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Happiness Now!

Written by Robert Holden

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HAPPINESS NOW!

TIMELESS WISDOM FOR FEELING GOOD FAST

ROBERT HOLDEN PhD



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Dedicated to those
who dare to sprinkle kindness,
radiate love, and scatter joy.

'No one who comes here but must still have hope, some lingering illusion, or some dream that there is something outside of himself that will bring happiness and peace to him. If everything is in him this cannot be so. And therefore by his coming, he denies the truth about himself, and seeks for something more than everything, as if a part of it were separated off and found where all the rest of it is not. This is the purpose he bestows upon the body; that it seek for what he lacks, and give him what would make himself complete. And thus he wanders aimlessly about, in search of something that he cannot find, believing that he is what he is not.'

– A Course in Miracles

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CHAPTER ONE

Happy Already!

Picture the following scene:

I am at my friend Jane's house. It is mid-afternoon, and we are having tea. Jane and I are engaged in a deep and meaningful conversation when her two boys run into the room. They're young, full of energy, lively and noisy. Tom is four years old, and Ben is three. Ben follows Tom everywhere.

Jane and I continue to talk, but soon we can't hear each other speak because the boys are in a dispute.

'What's the problem?' Jane asks.

Tom throws Ben off him, takes a deep breath, and says, 'It's *my* turn to play on *my* bike, but Ben won't leave me alone, and he's already ridden *my* bike once today.' A few more things are said, but no agreement is reached.

'Go outside and sort this out. Robert and I are talking,' says Jane. The boys are dismissed.

After only a minute or two, the boys run into the room again . . . with the bike! Before Jane can chastise the boys for bringing it into the house, Tom says, 'We've worked it all out.'

'Good,' we both say.

Tom continues, 'Today the bike belongs to me all day, and tomorrow the bike belongs to Ben all day.' Both boys nod their heads with great enthusiasm.

'Are you both agreed?' asks Jane, sounding quite surprised.

'Yes,' they both say.

'Good, now go along and play,' says Jane.

The boys turn around to leave, and just before they do so, Ben pipes up at the top of his voice, 'I know – let's pretend it's tomorrow!'

Tom and Ben's story illustrates perfectly how children use possibility thinking to enjoy happiness *now!* I believe that, contrary to popular opinion, a baby's favourite toy is not a thing, it's a moment – a moment called *now.* Children are born only with an awareness of *now* – past and future are meaningless at first. In the beginning, *now* is the whole world to children, their entire playground. This fascination and reverence for *now is* entirely natural; it is neither learned nor fabricated.

Kids like Tom and Ben are completely unimpressed by the idea of 'future happiness' – above all, they want happiness *now!* Those who are yet to be indoctrinated or conditioned fully by meaningless 'laws of time' don't know how to wait for happiness. Why wait for heaven when the possibility for heaven exists right here and now?

I believe that as a young child, you too were alive to the infinite possibilities of the present moment. Like other children, you were full of wonder, imagination, awe, and appreciation for the precious present. *You got so much from 'now' because you gave so much to 'now'* – and for the entire time you were engaged with the present, you were happy to leave the past and future exactly where they were. *Now* was your treasure island, and you believed

wholeheartedly that happiness was here and now, waiting to be seen. The more you believed this, the more you would look; and the more you looked, the more happiness you found. Here is an important key to happiness.

Milking the 'Sacred Now'

The world has changed greatly in recent times in an effort to accommodate our desire for happiness *now*. Everything has sped up. We live life fast – faster than ever. Fast technology, fast travel, fast careers, fast relationships, and fast results are all the rage in our 'I want it *now*' world. Indeed, the world is fast becoming a vast convenience store where you can get everything in an instant – instant coffee, microwave foods, minute-meals, half-hour film developing, 24-hour banking, drive-thru funerals, quickie divorces, television shopping, home delivery of everything and, of course, instant credit. We're sold on signs that read 'No queues', 'No need to wait', 'One stop', 'Open all hours', and 'Buy now – pay later'.[1]

One way of looking at our 'I want it now' world is to see it as a highly egotistical and selfish pursuit of happiness that is fuelled by impatience, violence and greed, doomed from the very start to 'end in tears'. Indeed, many people are voicing their concerns at 'the way the world is going', believing that traditional values and morals are fast being corroded and obliterated by the chase for happiness now.

Another way of seeing our 'I want it now' world is that this clamour for happiness *now* reflects an instinctive wisdom and a great spiritual truth, which states that . . .

everything – absolutely everything –
is available to you 'now'.

There's a famous story from the Zen tradition that tells of an encounter between a young, eager student and a well-respected Zen master, noted especially for his perpetual grace and happiness:

'Master, I dream of everlasting happiness. What is the highest wisdom you can teach me?' asked the student.

The master smiled. He took his brush and wrote, as if for the first time: 'Attention.'

'Wonderful,' said the student, 'and what comes next after attention?'

The master smiled. He took his brush and wrote, as if for the first time: 'Attention. Attention.'

'Yes,' nodded the student, utterly perplexed. 'Anything more?'

The master smiled. He took his brush and wrote, as if for the first time: 'Attention. Attention. Attention.'

'Okay, so what does "attention" mean?' asked the student, unable to see.

The master spoke: 'Attention means attention.'

'Is that all?' asked the student, obviously dispirited.

'Attention is all,' said the master. 'Without attention, happiness is nowhere; *with* attention, happiness is now here. Attention is freedom from all. Attention offers all.'

Every authentic school of wisdom and spirituality teaches you that *now* is the most abundant moment of your life. The bibles of the world, be it the Old Testament or the New, the Koran or the Bhagavad Gita, the Dhammapada or the Tao Te Ching – indeed, any true spiritual text – all agree that *now* is an eternal treasure chest dripping with beautiful, everlasting gifts of peace, happiness, love and joy freely available to all on a 24-hour 'Don't pay now – don't pay later' basis.[2]

Now is sacred! This is what the Zen master is trying to tell the eager young student in the story above. Indeed, talk to any spiritual teacher or guru worth their mantra, so to speak, and this person will tell you that *now* is always sacred. But why and how is *now* always sacred, you may ask? What if you've just been stood up on a date or you've just opened a bill or you've just chipped a tooth or your football team has lost again – how sacred is that?!

One approach to milking the *sacred now* is to place your attention on what is happening around you right at this minute and

aim to appreciate, respect, and value it as much as you believe possible. You can do this right now. Before you read on, look around you and appreciate fully for a moment what your senses pick up. When you do so, you'll experience first hand how pleasurable appreciation can be. Events sometimes seem to make this exercise hard, but willingness can overcome this.

In my workshops for The Happiness Project, I often show a slide that reads:

HAPPINESSISNOWHERE.

When I ask people to call out what they can see, I always get two distinct answers, one being *happiness is nowhere,* the other being *happiness is now here.* Often, then . . .

the difference between 'happiness is nowhere' and 'happiness is now here' has something to do with the event, and everything to do with how you *see* the event. Your perception is key.

The real secret to milking the *sacred now is* to place your attention not out in the world about you, but within yourself – your inner, unconditioned *Self.* In truth, the *sacred now* is an inner potential. It is eternal and abundant; and its geography is spiritual, not physical. In other words, the *sacred now* represents a permanent potential within you to experience love, freedom and joy regardless of time, place, or circumstance.

The gift of happiness is wrapped in your heart, not the world. Thus, your happiness will never be posted to you! And it can never get lost in the mail! In truth, your happiness has already been delivered, sitting in your inner mailbox – your heart – waiting to be opened. This is what the *sacred now is* really all about. In essence, then, you *are the key to happiness.* More than what happens to you, it is your perceptions, your thoughts, your beliefs and your overall response that are essential; your Self, your original Self, is the real key.

The real reason *now* is so naturally abundant is because when you allow yourself to be unrestrained by fear and uninhibited by worry, it is *you* who is so naturally, originally abundant. In truth, then . . .

Now *has enough wisdom to last you forever,*
because within you, right now, there is all
the wisdom you listen for in others.

Now *has enough love to last you a lifetime,*
because within you, right now, there is the
love you continually cry out for.

Now *has enough peace to last you an eternity,*
because within you, right now, peace of mind
is one thought away at most.

And now *has enough joy to outlast the world,*
because within you, right now, the joy you
chase is not in things – it is in you.

The problem with our 'I want it *now*' society isn't that we want happiness *now,* but that we've lost sight of how to experience it now. In particular, we say, 'I want it *now*', but we doubt and don't really believe that 'it is here *now*'. We've lost faith in *now* and have placed all of our faith in some imagined future. Similarly, we've lost faith in our *Self* and have placed all our attention on the world outside. Now it is the world, it seems, that must 'make us happy' *– and herein lies the source of all our misery.*

As long as you believe that it's the world that must make you happy, you leave yourself open to great disappointment and much sadness. Why? Because as long as you refuse to see your inner potential for happiness *now,* you will not see it in the world. *How can a mirror change the way you look?* Think about that, for the world is only a mirror. You will only see in the world what you're prepared to see in yourself – nothing more and nothing less.

Know, therefore, that the journey to true happiness and to happiness *now is* not a journey of physical distance or time; it is one of personal 'self-recovery', where we remember and reconnect consciously to an inner potential for joy – a paradise lost – waiting to be found. One moment we look within and we see *happiness nowhere;* the next moment we look within and this time we see *happiness now here*. This is a revelation. This is enlightenment. This is joy!

The faster we chase the world and the future, the quicker we appear to overlook the possibility that happiness is here already. Every morning as we wake up, the alarm clock sings *'now',* and from that moment on we do not give *now* another thought as we desperately chase our future. But are you so sure that happiness isn't already here with you *now?* Have you really looked? I mean, *really* looked?

Milking the *sacred now* is excavation work. It's about rediscovering an inner potential for original joy – a potential that already exists but has been buried beneath a pile of fears, doubts, guilt, conditioning and history. Think of this potential for original joy not as something to arrive at, but as something you bring with you wherever you go. Recultivating this potential is our task, and the task begins with the realisation that . . .

joy waits on welcome, not on time.[3]

Diving for Treasures of the Soul

Psychology school taught me a lot about our potential – in particular, our potential for unlimited amounts of misery, pain, weakness and despair! We studied every affliction, every neurosis, and every mental dis-ease available at the time. In a nutshell, my psychology training consisted of: *Year 1,* an introduction to basic suffering; *Year 2,* the study of advanced suffering; and *Year 3,* a qualification in inspired suffering.

The focus was entirely on our inner potential to mess life up. My curriculum was the A–Z of suffering, from anger to

zoophilia – including stress, depression, anxiety, neurosis, psychosis, neurotic-psychosis and psychotic-neurosis, hysteria, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorders, phobias, inferiority complexes, kleptomania, suicide, insanity and delusion. At no time did we consider our potential for joy, love, or peace of mind. In effect, I was studying for a Ph.D. in misery!

Studying suffering full-time had a big impact on my way of thinking. I once read that history has no evidence that there ever lived a happy psychologist. I can see why now. After a while, I was able to work out just how low I was going to feel on any given day by looking at my lecture timetable. For instance, when we studied depression for a week, I remember that the entire class eventually felt totally depressed by the end. The same was true for any and all of the complexes, afflictions, disorders and fixations. Getting an unexpectedly low mark for my paranoia essay didn't help at all!

Do you remember when in nursery or primary school you were given a lecture on the importance of bodily hygiene and the dangers of head lice? And do you remember how, after 20 minutes of listening to this woman who showed you great big blown-up slides of head lice with six-inch teeth, you became absolutely convinced you had a nest of these things in your hair? Well, that's what it was like in my psychology lectures. Doctors-in-training will tell you that their experience was also the same.

I learned a very important lesson about perception and focus during those years, which is . . .

be careful what you look for because you *will* find it.

I immersed myself thoroughly in the study of misery. I received distinctions for the most part in every study I undertook. As I increased my focus, I soon realised that there was not *one* type of depression, but 100. Furthermore, there was not *one* sort of schizophrenia, but 30, 40, or more. Whatever you focus on, expands. Each day I hoped we might dive for pearls, but instead we merely collected crabs!

After a full six years of study, I still hadn't been given a single lecture on our potential for joy, peace, unity, wholeness and

success. Psychology, originally defined as *the study of the soul,* had been reduced to a study of illness and neurotic behaviour. Freud and Behaviourism, in particular, reduced human beings to no more than a pitiful bag of blood and bones housing a mind full of neurotic defences and endless psychotic potential for aggression and psychosexual hang-ups. Never was there any mention of the soul, of spirit, of divinity, of God, of love.

My training in psychology, with its almost exclusive focus on pain, is a very common story. It also reflects a tendency in our society to focus on negatives. Doctors, for instance, study illness, not health. Business leaders analyse failure, not success. Economists study cost, not value. Philosophers mostly debate original sin, not original blessing. Christians talk endlessly about crucifixion, not resurrection. Mental-health organisations publish books on 'Understanding Depression', 'Understanding Stress', and 'Understanding Bereavement', but not on 'Understanding Joy' and 'Understanding Love'. The media is full of journalists suffering from an addictive, antisocial, obsessive-compulsive need to communicate and make up bad news. Literature and art is full of depressed poets and painters – can you name three joyful poets?

What you focus on most often becomes familiar, and what is familiar feels real to you. In our society, we focus on pain before joy, tears before laughter, and fear before love, so we gradually grow blind to our inner, ever-present potential for happiness. I remember well how my lecturers frowned on happiness. What they taught me essentially was: 'If you find that you're experiencing happiness – don't worry – you're just in denial and the pain will soon return!'

Happiness appeared to have no value, other than that it offered a temporary respite between periods of pain and trauma. It was defined simplistically as the absence of pain. Other messages I received included, 'Happiness is superficial, pain is deep', 'Laughter is a common symptom of manic depression', 'Smiling a lot means you're suppressing a hidden pain', 'Optimism is often unrealistic and delusional', and 'Talking to God is the first sign of a nervous breakdown'.

Of greater concern to me, though, is the large body of thought within the psychology profession that suggests that happiness is in some way a dysfunctional behaviour in light of all the suffering in the world. The idea is: 'If you have normal blood pressure living in our troubled world, you're not taking it seriously enough.' There have been several recent studies that have tried to suggest that happiness is only an avoidance of real issues, a selfish coping strategy, or a superficial form of escape. This thinking doesn't take into account that your happiness is an inspiration, a gift to others and a way out of suffering.[4]

When I asked my lecturers why we didn't study happiness, they usually challenged me to look at my resistance to embracing my pain more fully! The most common explanation given, however, for why happiness, love, peace and God aren't studied by psychologists is that they cannot be measured as easily as fear and pain. In other words, they are inner potentials that don't show up on laboratory apparatus designed to measure externals.[5]

Just because psychologists choose not to focus on joy, however, doesn't mean to say that joy doesn't exist. We can refuse to look at the sun, for example, but that won't make it go away. One problem, though, with not focusing directly on happiness is that what has emerged in place of the truth is a myth of happiness where happiness has become *a potential time forgot,* clouded in misperception, superstition, doubt and cynicism.

The Oasis in the Desert

It was while studying communications that I met a man in my class who was to change my life forever. His name was Avanti Kumar. Avanti was an Asian gentleman, a mature student of about 24 years old, and the spitting image of the actor Danny DeVito – short build, stocky, no hair directly on top of his head but wild curly bushes of growth either side, big bronzed cheeks, a great smile, and a beautiful and radiant light in his eyes.

Avanti always sat at the back of the class, and in the early weeks he was always last in and first out. 'Who is he?' we all

wondered. All we knew about him was that he was quiet and that he was always smiling. In fact, he was never *not* smiling. It was as if he had a private joke running in his head all the time.

I was deeply intrigued by Avanti from the very first moment I laid eyes on him. It was as if I somehow knew him already. There was a familiarity I felt but couldn't explain. I remember wanting to talk to him but feeling, unusually for me, too nervous to approach.

I'll never forget our first conversation. I asked him why he'd chosen this course to study. His answer was, 'To meet you, of course.' His smile really was infectious.

After that, I made sure we drank coffee together most days. I asked questions, and he gave me cryptic clues. I remember asking him one day, 'What are you?'

'A yogi,' he replied.

'A what?' I asked.

'A student of yoga,' he said.

'Oh! You mean like Jane Fonda!' Fortunately, we enjoyed each other's humour. Soon, another student, Phil, joined our coffee sessions. We became inseparable. We were one.

It was as if Avanti were fresh out of some Himalayan cave or esoteric monastery, where, I imagined, he'd been sitting for centuries in blissful meditation. He was my first direct experience of someone consciously connected to, and aware of, the inner potential for joy – anywhere, anytime. Over the next few months, he carefully and lovingly reacquainted Phil and me with this inner awareness as we talked about yoga, metaphysics, spiritual wisdom, and the more enlightened schools of psychology.

'So far all you've learned about is a psychology of the ego, or lower self,' Avanti explained, 'which is immersed in separation, fear and suffering. If you'd like, I will teach you about another psychology, a psychology of wholeness and of the Higher Self, which teaches you how to allow your inner joy to shine on the world once more.'

It was with Avanti, then, that I first began to focus directly on happiness. It was Avanti who first taught me that happiness is not just the absence of pain, but that . . .

true happiness is an inner power –
natural, healing, abundant, and always available.

Like all great teachers, Avanti loved to tell stories. One day he introduced me to the story of two birds, first written in an ancient Hindu text called the *Mundaya Upanishad*.[6] It reads:

Two birds
inseparable companions
perched on the same tree.
One eats fruit,
the other looks on.

The first bird is our individual self,
feeding on the pleasures and
pains of this world;
The other is the universal Self,
silently witnessing all.

'Think of the two birds as two thoughts flying about in the sky of your mind,' said Avanti. 'The first bird, *the individual self,* is your ego. It "desires" happiness, and it tells you that you must search the world to find it. The second bird, *the universal Self, is* your spirit. It "knows" happiness, and it tells you that you are happy already, that you were created happy, that all the happiness you have ever dreamed of rests in the centre of your real *Self* right now.

'Like an oasis in the desert, the *universal Self* is wholly joyous, wholly abundant, and wholly peaceful,' said Avanti. 'It is home to the *sacred now,* your inner potential for immediate peace and joy anywhere, anytime.'

With Avanti's guidance, I immersed myself in Eastern and Western literature in an effort to understand further the concept of the *individual self* and the *universal Self*. There are many names for these two selves, some of which I've listed in Table A.

conditioned self	Unconditioned Self
learned self	original Self
false self	real Self
fearful self	loving Self
critical self	creative Self
lower self	higher Self
dissociated self	unified Self
ego	holy spirit
split self	whole Self
body/mind	spirit/soul
persona	atman
flesh	christos
nothing	'I am'
sin	source
hell	heaven
fallen self	divine Self

Table A

Today, many years later, I now think of the universal Self as your unconditioned Self – the Self that exists behind the mask of your personal history, your conditioning, your learned limitations, the roles you play, your persona, your defences, your doubts and your fears. This unconditioned Self is the original you, untouched by the world, completely safe and whole. It is who you really are, and not who you have been taught you are by parents, teachers, friends, lovers, anybody else, and most of all, yourself.

Your unconditioned Self is the presence of peace. Three words, in particular, describe the unconditioned Self, and they are: (1) *wholeness;* (2) *love;* and (3) *joy.* The oriental mystics called the unconditioned Self the 'uncarved block'. Other names for it include the Zen term 'the original face', the Buddhist phrase 'the sacred happiness', the North American name 'free spirit', the Taoists' 'inner smile', and the Christian mystics' 'inner Eden'.