

Happiness Is At Hand

People in prison spend a lot of time and energy thinking. They dream about happiness. This propensity is a disease. It hinders most of us. Many inmates while away hours in remembering past glories. Others fantasize about future conquests. They miss the present opportunities to have positive feelings. These preoccupations determine the sad state of their emotions. There is a better way.

I learned a valuable lesson that helps one to cope. It is possible to maintain a measure of happiness even while being incarcerated. There is a principle that sets some apart from the average inmate. It is the idea of experiencing contentment through tasking. This practice is the art of obtaining enjoyment by concentrating on the activity of the moment.

Do you ever feel sad or depressed? I hope you answered yes! I do too. The degree to which I experience these unpleasant emotions is greatly diminished. The improvement came through acknowledgment and action. I never became happy by pretending I was, or by hiding my lowly condition. Denial of these feelings only prolonged the pain.

I learned that my thought life effects my emotions. I become disenchanted with the present when I reminisce about "the good" or "the bad" old days. Those events were never as wonderful or as grueling as I imagine them. Time has a way of distorting my recollection. Memory is unreliable. The illusions of my past detract from my current moment.

I can also ruin my day with unrealistic expectations. I take on emotional baggage when I give my thoughts over to daydreaming. I hurt myself by judging my current situations according to others experiences or by my own idea of perfection. I know that when I compare my life to a fantasy, trouble soon follows. It guarantees I will be unhappy with my present moment.

It is good to have hopes and dreams for the future. However, when they prevent me from making the most of today, they are no longer worthwhile. A wise man once told me: "Dreams become goals when you take your first steps toward realizing them." There is excitement and encouragement in striving for accomplishments. Each milestone deserves a celebration.

If one wants to be consistantly happy they must learn to be content in the moment. It can be accomplished whether a person is rich or poor. The emotion is independent of the level of their physical well being. This state is achievable both for the incarcerated and for the free citizen. It does take effort and practice. The process is simple. Please give it a chance.

The first thing you need to do is take a deep breath and slowly let it out. Now do it again. Were you sad, depressed or anxious just now? I hope not. I anticipated that you would take those breaths without thinking about anything else. If you did you were in the moment. Good for you! Now try doing it while you are engaged in something. Just do that one activity. Think only about the task at hand. It can be anything of your choosing.

I know that in our multitasking world this idea sounds odd. Try it anyway. Learn to be content anywhere doing whatever job lies before you. A foothold on happiness is gained in this way. Practice tasking while you eat breakfast, wash the dishes and make your bed. The concept is that you only do one thing at a time. Forget about other thoughts or plans until you finish your current endeavor. If your mind wanders gently remind yourself to focus on the present activity.

You may be surprised at how much you accomplish. You are released from the unhappiness of the past when you concentrate on the event of the moment. If your current situation is depressing this technique can give you a break from whatever ails you. I experienced hard times in my life. A few moments respite from the pain of them was a blessing. I was grateful for the ability to task. This concept is no quick cure. It is a practical way to regroup, refocus on, and then reinforce behaviors that enhance life.

In closing, I Timothy 6:6 says: "But godliness with contentment is great gain." If you want more out of life let go of the worldly theories of what will make you happy. Learn to be content where you are. May God bless you in your efforts.

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