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EXPLORING THE WORLD IN PURSUIT OF ECSTASY

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ABSTRACT

We have achieved a very high level of materialistic progress and conquered over many disasters, we are able to control the epidemics, but the ultimate question is: "Are we contented in comparison to what our ancestors were in the past"? The answer is - "No". And the reason after all our sorrows is perhaps we enjoy material comforts and suffer more intensely. The desire for happiness is a natural phenomenon that is implanted into us by God and motivates everything we do. When we were kids, we didn't have to think about contentment. We used to wake up happy; we played and giggled, and lived in the moment. As adults with stressful lives, it's a challenge to maintain good spirits and to re-attain that juvenile happiness. Being in pursuit of this juvenile happiness, people spend a lot of money, fall in love, buy expensive things, change their sexual partners and fanatically practice some religion. But not always they reach their happiness. Reality knows a lot of unhappy people with a high income level and with a lot of power. They have everything they want, regardless of the country they live in, the religion they practice, the number of love partners or cars they change.

Different people select different ways and means to increase their sense of happiness. To some people, meditation can help them focus on the present moment rather than worry about the future. For some others, a pleasant life might be champagne and a sports car. There are people who focus on the things that really matter to them like setting goals in the area of their life they want to improve: marriage, parenting, self-fulfilment and they work on those goals with specific action steps. And there are some human beings who believe in what their imagination dreams. Insights gained from Harvard studies on contentment indicate that habits are like financial capital. Forming one good habit today is an investment that will automatically give out returns for years to come.

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Exploring the World in Pursuit of Ecstasy

John Locke (1632-1704) was a major English philosopher, who devised the phrase 'pursuit of happiness', in his book *An Essay Concerning Human*

Understanding. Greatly influenced by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, Locke distinguished between "imaginary happiness" and "true happiness". Since God has given everyone the desire to trail the real

bliss, majority of people start a relentless search for it, but when they don't get what they desire, they conclude they have been deprived of.

On the other hand, everybody on this earth is quite ready to take the credit for the progress that mankind has achieved. Religionists, scientists, politicians, philosophers and economists - are all quick to claim that humanity is grateful to them for the progress that is being made. But who must share the blame for the bliss that has eloped from the faces of the social beings? I believe that we ourselves are responsible and no one else. Honestly saying, we also have been responsible for failing to bring peace and harmony to our fellow beings.

Ecstasy is an asset composed of love, affection, care and social harmony and is certainly not about how much you own. It is about love and family and contributing productively to society. The economy for the parents is gratification of the family. They derive satisfaction by helping children in family. Everybody has a dream of a world where his children will live a life of enduring bliss no longer burdened by the anxieties of mortgages, education loans and debt repayment: a world in which there is no longer debt-money, interest charges, moneylending and fear of tomorrow because of the belief that money is scarce. Everybody has a dream that a new economy will be based on welfare, delight, abundance and resilience revealed in nature.

But the world presently is wedged under debt crisis primarily because it is impossible to imagine a system of money creation without debt money that threatens the pursuit of genuine delight and destroys the human spirit and hope.

The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is a universal indicator for *standard of living and economic performance* of countries. However, GDP does not properly account for social and environmental costs and benefits. The concept of economic well-being is a broader concept than GDP, but it can still be captured with standard economic measures. The living conditions include a mix of non-material aspects of wellbeing with some material ones. Human welfare and the delight have numerous sources, with economic indicators and

policies influencing them to a certain extent, but under conditional circumstances.

One of the very few countries that have not accepted GDP as an indicator of national economic growth is Bhutan. That is why the 4th King of Bhutan Mr.Jigme Singye Wangchuck adopted the Gross National Happiness index (GNH). The concept of GNH considers economic development not as an end in itself but as one of the many means to achieve Gross National Happiness. Instead of seeing happiness as a purely individual responsibility Bhutan addresses collective happiness directly through public policies in which happiness becomes an explicit criterion in development projects and programmes.

Therefore, Bhutan has set up four policy bundle priority areas:

- 1) Sustainable and equitable socio-economic development;
- 2) Conservation of environment;
- 3) Preservation and promotion of culture; and
- 4) Promotion of good governance.[1]

The concept of GNH has become a guiding force for day-to-day economic and political decision-making in Bhutan. Its commitment to GNH has allowed Bhutan to both expand its network of roads and increase its forest cover. Furthermore, moral and ethical values were placed at the core of its economic strategies for ensuring better food, housing and health. Research is currently being done to create GNH indicators in the following fields: living standard, health, education, ecosystem health (diversity and resilience), community vitality, time use and balance (leisure vs. work), cultural vitality and diversity, emotional well-being (depression, psychiatric condition, alcoholism etc.) and good governance.[2]

It is a known fact that money is no longer our master but rather serves our collective longing for luxuries and joy. Wealth no doubt can help to overcome certain problems but not all the world's bliss can be gained through money. Materialistic things no doubt bring some provisional physical and mental comfort but they cannot afford lasting bliss in the ultimate sense. This is particularly true when possessions are unjustly acquired or obtained through misappropriation. They become a source of

pain, guilt and sorrow rather than bringing pleasure to the possessor.

Every human being would certainly agree with Shakespeare's view of the human paradox:

What a piece of work is man
how noble in reason,
how infinite in faculties in form and moving;
how express and admirable in action,
how like an angel in apprehension,
how like a god, the beauty of the world
the paragon of animals; and yet to me what
is this quintessence of dust?[3]

I believe that everyone on this earth makes a resolution for the near future to bring improvement in life. We look forward for good health, more wealth, happiness, success, peace and what not. We want improved relationship with our near and dear ones and several other positive traits of life. We want everything positive in our lives. But most of the time, we forget to practice principles that make our lives blissful. It is therefore very important for every one out of us to frame some brilliant resolutions and act as well and establish positivism in our lives.

Lao Tzu or Laozi, who existed in the 6th century B.C, and who was founder of the Chinese Philosophical "School of the Tao" or "Taoism" once quoted:

If you look to others for fulfilment, you will never be fulfilled. If your happiness depends on money, you will never be happy with yourself. Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the world belongs to you.[4]

During one of his speech on *Compassion and the Individual* Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama once explained the purpose of human life:

..... we all have an innate self-centeredness that inhibits our love for others. So, since we desire the true happiness that is brought about by only a calm mind, and since such peace of mind is brought about by only a compassionate attitude, how can we develop this? Obviously, it is not enough for us simply to think about how nice compassion is! We need to make a

concerted effort to develop it; we must use all the events of our daily life to transform our thoughts and behaviour.[5]

At another place, during one of his lectures he expounded:

I believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. From the moment of birth, every human being wants happiness and does not want suffering. Neither social conditioning nor education nor ideology affects this. From the very core of our being, we simply desire contentment. I don't know whether the universe, with its countless galaxies, stars and planets, has a deeper meaning or not, but at the very least, it is clear that we humans who live on this earth face the task of making a happy life for ourselves. Therefore, it is important to discover what will bring about the greatest degree of happiness.[6]

In today's materialistic society, everybody feels that only money and power makes the mare go. Serenity and joys are greatly misunderstood. If we have riches, we seem to have a platoon of friends. But they are our friends up to the extent we have money and power. The moment we lose our wealth and influence, it will be very difficult to track these people. But then the question arises that who can be our compassionate friends? Because the problem with the human character is that sometimes, when destiny favours us and feel that we can manage everything by ourselves and feel we do not need friends, the moment we quickly realize that how wrong we are. At that moment we learn who is really helpful and who is completely useless. So, to prepare for that moment, to make genuine friends who will help us when the need arises, or from whom we can get good counselling is really a herculean task.

Also, It's a mystery for the ages: Why are some people blissful and others not? One may never fully understand it — and that may be because much of it has nothing to do with science at all. People trail different roads to seek fulfilment and contentment and to gain eternal ecstasy for living a blissful life.

The first road leads through spiritual practices and meditation. Most of us know that wealth, mental efficiency and serenity arise from the unification of physical, mind and spirit systems. Of health and sanity we understand much, but of that highest ecstasy, we have truly realized very little. The highest ecstasy is inextricably linked with spiritual progress that yields lasting joy, peace which passes all understanding.

Regardless of religion, gender, social or financial status, every one of us wants to be blissful and it is this common need that binds us together. All our endeavours are geared towards finding bliss and alleviating pain. Unknown to most of us who seek pleasure outwardly, true and everlasting bliss lies deep within us as a soul (ātmā). The soul is the God within us and one of the qualities of God is perpetual bliss or ecstasy (Ānand). Bliss is the happiness of the highest order and is not dependent on any external stimulus. In the course of our spiritual progress, we find that perpetual ecstasy or Bliss.

Simultaneously, we know that a superlative form of contentment (i.e. Bliss) does exist and we struggle to find this natural state of bliss outside ourselves instead of trying to tap it within. In the course of the process of our spiritual evolution we acquire the ability of going within and gaining access to the bliss (Ānand) from our soul (ātmā). Every one of us is at different stages of spiritual evolution. The quality and quantity as well as the duration of the experience of this bliss or ecstasy are directly proportional to the stage of our spiritual evolution which, in return, ripens in us, the most brilliant of lights, that is the blessed soul. But even the brightest of lights if covered with thick blankets would give birth to 'spiritual ignorance'. This spiritual ignorance refers to our inability to see beyond our five senses, mind and intellect and perceive the soul within. Externally, we clean our homes and bathe our bodies daily because the dirt outside us is easily visible but internal spiritual cleaning is rarely undertaken.

As we get regular with our spiritual practice (meditation as part of it) we begin to get flashes of the wondrous experiences of the Divine which are known as spiritual experiences. This final state

comes when the covering has completely dissolved and the pure soul can shine through with no filters of 'spiritual ignorance' to block its radiance. So, that union with God creates "the peace that knows no understanding" leading to bliss – an orgasmic type of "bliss".

The second ecstatic road leads us through literary world. It has been said that "Eternal Bliss or ecstasy is as a butterfly which, when chased, is always beyond our grasp, but which if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you". Social scientists have caught the butterfly. They have found that if a person becomes absorbed in some sort of reading habits, this exercise enhances connectivity in the brain and improves brain function. Reading fiction expands the reader's ability to put themselves in another person's shoes and flex the imagination in a way that is similar to the visualization of a muscle memory in sports.

Few years ago, a book called *The Secret*, by Rhonda Byrne, brought revolution in the whole world when it claimed that the real secret to life and serenity lies in a force called the Law of Attraction. Byrne's claim was that the universe responds to your thoughts and that you attract bliss to yourself by the power of what you think. If you think positive thoughts, the universe responds to your thoughts by bringing positive outcomes to you, and if you think negative thoughts, your outcomes will be negative. Millions of people responded to the idea that this one law was the secret to delight and contentment what all they desired in life. Even the readers of this research paper may also agree with this notion that people who think positively have much better outcomes than negative thinkers.[7]

While reading the holy *Bible*, the robust findings of your research will be proving that tranquillity and fulfilment is not found in circumstances, in our bank accounts, in the material possessions, or achievements. Instead, this contentment comes largely from how we live our lives and into which activities we decide to invest our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Bible has a lot to say about positive thinking and the Law of Attraction, about that Eternal Bliss and the realization.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich by Alexander Solzhenitsyn counts among the best classics of world literature. An unforgettable portrait of the entire world of Stalin's forced work camps; the novel exposes the story of a Russian soldier's life in a Siberian labour camp around the time of World War II. The laws and punishment within the labour camp are as unjust as those outside the camp. Overall, perseverance is largely a mental thing in the prison camp. Like anybody who's been in a highly structured and disciplined environment for a long time, the protagonist has developed his own individualized way of living day to day, bending the rules, avoiding punishment, and making life a little more bearable but cheerful under those circumstances. Every day is a struggle, but the protagonist accepts everything camp life throws at him and triumphs. [8]

Readers, while reading the book notices that the protagonist has adapted all the qualities necessary to survive: he works for himself and for his comrades; he does not rely on outside help, but on his own skill and craftiness; he is used to obeying sensible orders; he has faith, but it is a faith designed to help him cope with the realities of this life, not one which exhausts itself in dogmatic theological debate. He is a compassionate human being who looks at his fellow prisoners with sympathy and understanding. Most of them appreciate this attitude and treat him with the same respect.[9]

The remarkable thing about the life of the protagonist is that before his imprisonment he was a soldier and even before that he was a teacher but the circumstances lead him towards a new world – the world that exposes the horrors of Soviet gulags and he accepts and happily compromises with. In spite of the rigid instructions and sadistic officers he was working under, he would wake up early, would eat three crummy meals, had to work in sub-zero weather until sundown, would steal a few precious moments for himself at the end of the day and would go to sleep happily.[10]

The other moment of true contentment comes at the end of the novel when he recounts the triumphs of this day:

They hadn't put him in the cooler. The gang had not been chased out to work in the Socialist Community Development. He'd finagled an extra bowl of mush at noon. The boss had gotten them good rates for their work. He'd felt good making that wall. They hadn't found that piece of steel in the frisk. Caesar had paid him off in the evening. He'd bought some tobacco. And he'd gotten over that sickness.[11]

Back in his bunk, reflecting on the day's adventures, he is at peace with his actions and their consequences. As he falls asleep, he recalls this an unclouded day. Almost a happy one:

Nothing had spoiled the day and it had been almost happy. There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days like this in his sentence, from reveille to lights out. The three extra-ones were because of the leap years.....[12]

There are a handful of more books that have found their way into our life and also have helped bring joy and that tremendous peace.

In *Eat, Pray, Love* written in the form of a memoir, the author Elizabeth Gilbert narrates her time spent in Italy, India and Bali and how she discovers the joy of good food, faith, spirituality, peace and love. The author describes how she made the difficult choice to leave behind all the trappings of modern American success to follow her heart and travel the world, searching for meaning. The book gives its readers deep insight into the doubts and confusions in life of most of the women. It also shares with its readers how the protagonist chooses to face her doubts fears, weaknesses; how she fight them and above all how she masters the social harmony and real happiness in life.

The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz reveals the source of self-limiting beliefs that rob us of joy and create needless suffering. Based on ancient Toltec wisdom, the book exposes self-limiting beliefs and presents a simple, yet effective code of personal conduct learned from his Toltec ancestors. Full of grace and simple truth, this handsomely-designed book makes a lovely gift for anyone making an elementary change in life, and

reads in a voice like one would expect a native healer to sound. The four basic agreements are:

1. Be Impeccable With Your Words.
2. Don't Take Anything Personally.
3. Don't Make Assumptions.
4. Always Do Your Best.

These basic goals and hopes are wonderfully helpful and a path to making one's life a bit easier. It's how and why one should do these things that make The Four Agreements worth reading and remembering.

You Can Heal Your Life by Louise L. Hay is another book that introduces its readers the very basic need of healing and how negative thoughts and life style can affect us, and just by simple healing techniques how can we make our dreams come true, and how can we really create a truly blissful ever after-life for ourselves. The assertions in the book are truly healing and it really heals the readers both physically and mentally especially those who are physically and mentally ill for years.

Ask and It Is Given by Esther Hicks and Jerry Hicks is a plain and simple and is one of the most powerful books one has ever read. One's entire life can change because of what is found here. After reading, the reader will probably be delighted to have an inspiring, updated book that speaks to the familiar conversation of attracting the life we want.[13]

Reading Lolita in Tehran, a memoir by Azar Nafisi, enlightens about the power of books in a time of crisis and oppression. Prof. Nafisi taught literature at a number of Iranian universities in the 1980s and 1990s, but eventually was forced out and/or left these positions. The novel chronicles the instinctive exuberance and intellectual unfolding of a private literature class Dr Nafizi started in Tehran after she resigned from the University of Tehran years earlier, refusing to wear the veil:

For nearly two years, almost every Thursday morning, rain or shine, they came to my house, and almost every time, I could not get over the shock of seeing them shed their mandatory veils and robes and burst into colour. When my students came into that room, they took off more than their scarves and robes. Gradually, each one gained an outline and a shape, becoming

her own inimitable self. Our world in that living room with its window framing my beloved Elburz Mountains became our sanctuary, our self-contained universe, mocking the reality of black-scarved, timid faces in the city that sprawled below.[14]

The one place where her students felt released was in Nafisi's house, veils off, personalities revealed, studying the books they loved and able to express and challenge their own perceptions and judgments. Stories of abuse they suffered, fear, the search for love and desire for freedom rose to the surface, accompanied by humour, accounts delicately revealed through honest and tender descriptions.

Azar wanted her students to see that literature could transform their squashed and disgraced lives, and she seems to have succeeded marvellously. Reading *Lolita* for them is a captivating and inspiring tale. It explores the importance of self-discovery, the ways in which literature can aid in that process and the necessity of letting one's voice be heard despite the overwhelming pressure to remain quiet and submissive. Nafizi and her students, all women, began to think of these classes as an escape to a true republic where they are all able to discover another reality – the instinctive desire of contentment, confidence and a sort of independence.

Even Buddhism, when it talks of true or real satisfaction, it indicates towards the literature on Buddhism. Happiness in Pali is called *Sukha*, which is used both as a noun meaning happiness, ease, bliss, or pleasure and as an adjective meaning blissful or pleasant.

Buddha enumerates contrasting types of mental happiness: the happiness of the household life and that of monastic life, the happiness of sense pleasures and that of renunciation, happiness with attachments and taints and happiness without attachments and taints, worldly happiness and spiritual happiness, the happiness of concentration and happiness without concentration, Aryan happiness, mental happiness, happiness without joy, happiness of equanimity, happiness not aimed at joy, and happiness aimed at formless object. Happiness associated with the wholesome roots produced by the renunciation of sensual enjoyments

is spiritual happiness (niramisasukha) or the happiness of renunciation (nekkhammasukha). The happiness of Jhana is a spiritual happiness born of seclusion from sense pleasures and the hindrances (pavivekasukha). It is also a happiness of concentration (samadhisukha).[15]

However, I believe that what we are all ultimately searching for is delight or happiness. Together, with this research paper, I have tried to explore the ways in which we can all ultimately achieve happiness and lead happy lives. Through a long and arduous journey I have gained some important insights (as discussed above) into the art of being and staying happy and maintaining happiness throughout one's day, week, year, and life! I absolutely guarantee that anyone, absolutely anyone, can be happy if he or she just keeps on exploring the world of happiness with me. Happiness isn't necessarily complicated, but it does take work. Together, let's explore some other options how to be happy right now:

Be grateful to God for your life -- for each moment of every day; choose a healthy lifestyle; keep a daily routine; live in the present – do not worry about the future; be inwardly free; take care of your spirit, expand your awareness and discover new ways of expressing divine gifts; let go of negativity; be more optimistic about the future and your ability to accomplish life goals; learn to forgive and forget; see every challenge as an opportunity for further growth; express gratitude for what you have; open yourself up to success and embrace failures or mistakes that happen along the way; do not worry about the little things; surround yourself with positive energy and people; accept and love yourself for the unique gifts and talents that you bring to life; treat everyone with kindness; speak well of others and truly listen to them; be careful with your words -- speak gentler, kinder, and wiser; give and take respect; be honest, speaking the truth builds trust in relationships and improves your will power; put your trust in others and be trusted in return; take some time to be silent; practice generosity and giving without expecting anything in return; smile– to family, to co-workers, to neighbours, to strangers– and watch how they feel; de-clutter your home to de-clutter your mind; feel

good in your own home and make it your safe haven by keeping it clean, organized, and uplifting; take some time away from life's complicated outer involvements to get to know your family, your neighbours, and your loved ones better and to get to know yourself; get enough sleep and wake up preferably early; exercise daily to the point of sweating to purify the body, to prevent stress, relieve depression, and positively improve your mood; laugh more as laughter is the best medicine as it releases endorphins that battle the negative effects of stress and promote a sense of well-being and joy; practice meditation as it leads to physical changes in the brain that improve concentration and focus, calm the nervous system, and help you to become more kind and compassionate; surrender yourself to the Divine and allow it to take care of the littlest things in your life to the greatest and most important.

And in the end, reconnect with Nature; take some time every week to recharge your body battery. On the weekend, escape to nature or a place where you can feel peace in time for a fresh start to the work week, observe the natural beauty that surrounds you and feel a sense of connection, appreciate the details and miracles that you found in nature; ask yourself what makes you happy, and find ways to restructure your life so that you are able to do more of those things.

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