

## A simple truth about happiness

After I gave a talk on the subject of happiness, a woman in the audience stood up and said, "I wish my husband had come." "Much as I loved him," she explained, "it wasn't easy being married to someone so unhappy." This woman enabled me to put into words what I had been searching for — altruistic<sup>1)</sup>, as well as the personal, reasons for taking happiness seriously. I told her that each of us owes it to our spouse<sup>2)</sup>, our children, our friends to be as happy as we can.

I was not a particularly happy child, and like most teenagers, I took pleasure in my anguish. One day, however, it occurred to me that I was taking the easy way out. Anyone could be unhappy; it took no courage and effort. True achievement lay in struggling to be happy. The notion that we have to work at happiness comes as news to many people. We assume it's a feeling that comes as a result of good things that just happen to us, things over which we have little or no control. But the opposite is true: happiness is largely under our control. It is a battle to be fought and not a feeling to be awaited. To achieve a happy life, it's necessary to overcome some stumbling blocks, three of which are:

**Comparison with Others** Most of us compare ourselves with anyone we think is happier — a relative, an acquaintance or, often someone we barely know. I once met a young man who struck me as particularly successful and happy. He spoke of his love for his beautiful wife and their three daughters, and of his joy at being a radio talk — show host in a city he loved. I remember thinking that he was one of those lucky few for whom everything goes effortlessly right. Then we started talking about the Internet. He blessed its existence, he told me, because he could look up information on multiple sclerosis<sup>3)</sup> — the terrible disease afflicting his wife. I felt like a fool for assuming nothing unhappy existed in his life.

**Images of Perfection** Almost all of us have images of how life should be. The problem, of course, is that only rarely do people's jobs, spouses and children live up to these imagined ideals. Here's a personal example: no one in my family had ever divorced. I assumed that marriage was for life. So when my wife and I divorced after five years of marriage and three years after the birth of our son, my world collapsed. I was a failure in my own eyes. I later remarried and confided to my wife that I couldn't shake the feeling that my family life had failed. She asked me what was wrong with our family now (which included her daughter from a previous marriage and my son). I had to admit that, aside from the pain of being with my son only half the time (my ex-wife and I shared custody<sup>4)</sup>), our family life was wonderful. "Then why don't you celebrate it?" she asked. That's what I decided to do. But first I had to get rid of a "perfect" family.

**"Missing Tile"<sup>5)</sup> Syndrome<sup>6)</sup>** One effective way of destroying happiness is to look at something and focus on even the smallest flaw. It's like looking at the tiled ceiling and concentrating on the space where one tile is missing. As a bald man told me, "whenever I enter a room, all I see is hair." Once you've determined what your missing tile is, explore whether acquiring it will really make you happy. Then do one of the three things: get it, replace it with a different tile, or forget about it and focus on the tiles in your life that are not missing.

We all know people who have had a relatively easy life yet are essentially unhappy. And we know people who have suffered a great deal but generally remain happy. The first secret is gratitude. All happy people are grateful. Ungrateful people cannot be happy. We tend to think that being unhappy leads people to complain, but it's truer to say that complaining leads to people becoming unhappy.

The second secret is realizing that happiness is a byproduct<sup>7)</sup> of something else. The most obvious sources are those pursuits that give our lives purpose—anything from studying insects to playing baseball. The more passions we have, the more happiness we are likely to experience. Finally, the belief that something permanent transcends<sup>8)</sup> us and that our existence has some larger meaning can help us be happier. We need a spiritual faith, or a philosophy of life. Whatever your philosophy, it should include this truism<sup>9)</sup>: if you choose to find the positive in virtually every situation, you will be blessed, and if you choose to find the awful, you will be cursed. As with happiness itself, this is largely your decision to make.

## 快乐的简明道理

在我做了一场以快乐为主题的报告之后，一位女士听众站起来说：“我丈夫也能来听这个报告就好了。”她解释说：“尽管我非常爱他，可是同一个不快乐的人做夫妻真不是件容易的事情。”这位女士用语言表达出了我一直在探索的一个道理——认真对待快乐，既有利于自己，也有利于他人。我告诉她，我们每个人为了我们的配偶、我们的孩子、我们的朋友，都应当尽可能快乐。

我不是一个特别快乐的孩子，像大多数十几岁的少年一样，我在苦中求乐。然而，有一天，我突然意识到，我是在贪图省事。任何人都可以不开心，这不需要勇气和努力。真正的成就在于努力奋斗以获得快乐。对许多人来说，我们必须努力去争取快乐这一概念像是一件新鲜事，因为我们以为，快乐是一种感觉，是我们碰到好事的结果，对于它我们很难控制。然而，事实恰好相反：在很大程度上我们可以控制快乐。这是一场需要奋争的战斗，而不是一种坐等的感觉。要想获得幸福的生活，需要克服一些障碍，其中的三个是：

**与别人相比** 我们大多数人把自己与我们认为比我们更快乐的任何人相比——亲戚、熟人，或者经常是我们不大了解的人。有一次，我遇到一个年轻男子，他给我的印象是特别成功和快乐。他说他爱他漂亮的妻子和他们的3个女儿，并说在他喜欢的城市里做广播脱口秀节目的主持人令他感到快乐。我记得我当时认为他是属于少数一切都顺顺当当的幸运儿。之后我们开始谈论因特网。他告诉我，他对因特网心存感激，因为他可以在网上查找医治多发性硬化症的信息——这种可怕的疾病正在折磨着他的妻子。我当时觉得自己像个傻瓜，还以为他的生活中没有不快乐的事情。

**想像中的完美无缺** 几乎我们所有的人都想像生活应是什么样。问题自然是人们的工作、配偶以及孩子都很难达到想像中的理想标准。这儿有我自身的例子：我们家里从来没有人离过婚。我本以为婚姻应持续终生。所以，当妻子与我婚后5年，儿子3岁我们离婚时，我的世界崩溃了。在我眼里，我是个失败者。我再婚后向妻子吐露，我摆脱不了“我的家庭生活是失败的”这一感觉。她问我，我们现在的家（包括她与前夫生的女儿和我的儿子）怎么了？我不得不承认，除了只能一半时间跟儿子（我和前妻共同监护孩子）在一起的痛苦之外，我们的家庭生活很愉快。“那你为什么不庆贺这种生活呢？”她问道。那就是我决定要做的。可是，我首先得摆脱“十全十美”的家庭这种幻想。

**“缺瓦”综合征** 一种毁坏快乐的有效办法是：只看某事的坏处，甚至注意到最细小的缺陷。这就像看瓦房顶一样，注意力集中于那缺瓦的地方。正如一位秃顶的先生告诉我的那样：“无论何时我进入一个房间，我所看到的都是头发。”当你确定了你丢失的那片瓦是什么时，探究一下获得这片瓦是否真的会让你快乐，之后做下列三件事之一：取回那片瓦；用一片不同的瓦替换它；或者忘了它，把注意力集中在你生活中那些未丢失的瓦上。我们都认识一些人，他们过着相对安逸的生活却根本不快乐。

我们也认识一些人，他们经历了巨大的痛苦却往往仍然是快乐的。第一大奥秘是感恩的心境。所有快乐的人是有感恩之心的。没有感恩之心的人不可能快乐。我们往往认为，不快乐会导致人们抱怨，但是更正确的说法是，抱怨导致人们不快乐。

第二大奥秘是，要认识到快乐是别的事情的副产品，其最显而易见的来源是那些赋予我们生活以目的的追求——任何事情，从研究昆虫到打棒球。我们的激情越多，我们有可能体验的快乐就越多。最后，要相信有一种永恒的东西超越我们，我们的存在有着某种更广大的意义，这种信念能帮助我们更加快乐。我们需要一种精神信仰或者一种人生哲学。不管你的哲学是什么，它应该包括这个自明之理：如果你决心去发现每种情况的积极面（事实上都有），你就会得福；如果你决心去发现其消极面，你就会遭殃。如对快乐本身一样，这主要取决于你自己。

### NOTE 注释：

altruistic [ˌæltruˈɪstɪk] adj. 利他的，无私心的

spouse [spaʊz] n. 配偶(指夫或妻)

sclerosis [skliəˈrəʊsɪs] n. [医]硬化症，硬化，硬结

custody [ˈkʌstədi] n. 监管，监护

tile [taɪl] n. 瓦片，瓷砖

syndrome [ˈsɪndrəm] n. 综合病症

byproduct [baɪprɒdʌkt] n. 副产品

transcend [trænˈsend] vt. 超越，胜过

truism [ˈtruːɪzəm] n. 明白之理，不言而喻的事