



G.D. Budhiraja

A common-sense
approach to
lasting happiness

The Art of
**Happy
Living**



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The Art of Happy Living

—Yes... you can achieve it.

G.D. Budhiraja

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Introduction

Ask any common man what he wants from life and most probably he will say that all he wants is to be happy. And we believe him, as most people want to be happy. They try their best to make themselves happy. They attend lectures, buy books and change their lifestyles in their efforts to find happiness. But do they succeed?

It appears that the majority of people most of the times do not feel happy. This is not the case of only those who do not get what they want in life. It is the same story with people who get what they want!

People with money and power know something that you and I do not know. Money and power do not satisfy the unknown hunger in them. We keep thinking that if we have what they had, we would be happy. Yet we never seem to reach the point where we are relaxed and feel we have arrived. Why should people with so many reasons to be happy still be unhappy? Why are so many people dissatisfied in so many ways? Everyone reaches desperately for happiness but it does not seem to come any closer. Are we expecting too much in life?

You know that a happy life consists of various elements. To enjoy life we need enough to eat and suitable clothing. We need a home for protection and rest. But these are just the basics. Pleasant companionship and good health are equally important.

But even those who have a measure of these things may still long for true happiness. The type of work a person does, or the conditions under which he works, may rob him of contentment. Or there may be conflict between husband and wife or between parents and children. Nor can we ignore the fact that the possibility of sickness or sudden death looms

large over all of us. Do you believe that it is possible to cope with these and other problems in such a way that we can find true satisfaction? There is reason to believe so.

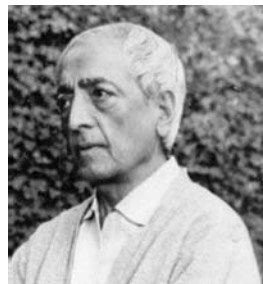
Happiness is possible despite all our problems.

Happiness is not just an elusive fantasy that occurs only in the movies. Researchers are discovering that we can learn to be more joyful and optimistic. While studying the strong points of individuals (as against weak points such as anger, guilt, fear, sadness), it has been found that happiness not only brings a pleasant feeling, it also has health benefits. It actually protects us against stress and helps us to live a more healthy life. Positive, optimistic and happy people live longer, some long enough to celebrate their centenaries.

How do we attain this elusive emotion? What does it take to be happy? Happiness is not something that can be felt or experienced at a given moment. It is, in essence, the quality of a whole life. Aristotle said that the man who had no need left to be fulfilled was happy.

But what happens when greed overtakes the sense of need. The thin borderline between need and greed tends to get blurred as the acquisitive instinct takes over and becomes the prime mover of human conduct and, eventually, a major source of misery. Plato, therefore, defined happiness in terms of harmony within the soul and equated it with the spiritual well-being of man.

According to J Krishnamurti, happiness is a state about which one is unconscious. It is only later when misery strikes that one realises how happy he was! In the ultimate analysis, much depends upon one's perception and attitude to life. Two persons in similar circumstances are not equally happy or unhappy because their thinking is not on the same wavelength and their expectations are different.



A simple truth about happiness is that if you are waiting for it, you have missed the point. There is little correlation between

the circumstances of people's lives and how happy they are. We all know people who have suffered a great deal but generally remain happy. In fact, happiness is an inside job. If we choose the positive in different situations, we will be blessed and if we choose the negative, we will be cursed. This is largely our own decision.

In this book, I have tried to reveal the secrets of real happiness. No deep philosophy will be found in the following pages. The remarks and suggestions made in this book are entirely based on a common-sense approach. Most of these suggestions are based on the result of recent researches made on the subject. Some of the techniques suggested are based on my own experience. I have myself acted on many of them and I can confirm that they have increased my own happiness. I sincerely hope that people who are unhappy today may become happy after reading and acting upon suggestions made in this book.

That will be my real reward, which will boost my own happiness in return.

—GD Budhiraja

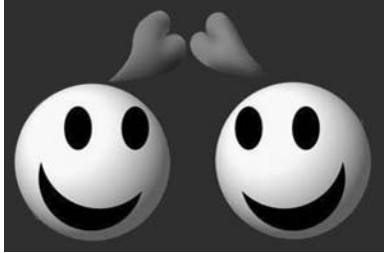
Part - I

CAUSES OF UNHAPPINESS

The Nature of Happiness

'Do not worry, be happy' a well-wisher advises. 'I only want your happiness,' intones a lover. 'The Prince and Princess lived happily ever after' goes the line at the end of a story. 'Every man has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' says the Constitution of the United States of America.

The common message in all the above words is that happiness is a desirable state of life. There are some basic drives in all of us through which we are motivated to act or react. The need for happiness is one of them. A housewife at home makes



efforts to maintain a clean and tidy house with well brought up children so that it brings happiness to the family. The husband works hard to earn more money for the happiness of his family and himself. We strive for money, health, fame and power not for their own sake but for the supposed happiness they may bring.

But you know that we do not always feel happy. If we buy a new car or get a promotion or succeed in our efforts to lose weight, we feel great for a while. But we soon find that the car requires petrol and maintenance, which increases our expenditure. Colleagues are jealous of our promotion. Our lives have not dramatically changed by losing weight. Nothing seems to be quite enough, as others appear to have more. Our desires to have more keep increasing. If nothing else, we have apprehensions about the future, which robs us of happiness in the present.

Many of us are content with this mixed bag of happiness and sorrow. We try to maximise our joys and minimise our sorrows and failures arising out of our daily happenings. But for some of us this fleeting and fragile happiness is not enough. We want happiness that we can depend upon.

This brings us to the question: What is the true nature of happiness and how can it be achieved?

Fontenelle, the French writer, defined happiness as a state in which we desire to remain without change of any sort. Unquestionably, if we were to achieve a state of mind and body that makes us say, 'I want everything like this forever', we may be truly happy. But an unchanged scenario is inconceivable. How can there be no change when the basic elements of happiness are so unstable? If some lovely music is playing, the music will soon cease. If a book is being read, its last page will eventually be done with. Even if we could freeze time at the perfect moment, this happiness would soon diminish because the novelty of the moment would have gone.

So what precisely is happiness? This intriguing question is as old as the hills. The word happiness can never be defined to everyone's satisfaction since it means different things to different people at different times. For instance, we sometimes use it for a short period of intense satisfaction; sometimes we use it to describe a prolonged period free from major worries or discomfort; at other times, we apply it to an experience referred to as joy.

All these experiences are marked by the presence of agreeable feelings and the absence of disagreeable ones. So what it really comes to is that we have to study the conditions in which agreeable feelings are generated and disagreeable ones are prevented. When we understand this clearly, we can settle the limits of the word 'happiness' in any way that is convenient.

Approach to human needs

This really means we can approach the subject of happiness by trying to draw up a full list of human needs and ascertain how far they ensure the required satisfaction. In doing so, we

should not focus our attention on individuals but take into account society at large. But before we start, there are some misconceptions that need to be cleared.

When we approach the subject of happiness by studying the conditions in which agreeable feelings are generated, it does not imply that happiness can be attained by satisfying as many needs as possible. We must understand that there is a hierarchy of needs – some essential, others not quite so, and yet others that can be dispensed with in certain circumstances. So happiness is not a question of meeting demands to the fullest extent. According to the law of diminishing returns, there comes a point when the satisfaction derived from meeting the same demand is reduced gradually and it is no longer wise to use energy to proceed with it further. That delicate interplay of our needs will become clear when we understand their true nature.

Happiness can be seen from another perspective; when a man cannot obtain what he wants, he will accept a substitute. However, substitutes are never equal to the real thing in the long run and much unhappiness can be traced to the unwitting use of substituted satisfaction. The substitute can be in material or economic spheres. Email can be substituted for a handwritten letter or a telephonic talk. We should not make the mistake of giving the substitute the permanent place of an original.

Talk of substitutes cannot be confined to the impersonal sphere. It is the use of substitutes in the emotional sphere that's of paramount interest in the present context. The childless woman who lavishes affection on a pet considers this a source of happiness.

Similar to the use of substitutes is the use of intoxicants. When we cannot meet a demand, we may seek to numb it. Consider the man who, desperately unhappy because a fundamental need was not met, takes to drink to numb his misery. Looked at superficially, his action is chosen to raise his happiness barometer after the third or fourth peg. Yet no one would regard alcohol as a cure for his misery. (I don't deny the value of enjoying a moderate quantity of alcohol at social

gatherings.) We have, therefore, to assess the validity of the demand before we accept and meet the demand.

There is another angle from which we have to handle the subject of happiness in terms of meeting needs – that is, the existence of neurotic and misplaced needs. The miser demands gold and money for hoarding. The Don Juan needs a variety of women. Though such a person is unhappy when his needs are frustrated, he is rarely less unhappy when it is met. Here, the way to happiness does not lie in meeting the need, but in getting rid of it.

When we recognise the existence of invalid demands, it would become apparent to us that a great range of our so-called needs can be discarded, leaving only a simple range of primary needs. The view prevalent in Eastern cultures holds that the road to happiness is not found in satisfying our every need but in reducing them. What's actually required is the synthesis of these two schools of thoughts: the Eastern reduction of needs and the Western satisfaction of all demands.

Basic drives for human needs

There is an ever-increasing list of human needs and it is very difficult to catalogue all of them. These differ for different people depending upon various factors such as economic and climatic conditions of the country in which they live and their social and cultural backgrounds. These broadly fall into two major groups – physical and emotional, although emotional appears to be an unsatisfactory label because it includes not only love and affection, but also security and success in one's enterprise.

Strictly speaking, our physical needs are real ones. It is difficult to be happy if one is hungry or thirsty or short of sleep. But it is also true that aesthetic experiences are a possible source of happiness too. The question: Is it an essential need? Could we not be happy in our own way without such an experience? At one time many people thought emotional fulfilment was optional. But research by psychiatrists clearly

shows that a person who fails to develop emotionally is never really happy. We need to fulfil our emotional potential. If we do not realise our aesthetic potential, we are not only less happy, but also actively unhappy.

All our drives (for meeting needs) operate through our ability to feel pleasure or its opposite. But what is pleasure? Like happiness it is a word we use with vague meaning. Most people use the word *pleasure* as though it were simply the opposite of pain. But pain has nothing to do with pleasure. It will be more appropriate to term the opposite of pleasure as “displeasure”.

Pleasure means feelings of pleasant satisfaction, which generally relates to physical sensations or the sensations we derive from meeting our physical needs such as of food, air, water, freedom of movement etc. Consider the case of heat and cold. If we are cold, a moderate degree of heat is pleasant. If we are hot, it is unpleasant. For example, our body has a normal temperature of 98 degree F. This is experienced as a positive sensation when it helps the body to remain near the normal range and as a negative sensation when it rises over 99 or 100 degrees.

This example can be generalised to include a wide range of sensations. Our body consists of a nexus of chemical, physical and electrical reactions, which function with perfect equilibrium by maintaining the supply of new material and removal of waste products, as the body uses its resources in its maintenance and growth and other actions. Whenever the supply falls short or waste products are not removed or energy is not utilised in action, a sense of ill health or discomfort results.

Of course, the greatest of all sources of pleasure are the emotions. There is the bliss of being united with a person one loves and the agony of separation, the joy of achievement and the misery of frustration, the contentment of security and the tortures of anxiety and guilt. These miseries and bliss are very important and have been dealt with separately in detail.

Factors influencing behaviour

Keeping in view various types of motives, the factors influencing our behaviour are:

1. Pain
2. Comfort/discomfort
3. Pleasure/displeasure
4. Bliss/misery

While pain and comfort/discomfort factors are physical ones, pleasure/displeasure are psychosomatic and bliss/misery is psychological. In broad terms, we can speak of them as physical and emotional factors.

While physical factors make a more urgent claim on our attention, the emotional factors provide the more enduring motives. Man's behaviour is constantly being diverted from his main purpose of emotional satisfaction to deal with annoying but urgent needs. A lover looking for his beloved will ignore the pangs of hunger and exhaustion for a time but will finally stop for food and rest. This does not mean he values food above his beloved, but he realises that he will not succeed in his primary aim, an emotional one, unless he takes the help of a physical medium.

Pain is most effective in distracting us from our emotional happiness, discomfort is less so and displeasure the least. Conversely, bliss is more rewarding than pleasure and pleasure more than comfort. There may be exceptions to this behaviour, which can be understood by grasping the theory of neural energy constant, propounded by J Bostock in his study of *Basis of Consciousness* (1931). According to this theory, the amount of energy available to centres in the brain that handle sensation, feeling and cognition is constant so that when any one centre is being fully used, the others are temporarily shut down. It then takes a powerful stimulus to reconnect them to the circuit. Therefore, when listening to our favourite music or watching an absorbing movie, we remain unaware for some time that we are growing stiff or hungry. When this fact finally comes to our attention, it at once reduces the amount of attention we are able to devote to the music or the movie.