A good part of growing up, in fact, involves learning to overcome these kinds of impulses so as to avoid the unfortunate consequences of them. Before we can, however, it’s important to be able to recognize which desires in the long run are healthy and good and which ones are unhealthy and damaging.

Still, there are many impulsive people who seek as much immediate pleasure as possible without thinking twice about it. In their minds, anything that is pleasurable — again, in the short term — is good, while that which causes them the slightest pain or unpleasantness is evil. They are living by what is called a “pleasure/pain principle,” by which ones tries to experience as much pleasure and as little pain in one’s life as one can. Common experience tells us, however, that a life of such pleasure-seeking rarely achieves real satisfaction, because the person probably has never asked himself seriously about the meaning or purpose of his life or what effect his actions have on others.

A big part of the problem is ignorance. We may not be sure which path in life will lead to lasting happiness. As a result, our desires can be corrupted or misdirected and their realization will cause us harm sooner or later. Often we lack a good sense of right and wrong when it comes to attaining true happiness. So we stumble around from one bad experience to another and wonder where is the way out. Usually, if we have a problem with our health, we can go to a doctor who can give an accurate diagnosis and prescribe the right treatment. But how about finding lasting happiness and peace of mind? Is there anyone to whom we can go who can really help us in this matter?

Physical happiness

If you think about it, there are actually two kinds of happiness: One is a physical or external happiness that we generally associate with our bodies. The other is happiness of the mind or inner happiness. It would be ideal if we could always experience both of them at the same time, but many times it’s not that way. We may feel good inside while reading an interesting book or while being together with close friends, but if suddenly we come down with some illness and must stay in bed, we

cannot feel completely happy. On the other hand, though we may be in perfect physical health, if we have hurt someone we care about or, for some other reason, are not at peace with ourselves, our happiness cannot be complete either.

Considering for the moment just our physical health, we realize that staying healthy means observing certain natural laws. We know it's important to eat the right foods, sleep well, keep warm, exercise and so on, but there are other kinds of laws that strongly affect your state of health:

- ✘ You're leaning over the balcony of your tenth floor apartment when you see your best friend, whom you've been longing to see all week, walking along the street. If you use the usual means to get downstairs, you may not have enough time to catch him. The quickest way, of course, is to jump, but the law of gravity predicts that if you do that you will die, most likely.
- ✘ You really like mushrooms but, for some reason, no one ever told you that some mushrooms are edible while others are quite poisonous. One day you go for a walk in the woods and you come upon a big patch of mushrooms. They look just like the ones your aunt collects, so you pick them and take them home. You then cook and eat them. A while later you're writhing in pain and have to be taken to the hospital to have your stomach pumped.
- ✘ Some of the earliest experiments with flight were failures because the first "aviators" simply didn't know the fundamentals of aerodynamics. They had to discover them the hard way, often at great expense to their health.

To grow up, stay healthy and have physical health and happiness, we should live in accordance with natural law. However, we are not born with knowledge of such things. We have innate desires and must learn the best way to fulfill them.

While there are some things that are only understood through trial and error, such as riding a bicycle, there are other things that allow us but one mistake, which is fatal. Some desires can never be realized, like unaided flight. Other desires are bad for us because they are excessive, like too much ice cream. Still other desires are wrong because they are premature, such as a two-year-old child wanting to cross a busy road by himself.

Throughout history in every society, people have tried to dispel ignorance by accumulating knowledge about how to survive and prosper in their environment. This knowledge was rightly treasured and passed on from generation to generation. Often this knowledge has taken the form of aphorisms such as "Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning; red sky at



night, sailors' delight." This pertains to survival at sea, but another people might share with us their special knowledge of how to survive in the jungle, in the desert or on the steppe.

Out of humankind's struggle to overcome its ignorance of nature and uncover nature's laws, science emerged. Scientists develop theories that are like maps. Maps attempt to describe as accurately as possible the territory, so that one can know what to expect around the next bend. This knowledge can be used to travel along the safest and quickest routes without getting lost. Scientific theories too can be used to enable human beings to accomplish their desires, whether to fly or to avoid dying of polio. It's important to recognize that it took several hundred years to acquire such knowledge, which today we are able to learn in school in just a few years.

If we are wise, we study hard and inherit from the work of others so that we don't have to waste time and effort rediscovering previous knowledge. Knowledge is often acquired only at a great price. Early medical researchers, for example, would experiment on themselves because they didn't want to endanger others. Sometimes they died during the experiment. Their colleagues could take note of the results without repeating the experiment or making the same mistakes. Isaac Newton, who first formulated the laws of gravity, admitted: "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." That is, he built or elaborated on the noble efforts of scientists who came before him.

As science uncovers new facts, people adjust their behavior accordingly. For example, when it was established that smoking is linked to lung cancer, many people stopped smoking. They realized that the temporary and immediate gratification of smoking was outweighed by the prospect of future physical suffering and a shorter lifespan.

Inner happiness

The same applies to our inner health, happiness and well-being. To grow into spiritually mature and psychologically healthy persons, we also need a map of our inner world and of human relationships. Just as a good map of a mountain range indicates which paths are dangerous, a map of our interior world will warn us of which ways to avoid. If we make mistakes that hurt the feelings of those we love, we may damage our self-respect and the trust of those we care about. Sometimes the damage can be healed and we end up just a little wiser. Sometimes, though, the psychological damage lasts a lifetime and the emotional wound never heals. The effect is not always obvious, but the person's inner world is diminished by the experience.

We can affirm that there are certain ways of relating that promote healthy emotional growth and other ways that are unhealthy, ultimately causing pain and unhappiness. As we will see throughout this book, spiritual and moral laws exist which are more than just a matter of personal opinion or some old-fashioned social convention. In other words, you cannot just choose or invent spiritual laws at whim any more than you can change the laws of physics. Human experience tells us that spiritual laws are as real as those that govern the natural world, even if the results are not immediately seen. Conversely, just as we know that our body functions best when it lives in harmony with the laws of nature, so also our mind remains healthy and happy when it is in harmony with spiritual law.

At this point, most of us have what we need to be minimally physically healthy. Maybe some of you know how to drive a car

A wise person learns from the mistakes of others.

A person with common sense learns from his own mistakes.

A fool never learns.

already or even hold a job. Some things come naturally, but to be most effective or to do things correctly involves a learning process. To be strong and healthy, to be wealthy or knowledgeable requires us to gain special skills and understanding. These don't happen automatically.

We can learn to satisfy our emotional desire for love and friendship in the same manner. Making good relationships requires that we develop personal virtues, alongside practical knowledge on how to relate well with others. We learn about spiritual laws in much the same way as we learn about physical laws: partly from direct experience and partly from the experience of others — from our parents, our teachers, books, etc. In addition, spiritual knowledge relies heavily on the example of others, on intuition, and on the social and cultural norms that we've grown up with. Historically, religions have been the wellsprings of much wisdom, since they deal with notions of life's origins, purpose, death and destiny. Religion is integral to all human cultures. Whether we are believers or not, religions still have many valuable insights on the path to attaining spiritual health and happiness. In this book we will draw upon a few of the world's great religious traditions as wellsprings of spiritual understanding.

Happiness and pleasure

In the history of thought, philosophers have grappled with questions about happiness and the meaning of human existence.

Some people think that happiness comes from living a life of pleasure. Yet, surely isn't there more to living the good life than this? Another Greek philosopher, Socrates, is famous for saying, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Ignoring this ancient wisdom, British philosopher Jeremy Bentham thought that since pleasure was the source of happiness, any pleasure was preferable to pain, and therefore gambling was at least as valuable as poetry. His successor, John Stuart Mill, responded by saying:

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question.

Can you think of any values or purposes for which a person might be willing to endure pain or even risk his life?

This raises another important question: Is it possible to be happy without being good? Can one live a life preoccupied with the needs of oneself and feel deeply satisfied in the end? Aristotle believed that happiness was intrinsically related to living a virtuous life. All of us are familiar with examples of those who sacrificed their lives for the sake of love — love for another person, love of family, love of country. Even those examples should be enough to convince us that happiness and pleasure do not always coincide with each other. One can experience pleasure even in committing a crime, but genuine happiness appears to be more refined, possible only within the bounds of goodness.

The way to happiness

Our path to happiness depends on our knowledge of those principles that operate in the world of nature and the world of the spirit.

Consider the following metaphors:

A fleet of ships is sailing from Ontario to San Francisco. The voyage will be successful only if each ship is seaworthy with its engine in good operating condition,



and also if the ships do not collide with one another or get in each other's way. The two, in fact, are related, for if their steering mechanisms are faulty, they will not be able to avoid colliding, and, of course, if the ships keep colliding they will not remain seaworthy for long. If instead of San Francisco the fleet ends up in Singapore, the voyage cannot be deemed successful either. Seaman-ship, then, is fundamentally concerned with three things: keeping the ship in good condition, staying on course and arriving safely at the final destination.

By analogy, to conduct our life successfully means to maintain our moral and spiritual health, while keeping a clear vision of where we are going and how to get there, and finally to persevere until our goal is reached.

Returning to our map analogy, we realize that if you want to find your way through an unfamiliar mountain range, a map of the area is very helpful. The more accurate and recent the map, the easier your journey should be. An old and inaccurate map may be worse than useless, for it may give you a feeling of false confidence while leading you in the wrong direction. The result could be fatal. A good map will include information about dangers to look out for and paths to avoid. A travel guide is also useful, as it takes into account the experiences of previous travelers to the area.

For achieving real happiness too, many maps and guides are available — some very good ones and some not-so-good ones. We believe we have chosen from some of the most reliable sources of moral wisdom in writing this book — religious, philosophical and psychological — and our hope is that the book itself can be a most useful map to help you on your journey. Have a successful one!

For Your
Journal



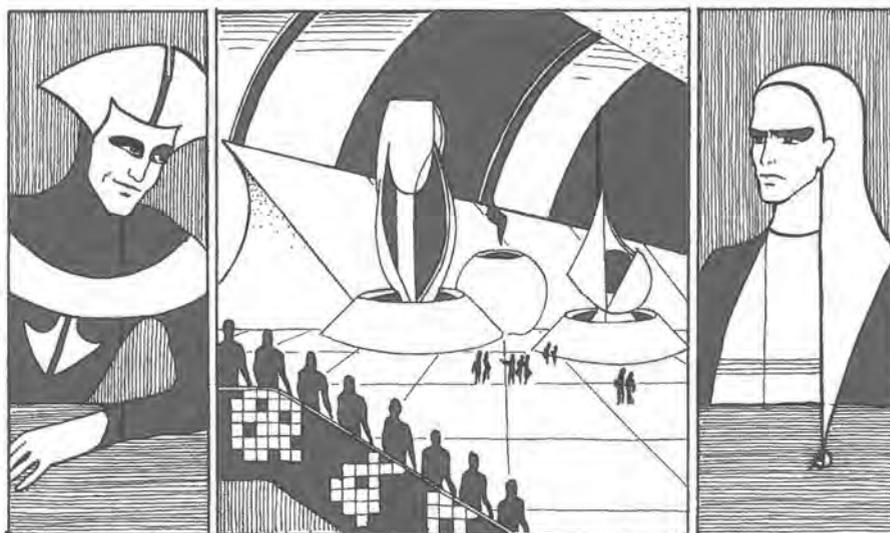
What Makes You Happy?

Make a list of 20 things that make you happy. Now write an imaginary life story including doing all the things you have on your list.

The Right to Be Unhappy

In his novel *Brave New World*, set in the not-too-distant future, Aldous Huxley explores the question of what is most important in life: pleasure or integrity.

London has become a society based upon the assumption that pleasure is the highest good and the source of happiness. All the sufferings and problems that are a normal part of life have been banished since everything is planned and predictable. So there are no social or economic problems. Medical technology allows people to be genetically designed, created in test tubes and brought up in conditioning centers where they learn how to behave. They are assigned to particular jobs that are suitable for their personality. Since everything



is taken care of they don't have to worry about anything. They are free from responsibility. To avoid the pain that accompanies intimate relationships, no one marries or has deep friendships, but there is free sex for all. If a person gets bored there are games to kill time, and any doubts or tinges of unhappiness can be instantly dismissed with a dose of the intoxicant soma.

The Savage, John, is born "by accident" and brought up in an Indian village outside of "civilization". He returns to London but as a free man cannot accept the values he finds there. He feels there is more to life than soma and sex. His unorthodox thinking and behavior attracts a couple of "intellectuals" and bring him to the attention of the authorities. Towards the end of the book there is a meeting between the Savage, his two friends and Mustapha Mond, the Controller.



To read

Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley