

Enigma of Happiness

Harriman State Park is a sprawling slice of nature planted just forty miles north of the epitome of modern urban living in Manhattan, New York City. It encompasses thirty-one exquisite small lakes, two-hundred miles of enchanting trails – overall 51,000 acres of unspoilt virgin nature.

Through summer, fall, and spring the park is teeming with people from adjoining counties and Manhattan, and states. Even in winter there is human life lurking under the bare tree branches, the browned out trails, and lonely vistas. You see the intense love between man and nature and wonder why. We can say that nature being the source of human life, attracts the two, like the relationship between a mother and child. But there is something more. Man sees in nature not only his source but also his solace. Solace comes from nature's loftiness in principledness, beauty, and selflessness.

We will never know why nature created human life. To what end? It may well be what many think to be just an accident. But that explanation in no way mitigates the drama of human life: choices to make, the call of the soul, the search of the absolute, and suffering. Humans have so much potential and yet they must undergo so much suffering. Religion, philosophy, art, and science have tried hard to unscramble the mystery of human mental existence and yet it persists. We are supported by a physical system but yet are endowed and guided by a transcendent mental architecture.

The search for happiness is a natural human urge. It is because nature did not make human beings *naturally* happy. It is because our *natural* physical-mental existence is at variance with the world we are forced to live in. That is, if a human being were left in a setting of nature, like that of plains, mountains, and lakes, with a minimal contact with the world of urbanity, commerce, and politics there would be higher chances of him being happy than otherwise. That is, the urban existence of man is in direct violation of his inner setup.

In pursuit of happiness should a human being follow his desires, his philosophical leanings, love for another human being, etc.? But none of them is a guarantee of acquiring happiness. Happiness has to be idea-based. That is, it should be connected to ideas, like the ideas of freedom of man, uniqueness of the individual, and the brotherhood of mankind; on the notion that there exists beauty in both physical and mental spheres of human beings; that human life is an extraordinarily precious gift of nature, which billions of years have taken to build, etc. Happiness solely based on physical pleasures, material richness, power over human beings, etc. is fragile and ultimately ersatz. There has to be inner solemnity, a poetry, a respect for human life in order for it to give us happiness. Happiness consists of ordinary experiences but which have been interpreted by special knowledge of life.

In a way happiness is a way of looking at life. How we look at something is shaped by our ideas of about looking and the thing we are looking at. So, the ideas are the bedrock of human existence, including the scope of its happiness. But to be rich in ideas one has to read and think a lot, which the age of technology does not give us much latitude for. Living moment to moment, seeking excitement; which we consider the mantra of our existence, we have choked the fragile plant of reflection in us, which is the bedrock of happiness. So, for modern man happiness has become more difficult to achieve than it was for the ancient man.

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