



So What is Happiness?, by Gunaratana Mahathera

Happiness and peace. Those are really the prime issues in human existence. That is what all of us are seeking. This often is a bit hard to see because we cover up those basic goals with layers of surface objectives. We want food, we want money, we want sex, possessions and respect. We even say to ourselves that the idea of 'happiness' is too abstract: "Look, I am practical. Just give me enough money and I will buy all the happiness I need". Unfortunately, this is an attitude that does not work. Examine each of these goals and you will find they are superficial. You want food. Why? Because I am hungry. So you are hungry, so what? Well if I eat, I won't be hungry and then I'll feel good. Ah ha! Feel good! Now there is a real item. What we really seek is not the surface goals. They are just means to an end. What we are really after is the feeling of relief that comes when the drive is satisfied. Relief, relaxation and an end to the tension. Peace, happiness, no more yearning. So what is this happiness? For most of us, the perfect happiness would mean getting everything we wanted, being in control of everything, playing Caesar, making the whole world dance a jig according to our every whim. Once again, it does not work that way. Take a look at the people in history who have actually held this ultimate power. These were not happy people. Most assuredly they were not men at peace with themselves. Why? Because they were driven to control the world totally and absolutely and they could not. They wanted to control all men and there remained men who refused to be controlled. They could not control the stars. They still got sick. They still had to die. [...]

Life seems to be a perpetual struggle, some enormous effort against staggering odds. And what is our solution to all this dissatisfaction? We get stuck in the 'If only' syndrome. If only I had more money, then I would be happy. If only I can find somebody who really loves me, if only I can lose 20 pounds, if only I had a color TV, Jacuzzi, and curly hair, and on and on forever. So where does all this junk come from and more important, what can we do about it? It comes from the conditions of our own minds. It is deep, subtle and pervasive set of mental habits, a Gordian knot which we have built up bit by bit and we can unravel just the same way, one piece at a time. We can tune up our awareness, dredge up each separate piece and bring it out into the light. We can make the unconscious conscious, slowly, one piece at a time. -- Gunaratana Mahathera, 'Mindfulness in Plain English'