HAPPINESS in HARD TIMES

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HAPPINESS IN HARD TIMES

IF ONLY I HAD HER DIAMONDS!

IF ONLY I HAD HIS MONEY!

IF ONLY I HAD HIS WIFE!

IF ONLY I HAD HER FIGURE!
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On a bicycle ride around the world, my friend Aden stopped awhile in a West African village to help build a bakery. He said:

It took us several months to build the bakery. We made the bricks from crushed anthills. Every day the village children came to help. None of the kids had shoes but one happy little guy always wore one sock—no shoes, just a sock. He was about 10 years old. I called him One Sock.

Eventually my curiosity got the better of me. I said, “One Sock, tell me about this sock you always wear.”

He said proudly, “My Mum washes it every night. I wear it every day.”

I said, “Yes, but why do you wear one?”

He seemed surprised by my silly question, and then he smiled broadly and said, “Because I only have one!”

Perhaps you are broke right now. Perhaps you have lost your job or lost a loved one. Maybe you are sick. You say, “I just don’t know what to do.”

Here is the first thing to do—and the only thing to do. You accept where you are. To turn things around you first make peace with your situation. Forget about blame, forget about guilt, forget the “what ifs”. Progress depends on acceptance. Acceptance doesn’t mean, “I want to stay here.” Acceptance means: “This is where I am—and now I move on to what I want.”

Instead of, “My husband is a gorilla and I’m stuck with him”, it is more like, “My husband is a gorilla. What a perfect learning experience! I now realise I deserve better treatment.”

Instead of, “I’ve lost all my money. If only I hadn’t invested everything with Honest Eddie’s Equity Fund”, you say, “I am where I am. I made it once, I’ll make it again.”
Imagine you are overweight and you want to become thin. If you say:
• I’m not fat, or
• it’s my mother’s fault that I am fat, or
• my sister is fatter, what happens? You stay fat.
But there’s another option:
• I am fat. I like myself whether or not I’m fat. I now choose to lose 50 kilos.
You accept where you are. Now you can move forward.
• Acceptance isn’t giving up. Acceptance is recognition that, “This is a part of my journey.” Very often it means, “Right now I have no idea why this had to be a part of my journey but I embrace it anyway.”

In a Nutshell
Acceptance is power.

Quick Quiz:
Imagine that in the last week, you:
• tattooed your backside
• thumped your neighbour
• got married
• robbed a bank
• donated a kidney
• had botox
• joined a monastery
• devoured a huge pizza in three minutes and
• leaped off a very high bridge.
Okay, so you had a busy week.
Question: What do each of the above have in common?
Answer: These are all things that you might do to feel happier. Really! In fact, it’s a trick question because I could have put anything on the list. The motivation behind everything you do—and the motivation behind everything everybody does—is to feel better.
Don’t take my word for it. Ask the psychologists or read Plato, Aristotle and Sigmund Freud. There is a lot of debate about the meaning of life. There is broad agreement about why we do what we do—we want to be happy and stay happy.

You devour an entire pizza in three minutes. Your thought is, “This feels good. I want to be happy now.” You hire a personal trainer and eat lettuce for six months. Your aim is, “I want to like my butt—and this will make me happier.” You quit alcohol. Why? “If I do this I will feel better.” Whether you donate to Red Cross or belt your neighbour, your motive is, “If I do this I will feel better.”

Mary says, “I donate to charity because I want to help people.” Sure, Mary, but would you donate if it made you miserable? Fred says, “I punched my neighbour because he came at me with a spade!” Correct, Fred. You made a hasty decision, “To be happier in the very short term I need to break Larry’s nose before he whacks me with a gardening tool.”

Different people do different things but the objective remains the same—if I do this I will feel better.

You study accountancy for four years to please your dad. You say, “I did it to make him happy.” No you didn’t. You did it because you feel better doing what he wants than you would feel doing what you want.

Whether you sacrifice for your kids, whether you marry or divorce, whether you get a tattoo or join the priesthood, the ultimate goal is the same. Even if you leap off a very high bridge, it is an attempt to feel better—“I’ll be happier dead than alive”.

Is it Selfish to Pursue Happiness?

Here’s what’s crazy. We all chase happiness—it’s automatic—but some people worry that it is selfish. So they feel guilty—and that makes them unhappy!

It’s not selfish to seek happiness. IT IS SELFISH TO BE MISERABLE! Happy people are more thoughtful and more considerate. It’s unhappy people who are preoccupied with themselves. Happy people make better friends, better lovers and better employees. Studies prove that if you are happy you are more likely to:

- volunteer at a soup kitchen
- carry a stranger’s groceries or
- loan people money.
If you are miserable you are more likely to:
• complain about your ulcer
• steal from your boss or
• kick a dog.

So for the sake of everyone you know—and for the benefit of all the dogs in your neighbourhood—let’s get one thing straight: the happier you become, the better off we all will be!

Hard times can mean no money. Hard times can mean no friends, no job and no hope. Hope is what we need most. The good news is that it is possible for you to climb out of the deepest hole. If you are unhappy with your life right now, you may look back in a few months and see how these difficult times helped to prepare you for something better.

Most of us start out life believing:
• mistakes are bad
• the happiest people have the easiest lives
• the smartest people are the most successful
• we need a partner to be happy.

None of the above statements are necessarily true.
I Can’t Take it Anymore!

Sometimes life is hard. How do you hang on when things seem hopeless? You can only tackle your problems as you would climb a mountain.

If you go rock climbing and you get stuck on a ledge, you suddenly focus on the present moment! When your life is in danger, you forget about the future. All your effort goes into your next step. Then your next step. Inch by inch. Eventually you claw your way out.

The same strategy works for everyday life. It is the only strategy when life gets tough. You say, “How can I stay positive when I can’t even pay the rent? How do I keep going when I’m grieving, lonely or seriously ill?”

When the worst happens, you can’t worry about the rest of your life. You can’t even be worrying about the rest of the month. But you can usually handle one day at a time. And whenever 24 hours is too tough, bite off five minutes at a time. Tackle one problem at a time. Take a step. You get a little confidence...take another step, and another. Eventually you find that the worst is over.

If you were to worry about:

a) everything you need to do in the next month, or

b) everything that could go wrong in the next year, you could go nuts! Focus on the moment.

If you were embarking on a day’s march, wouldn’t it be foolish to try to carry enough food and water for a lifetime? Is it not strange, then, that many people carry around all their worries for the next 25 years and wonder why life is so difficult? We were designed to live 24 hours at a time. No more.

Next time you find yourself despairing, ask yourself:

• have I got enough air to breathe?

• have I got enough food for today?

• will I be okay for the next five minutes?

Once you have made it through those five minutes, just aim at getting through the next five. Bite off one small chunk at a time. It saves a lot of indigestion.

In a Nutshell

All you can do is give your best effort until bedtime.
Let tomorrow take care of itself.
Hong’s Story
I met Sushma in Singapore in 1982. I was 33 years old and she was 18. She was the daughter of an Indian father and a Chinese mother—and beautiful. For 15 years I had travelled the world. I had girlfriends but never considered marriage. I knew within 5 minutes of meeting Sushma that she would be my wife, and we married within a year.

I had an electronics trading business in Spain at the time and Sushma moved there with me. In March 1987 our only son, Jordi, was born. We lived in Europe until he was four years old. When my work took me to Nigeria we decided that it would be safest—and best for Jordi’s education—if he and Sushma moved to Singapore.

It was while I was in Nigeria, on 23 May 1991 that I received a 2.00am telephone call from my friends at my office. Sushma had been in an accident in Singapore—her car had hit a tree on Bukit Timah Rd. Hoping for the best, I packed my bags to return home, but within hours I received a second call with the news that Sushma had died. I went crazy. I cried and cried for weeks. I cried that I had lost my wife—but most of all I cried for my four-year-old son. How would Jordi manage without his mother? How would I raise him?

My first commitment to my son was that I would never marry again until he was an adult. I decided that Jordi should continue to live and be educated in Singapore. He stayed with his grandparents during school. During vacations he joined me in Africa and Europe.

We travelled the world as buddies—to Germany, Austria, South Africa and Brazil. He was my fun-loving best friend, my companion, my soul mate. Together we discovered a world that he could never find in books.

Another Phone Call
I moved to Bali in 2001 to start a new life and create the business I have now. Jordi loved coming to Bali for his vacations. By mid 2006 Jordi finished high school and came to stay with me. He wanted a motor bike and I bought him one as a graduation present.

Then on 20 September the police called me at 2.00am. Jordi had had an accident. By the time I arrived at the hospital he was already blue. He died within ten minutes. He was 19.

First my wife, then my son.
I was numb. My entire world collapsed. I walked in the forest for four days, in a
daze. Everywhere I went I saw Jordi. I took a trip to Thailand to try to heal. Still, I would see him. I returned to Bali and on the anniversary of the 40th day, we held a church ceremony for him.

The months went by and, slowly, I began to live my life again. Perhaps my 13 years in Africa helped me to deal with my loss. The European says, “This should not have happened!” The African says, “It happened. Life goes on.” I could say, “Why did I allow him to ride that bike?” But would that help?

If through sadness you can fix the future, then do it! But being sad doesn’t fix the future.

I have no regrets. I did everything I could with my son. I gave him the most I could give. And my life now? I am an artist. I create, I carve. I enjoy animals. I enjoy the people I meet. All my possessions I value at nothing.

You never know how you will react to tragedy. It’s like when you imagine a tiger jumping through your window. You say, “If a tiger leaped into my lounge room, I would do this!” But when the real tiger arrives, you do something totally different.

I wake up every day choosing to be happy. What can possibly hurt me now? What can worry me now? Life is like a movie. It’s not the length but the quality that matters.

There is no secret to happiness. You just choose it.

**Why Is Life So Hard?**

We learn most in life when we get hit over the back of the head. Why? Because it’s easier not to change. So we keep doing what we’re doing until it becomes too painful.

Take our health for example. When do we change diets and start exercising? When our body is falling apart—when the doctor says, “If you don’t change your lifestyle, you’ll kill yourself!” Suddenly we’re motivated!

In relationships: when do we usually tell each other how much we care? When the marriage is falling apart, when the family is falling apart!

In school: when do we finally knuckle down and study? When we’re about to fail.

In business: when do we try new ideas and make the tough decisions? When we can’t pay our bills. When do we finally learn about customer service? After the customers have left!
We learn our biggest lessons when things get rough. When have you made the most important decisions in your life? When you were on your knees—after disasters, after knock-backs, when you’ve been kicked in the head! That’s when we say to ourselves, “I’m sick of being broke, I’m tired of being mediocre. I’m going to do something.”

Success we celebrate—but we don’t learn too much. Failure hurts—and that’s when we get educated. In retrospect, we usually notice that “disasters” were turning points.

**Why Me?**

When tragedy strikes, or when we lose everything, or when a lover walks out on us, the question we usually ask is “WHY? WHY me? WHY now? WHY did she leave me for a loser?” Asking “WHY?” questions can send us crazy. Often, there is no answer to “WHY?” Or it doesn’t matter why!

Effective people ask “WHAT?” questions, “WHAT do I learn from this? WHAT am I going to do about it?” When the situation is really desperate, they ask, “WHAT can I do, just today, to make things better?”

Effective people don’t go looking for problems, but when they get smacked in the mouth, they ask themselves, “How do I need to change what I’m thinking and what I’m doing? How can I be better than I am now?” Losers ignore all the warning signs. When the roof falls in, they ask, “Why does everything happen to me?”

We are creatures of habit. We keep doing what we’re doing until we’re forced to change.
Mary gets dumped by boyfriend Al. Devastated, she locks herself in her bedroom for a week. Then gradually she starts to call old friends and meet new ones. She soon moves house and changes jobs. Within six months she is happier and more confident than she has ever been in her life. She looks back on the “disaster” of losing Al as the best thing that ever happened to her.

Fred gets the sack. Unable to find work, he starts his own little business. For the first time in his life he is his own boss, and doing what he really wants to do. He still has his problems, but his life has new meaning and excitement—and all out of apparent disaster.

**In a Nutshell**

The happiest people don’t bother about whether life is fair. They just concentrate on what they have.

**So is life a series of painful disasters?**

Not necessarily. The universe is always nudging us with gentle signals. When we ignore the signals, it nudges us with a sledgehammer. Growth is most painful when we resist it.

We can react to life in one of three ways. We either say:

• **“MY LIFE IS A SERIES OF EXPERIENCES I NEED, HAPPENING IN PERFECT ORDER.”**
  (The healthiest approach—guarantees maximum peace of mind.)

• **“LIFE IS A LOTTERY, BUT I MAKE THE MOST OF WHATEVER COMES ALONG.”** (The next best option—offers average quality of life.)

• **“WHY DO BAD THINGS ALWAYS HAPPEN TO ME?”**
  (Guarantees maximum misery and frustration.)

Life goes like this. We get hit by little pebbles—as a kind of warning. When we ignore the pebbles, we get hit by a brick. Ignore the brick and we get wiped out by a boulder. If we’re honest, we can see where we have ignored the warning signs. And then we have the nerve to say, “Why me?”

Life doesn’t always have to be painful—but pain is still the main reason we change. Until we are in pain, we can pretend. Our ego says, “I’m fine.”

It’s always easier to be philosophical about other people’s pain! We look at Jim and say, “Going broke was a huge learning experience for him.” We look at Mary and say,