

**S3-- "WILL I GO FOR THE DEEPER HAPPINESS IN THE FACE OF DEATH?", Tikkun, March/April 2002**

**"Think of somebody whose main activity of life is to act out his attachments and aversions. Such a person may become very powerful, very famous, he can even go down in history. But what has such a person attained? He has merely attained his name's going down in history. He has not become happy, he is dead."**

**-- The Dalai Lama**

**"People are happy; they get what they want and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're not afraid of death. And if anything should go wrong, there's soma."**

**-- World Controller Mustapha Mond, Brave New World**

**"The pursuit of happiness in itself is doomed to failure. Happiness can only be a by-product of facing the tragic dimensions of life and investing oneself in goals that go beyond the narrow confines of one's self and family."**

**-- Dr. Robert Firestone, from Combating Destructive Thought Processes**

**As incredible as it may sound, there is at this very moment an inner voice encouraging you to move in new directions to find a happiness beyond your present wildest imaginings. Our challenge is to quiet down enough to listen to it. If we do not we not only deprive ourselves of what might have been. We settle for a life of fleeting pleasures and unconscious despair.**

**There is, it turns out, something even more painful than the idea of oblivion for all eternity: the despair we largely repress at how we have not reached our full potential for happiness and fulfillment in our firefly life before we must die.**

**We can do nothing about our mortality. But facing the feelings it arouses in us can motivate us to do far more to experience the inner**

**states I call the "deeper happiness". As we approach the end of life - for example, we baby-boomers who are willing to admit at least to ourselves if not to others that we have settled for far less than the dreams of our youth - we confront the toughest question of all: will we raise the stakes? In the face of our impending death, will we risk going all-out for the deeper happiness? Or will we continue to settle for less until the grave?**

**The deeper happiness has little to do with the outer satisfactions offered by power, wealth, or fame. Nor is it an isolated, inward kind of "bliss," achieved at a cost of removing ourselves from the suffering of the world with all its complications.**

**Rather, the deeper happiness is a transformed state of being marked by both inner peace and action to serve others and life itself. Happiness comes from experiencing our potential for love, compassion, feeling, aliveness, inner peace, joy of service and connection to others, and deep opening to life's mysteries, absent the craving and grasping of ego. It is not that a politician's power, CEO's wealth, or movie star's fame does not bring real pleasure. But such pleasures are to genuine happiness as anonymous sex is to love-making with our beloved.**

**Although happiness is ultimately a deep inner experience, it is not an inward experience. As Robert Firestone emphasizes, and the Dalai Lama demonstrates with his life, we can only truly experience the deeper happiness within if we are working for the benefit of others and fully experience life's tragic dimensions. As light does not exist without dark, we can only experience our full potential for love, empathy, understanding, bliss and compassion if we are also willing to experience the feelings of horror that naturally arise at the sight of a starving child, the idea of death, the destruction caused by war.**

**We cannot achieve genuine happiness by seeking it in the abstract. It comes as a byproduct of doing work which matters, making profound connections with others, and/or following a spiritual practice that takes us beyond attachment and aversion.**

**Nothing makes us as defensive as facing the gap between our present lives and the happiness we might have had. But facing this anxiety can be the single most liberating event of our lifetimes. And experiencing the cloud of pain has another silver lining. Happiness is a matter of quality, not quantity. Once we do achieve it, we are so transformed that the years we wasted no longer gnaw away at us.**

**Will I myself go for the deeper happiness? It is important to ask the question this way. We can read every tome on happiness since the time of the Greeks, and still not be one whit closer to experiencing it. The deeper happiness only begins with understanding. What matters most is challenging our own conditioning, fears, and anxieties, the defenses that keep us from going for it. Here are some questions that might be useful in deciding whether to take the risk.**

### **IS GOING FOR PERSONAL HAPPINESS LEGITIMATE?**

**Because it is far easier to rationalize our current life than undergo the pain of changing it, we must begin with one of our most common defenses: isn't seeking personal happiness "selfish"? Isn't the Dalai Lama wrong in suggesting that my personal happiness is more important than my contributions to humanity? There is some truth to this view. We all benefit from the penicillin, electricity, railroads, autos, oil, and software that generally miserable human beings have brought us.**

**But in the end the true benefactors of humanity are those who do both the inner and outer work. It is no coincidence that we honor Martin Luther King more than LBJ, Sakharov more than Lenin, the Dalai Lama more than Bill Clinton, Gandhi more than Winston Churchill, Mother Theresa more than the Pope, and Moses, Christ, and the Buddha far more than Alexander, Julius Cesar, or Napoleon.**

**While pursuing social and material goals is important, the most essential service we can perform for others, not to mention ourselves, is to achieve - and share - the deeper happiness. "Gaia is more**

**interested in your process than your function," says Hungarian spiritual teacher Laszlo Honti. Happy, content people don't destroy their biosphere, wage war, abuse others, or use more resources than they need. And these problems won't end until more people are happier people. We cannot, of course, defer working on social problems until we attain a critical mass of fulfilled people capable of saving the planet. But neither can we delay our highest priority: achieving our own version of the deeper happiness, and sharing it with others.**

### **WHAT DO I MEAN BY "HAPPINESS"?**

**As the quotes by the Dalai Lama and Huxley indicate, "happiness" means many things to many people. To the Dalai Lama it is state of aliveness in which one deeply feels both the pain and ecstasy of living. To Huxley and activists of all kinds, it connotes a kind of blissful idiocy and brain-death, as when C. Wright Mills used to criticize Americans as "cheerful robots."**

**What does it mean for you? One suggestion is to replace the overused word "happy" with a less common word such as "fulfilled" or "satisfied," and then fill in the blanks. What would your lifelook like for you to be truly fulfilled?**

### **AM I WILLING TO WELCOME PAIN?**

**Once we decide what we mean by "happiness", we arrive at the crux of the issue: how much am I willing to risk changing my life to achieve the happiness I seek?**

**There is no way around it: seeking to be truly happier involves pain. It means abandoning the comforts we have spent a lifetime accumulating, challenging defenses against deep feeling and anxiety of which we are largely unaware. It is not only that few seeking it can be sure of success when they begin. It is that the search necessarily involves abandoning our familiar, and facing the dozens of fears - hunger, shame, loneliness, death - that haunt our sleep and limit our waking-hours.**

**But, in the end, we have nothing to lose but our defenses. If the Dalai Lama and so many others are right, when we do find happiness we discover that the very defenses that we think protect us are in fact our prison walls - and that our liberation lies on the other side.**

## **HOW DO I LOOK FOR WHAT I CANNOT KNOW?**

**If we are willing to go for the deeper happiness, we confront a final obstacle: we may have no idea what it is. A good rule of thumb is this: "whatever we think the deeper happiness is, it isn't." We form our idea of happiness from our previous experiences of satisfaction - the moments we fell in love, finished a creative project, received a raise, took a walk in nature, appeared on television - and projections about the happiness of others.**

**And yet once we admit that our present path isn't bringing us the deeper happiness, it becomes clear that our previous experience and projections no longer apply. So what to do? Though our minds cannot answer this question, a deeper kind of knowledge is available to us. An inner voice is telling us every second what we need to do next. Our problem is that our lives are so busy, our minds so active, our hearts so fraught, that we cannot hear it.**

**If we can slow things down, empty out, breathe deeply, relax, get healthy, and just listen, the answer usually appears. Our work is not to "figure it out". Rather it is to quiet down long enough so that we can bring to consciousness what our unconscious, or something even deeper, already knows.**

**What is important is not seeking a particular path, but rather committing to a process of searching in new areas foreign to our previous experience, quieting down enough to hear our inner voice, and progressively opening to the Mystery.**

**The deeper happiness awaits you.**

**Will you go for it?**