

‘We are all looking for Happiness’

Spring has sprung into summer in a few days, making up time for the long cold slow spring. London transformed and alight with vivacious colours and smiling people. The air is filled with joy (pollen) and the mood is uplifted and happy. Brought the question of happiness to my mind.

Last month Finland was ranked top of the list in UN’s report on happiness. Apart from the statisticians scepticism towards conclusions drawn from these kind of reports, my initial response was that this can't be true. How on earth did they come to *that* conclusion? Finland who invented Angry Birds and wife carrying competitions, happiest in the world? Who and when did this survey take place? I have not looked into the particulars but just followed the link and appear to be quite substantial. My reason for surprise and disbelief are light hearted, as many are the jokes we Swedes (me being Swedish) make about our neighbouring country men the Finns.

Their sparse dialogue in communication and proclivity for vodka drinking in aid of conversation. We tend to stereotype Finns as melancholic introverts who avoid eye contact and use very few words. (No doubt they have ways to describe their neighbour in the west that are equally broad brushed.)

After my initial impulsive prejudged thoughts I stepped back to reflect and reflected on; happiness and what does it actually mean to be happy, on my own prejudgment, and on the qualities of the Finns I know and met. Given it a bit of thought the result was not surprising at all and those attribute (apart from the vodka drinking that is a problem for at least some part of the population) may be important to happiness.

Then I came across a post from my teacher Rod Stryker about happiness: ‘We are all looking for the same thing - happiness. Even the mind’s busyness is in search for happiness. It's constantly searching happiness. It's constantly searching to fulfill its desires and longings. If we purposefully still the activity of the mind, we can access the ultimate of joys, and one that is not fleeting. The reason your mind is so busy it is busy looking for joys. We need to tell the mind, “Listen mind, settle down,” so we can find that dimension that is beyond all thought. It is a place that both the mind and the soul can both fully enjoy, which ultimately, fulfills our search.’

Happiness isn't a reaction to an event but a state of mind that has very little to do with what is going on around us. That said, being comfortable with silence and pauses in conversation, would be a sign of deeper happiness rather than social awkwardness and the melancholic trait understood as an emotional maturity. Melancholy might just be a bit underrated and forgotten in a world that bangs on about positive attitude and unrealistic exuberance. Being realistic, content and accepting of life is important as well as being able to feel sorrow, sadness and disappointments without getting frightened alarmed. Alain duBottom school of life has great little short films about it and recommend watching <https://vimeo.com/123004006> Alain duBottom School of life on melancholy.

In a different context, being hands on and connected with a creative process is explained to be mean to happiness. Getting your physical hands involved. Doing art, playing instrument or painting as well as more practical creations such as cooking, gardening and diy.

This also fits with the Nordic life approach that is very hands on with high level of practical life skill, it is far more common to do your rebuilding, redecoration, repairing or gardening yourself, rather than having someone else doing it for you. The same goes for clearing up from natures seasonal debris such as leaves and snow, keeping you physically connected to life. These kind of activity that requires a gentle focus or concentration on the task at hand is calming for the busy mind and helps it settle down. Settle, so we can find the dimension beyond thought. Also purpose full and satisfying.

The Scandinavian countries has also been slower in becoming over commercialised. Advertising has been more restrained and you be struggling to find shopping listed as a pastime or leisure activity. The vast choices we have over stimulate the mind and it will go into over drive searching for something that is ‘it’. The adverts subliminally bombard us with messages of need of something or in other words what'll have or are is not enough. We are a bit wrong - buy this and then you be ‘fixed’. Same happens on the internet, we search and search looking for joys. Temporary elation will be found, but the underlying state of mind will

remain. Of course we need to buy food other things for our lives but very little happiness is actually delivered from the promises in adverts, on the contrary they reinforce discontent and lack. This even in the era of 'peak stuff.'

The pursuit of happiness may be a life's work but simple connecting with what you are doing and settle the mind, getting comfortable with the sways and flow of life and feelings is a way to happy state of mind. I also asked one of my Finnish friends what he thought about the report he smiled and said it must have been done on a sunny Friday afternoon. But his words where spoken with great content and a radiance of ease and at least this Finn appears to be happiness embodied.

Reading suggestion

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Life Lessons

Johann Harri Lost Connections