

Don't Worry, Be Happy

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When I first heard the song "Don't Worry, Be Happy", I thought it was the most ridiculous and ignorant phrase or statement I have ever heard. What kind of happiness is he talking about? Who can possibly do that?

Then, a few years later, I found out that the song was based on a statement made by my spiritual teacher, Meher Baba. It, only, took me 20 years to discern, comprehend and begin to experience, every now and then, morsels of this "flavor" of happiness folded in the "...Be Happy" part of the statement.

Not long ago, one of my clients asked me, "Are you happy?". I responded immediately and without hesitation, "yes". He was surprised, (and by the way, I don't know whether he believed me) but not as surprised as I was! But I did speak the truth.

Over the years, I realized that a different "flavor" of happiness has been gradually infiltrating my world once I stopped looking for a reason to be happy; an underlying, tranquil and sustained sensation began to emerge. It used to be that immediately after the usual reasons which brought me "happiness" manifested, just like the sun setting every day, my "happiness" set as well. I propose, that when one seeks and finds a reason to be happy, one experiences ephemeral happiness, which is characterized by states of excitement, joy, pleasure, pride and satisfaction for getting what one wants or dreams of. Nothing wrong with that. However, time after time, we read in the scriptures of ago-old esoteric traditions, that our inherent identity, as souls, is a state of constant bliss. This state of constant bliss has been given various names, one of them being, Real Happiness, and this is the term I decided to use in this article. Real Happiness is described as the opposite of the ephemeral happiness or "pleasant" reactions we constantly seek. We seek and once we believe we find them, an unending effort commences in grasping, trying to make them last. The reasons for this "mistaken search" and unsuccessful attempt to hold on to them, are quite complicated and beyond the scope of this current piece of writing.

Conversely, annoyance, frustration, sadness, anxiety, anger, dissatisfaction, do not necessarily signify unhappiness. I believe, one can experience these unpleasant states while maintaining Real Happiness. Both pleasant and unpleasant reactions are ephemeral. Real Happiness, in my experience, is like the blue clear sky when the sun is out. It is a constant, no matter what kind of clouds the weather may bring during the day. All the ephemeral pleasant and unpleasant reactions and hardships are like clouds. They might block the sun and darkened a bright day, while the blue clear sky remains always unchanged behind the black clouds.

The "Don't Worry, Be Happy" statement, points out to being happy for no apparent reason, no matter what. It indicates an existence which is detached from emotional reactions, blame or praise, catastrophic events, worldly accomplishments and possessions. This might be a notion that has been said before, and which can easily be understood but extremely difficult to comprehend. The chances of comprehending it increase, only when the mind, body and heart undergo significant periods of dissatisfaction, pain, disappointment and suffering or conversely, when the individual is lucky enough to be the recipient of pure love. Pure love is when we are deeply loved without being obligated in any way. This kind of love softens and lowers our defenses and opens our vulnerability. It has a transformational effect. The hard conditions as well have the immense power for transformation but through a different pathway. They set into motion inner stirrings which, sometimes, can activate the questioning and pondering about what is important and what not important in life. This course of revisiting and reevaluating, sometimes, is pregnant with the possibility of triggering radical changes in the outlook of worldly life and thus starting the journey towards Real Happiness. And yet, at other times, after the hardships are overcome, one ends up in the exact same spot they were before without any expansion in their life attitude.

The disruption, from the Covid19 pandemic the world is now experiencing, has brought untold suffering, unimaginable loss, unfathomable pain. In the middle of all this, I strongly believe, there is a decision to be made as

to how to handle one's reaction to this unprecedented crisis. I can think of two choices; to keep asking why did this happen and blame others or God for brining such a horrific experience upon humanity. The second choice, is to consider this, as an example of those hardships which shake the human spirit down to its primal, deepest roots, in order to wake it up. Such arduous awakening, posits a chance to reset life paths which have dangerously departed from their original noble and honest intend.

Asking the Why question and blaming, have amazing gifts and limitations. Every time we ask why, it may reveal curiosity, an indication of not knowing something and wishing to explore new information or an interest in discovering more facts. Conversely, it can stagnate someone in the victim position. If the Whys are asked from such a position, they rarely carry an answer. Instead, they may easily magnify the intensity and multiply the frequency of worrying. Blaming others can offer a pause in attending to one's own life situation by focusing on someone else's life situation. This can sometimes offer a needed respite from facing one's own unsatisfactory life existence. More often though, the act of blaming leaves one in a bitter state of being and most categorically is a sure way in giving away one's power. It pushes the pause button for inner development and growth.

"Trusting" hardships, carries gifts and limitations as well. The most obvious limitation is to say, the overused and grossly misunderstood statement, "there is a reason for everything" and do nothing, learn nothing and feel superior because you utter such a "wise" statement. The gift that catastrophic situations can offer, is to recognize and handle the hardship as an opportunity to awaken from default, robotic, meaningless and unconscious life patterns. To dust our usual routines off, and once we manage to get up on our feet again, starting a determined march towards more lucid and aware convictions with a strengthened inner spirit.

The hardships brought about by the Covid19 pandemic and its elongated required lockdown seclusions, have forced us to behave unlike ourselves. For instance, if our personality tended to be the "laid back" type, we might be surprised and shocked to observe how we jumped in and took charge, handling all necessary details with no time to waste. On the other hand, the crisis might have forced us to intensify our usual modes of behavior. For example, if we carry a personality with tendencies to be responsible, now, we find ourselves becoming super responsible, to the point of functioning under mere and continuous exhaustion.

Whichever direction the patterns of our personality happened to turn, we also discovered common responses, such as, dealing with so many unknowns, caused the immediate suspension of expectations, plans and future predictions. Comforts and routines have been interrupted, desires are restrained and wants have to be curbed, otherwise, we will single handedly be fueling our own worrying. We are told that only truth and facts will enable the quarantines to lift and we keep hearing the phrase, test, trace, isolate. The tracing part requires honesty about, where we have been, who we came in contact with and when. Honesty is also forced upon our relationships. Having to stay for long periods confined inside the house with our family or partners, peels off any illusions we might have been holding on to and reveals the natural strengths and weaknesses in these relationships. The tracing and isolating forces the slimming down of egoism. We have to move away from the I, Mine, and My and enter the space of We and Ours because this can be a matter of saving our own or someone else's life.

Vulnerability has been cracked open these days. If we do not notice, attend to and dialogue with our scared inner child, we will end up overwhelmed, bitter or aggressive. Vulnerability is different from emotions. Attending to vulnerability has to do with tuning in and responding to our basic need for protection. Emotions on the other hand, although necessary and useful, are sheer reactions to a situation and do not carry clarity of or caring for our underlying basic human need for safety.

Immediate, clear and rational thinking is urgently needed these days for life saving decisions. Decisions have to be based on facts and becoming emotional, blurs facts. For the mind to clear, one has to detach from emotions. Detachment is not the same as indifference. Actually, when one is at the highest level of concern and interest for the wellbeing of humanity, the ability to exercise detachment from one's personal interests is the most noble action taken. Detachment is a state of accepting whatever is happening or not happening and acting according to what is required for the betterment of the other, the community, humanity, without personalizing anything.

Trust in one's faith, by whatever name is called, the universe, God, higher power, illuminates the fact that whatever condition one finds themselves under, no matter how horrific, it has nothing to do with being punished. Moving closer to one's faith can help remind one that everything human has a beginning, middle and an end. This perspective carries realistic hope and highlights the need for patience.

When examined closely, these "required" survival modes of behavior described above, are identical with some of the core teachings found in the spiritual essence of all the six major world religions. Furthermore and most importantly, **these actions and reactions led us to be in and accept the here and now, whether we like it or not, since it is the only thing we can be certain about and able to control. If this horrific pandemic has anything to offer, other than loss, pain and suffering, it is for us to learn to live in the moment. And this, my friends, is the key ingredient to Real Happiness. The courage and strength to stay in the here and now, is what I experience, lies underneath the statement, "Don't Worry, Be Happy".**

In a period of utter uncertainty with myriad of unknowns, staying in the here and now, realizing, with one hundred percent certainty, that we do know how this very moment looks like and furthermore, discovering that we are quite capable in handling this moment, are about the only conditions offering comfort and creating safety. There is a tremendous challenge, however, in being able to maintain this awaken mindset, when this hardship passes. Is it or is it not the time to depart from living either in the past or future, waiting for the "right" reason to be happy? Is it or is it not the time to begin living in the present, the only secure and direct path to Real Happiness? I do not know! This is a question that each person has to answer for themselves. For now, for me anyway, it suffices to remember that behind these horrendous clouds, I am convinced the sun is still shining...For now, under my exhaustion and fear, under my deep sorrow and sadness for what our world is going through, there is no worry, I find myself remaining "happy". Yes, I did speak the truth to my client, and No, I do not think that the statement "Don't Worry, Be Happy" is ignorant at all!