

Editorial

Happiness - An Evasive State of Mind

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The daily strive to get to work and back home through traffic congestions; passing the day without conflicts; improving the life style when money is short; overcoming medical problems; raising and securing the family, and tolerating unfulfilled dreams are only a portion of constantly bothering issues. No wonder then that in this chaotic reality and despite various joyful and satisfying moments, the majority of grown-ups claim that they are unhappy. Amazingly, however, there are always those who believe and declare that they are happy, which raises the question what is happiness and what is it constituted from. Google suggests that "Happiness is that feeling that comes over you when you know life is good and you can't help but smile. It's the opposite of sadness. Happiness is a sense of well-being, joy, or contentment. When people are successful, or safe, or lucky, they feel happy". This description combines a number of positive experiences and feelings, that most likely affect our brain to release chemicals recognized as the 'good guys', in contrast to the 'bad guys', chemicals secreted in situations of sadness, agony, pain, failures, disappointments and frustrations that affect brain circuits associated with unpleasant emotions and thoughts. Although moments of satisfaction, joy and pleasure raise good feelings, these are usually temporary, whereas happiness in its broader essence reflects a positive state of mind based on numerous parameters that collectively raise a long-lasting contentment. When a person claims he is happy, he probably disregards his difficulties and concentrates on a particular issue that makes him feel good (e.g., love, professional success, good health, overcoming a major difficulty, listening to beloved music, winning in sport).

Consequently, we may guess why only a minority of grown-ups feel happy, whereas younger people may feel happy almost with no reason. It seems that as people are more experienced and have a comprehensive perception over the surrounding world, even those who are healthy, live in comfort, have fulfilled most of their wishes, and are a target to envy by their neighbors, cannot be truly happy, while being at the same time aware to the chaos around. On the other hand, the long, often naïve, expectations of younger people, which may be founded on ignorance, fill them with a spurious feeling of

happiness, which in time gradually damps as disappointments and experience accumulate. Undoubtedly, reaching a happy state of mind is a subjective matter that depends on variables like age, physical and cognitive conditions, educational values, career, satisfaction of family life, care for society, and reasonable perception of national and global issues. As a social organism our emotions and perspectives are influenced by our surrounding, and so the differences among people and their state of mind vary tremendously. While one claims that he is happy, another with a similar background and exposure to comparable influences may feel miserable. Thus, any attempt to define happiness should differentiate between transient feelings resulting from satisfaction, joy, and pleasure versus a state of mind based on combined positive feelings and experience, while ignoring difficulties and worries that naturally ensue the surrounding chaos.

Another widespread avenue to happiness, practiced by humans for thousands of years, is by adopting a religious way of life. The unmitigated trust in God and belief that everything is a predisposed dictation (including matters of life and death), may release the brain from burdens and responsibilities and so minimize unhappy feelings. Although a religious way of life may not be easier, the trust in God and routine daily services (e.g., prayers, rituals, and various commandments) may fill up with an impression of completion, which mistakenly would be considered as happiness. However, such a 'religious bondage' in the 21st century may actually narrow the spiritual independence and free will of humans, as well as their self-control and judgement. This is reflected for example on the denial of the Darwinian evolutionary process of human creation, or the total rejection of the fact that the Cosmos was created billions of years ago. With such narrow-minded belief, the happiness achieved through religion is apparently illusive. Indeed, a growing number of people refute such kind of life and prefer the freedom of the mind and use of their brain with all accompanying pain and fears of the unknown and death.

Overall, reaching happiness consciously seems quite intricate, an almost impossible mission.

As our cognitive abilities are more complex, more obstacles must be overcome. Should this postulation be correct, we may further assume that our pet may reach happiness on the basis of fewer parameters (e.g., good food, warm rest place, cuddling, mating companion). It is unfortunate that we cannot get a clear verbal answer from our beloved animal, but overall it seems that the developed brain of humans, which brought our species to unprecedented heights, also obstructs our ability to reach happiness, quite a sad conclusion.