



Be Happy, Don't Worry

*You are concerned with your own happiness
and I am telling you there is no such thing.
Happiness is where the "I" is not.*

Nisagadatta Maharaj

HUMANS ARE PROBLEM SOLVERS.

Whenever we are sensing danger or distress, we are conditioned by our early evolution to focus on the object of our anxiety, either to banish it or to solve whatever problem it appears to arise out of.

Faced with a potential predator, there was no time for self-analysis or introspection, as any distraction or delay could prove fatal.

Fortunately, we rarely face such life or death situations in modern life, and yet, the mind's tendency to constantly be on the lookout for danger remains a part of human nature. Freed now from such existential threats, what if we took a different approach?

What if instead of focusing on the object of our distress, we brought our attention instead to the mental process underlying it — seeking to uncover its source and power?

Sitting quietly, paying close attention to our thoughts as they spontaneously arise and subside, might lead us to a startling discovery: *Worrying precedes its object.*

First arises in the mind a sense of anxiety, and then something brings our attention to it and it attaches itself to whatever happens to be the most pressing concern in our bottomless grab bag of fears and apprehensions.

Simply put, we confuse the object of our distress with its source. Rather than needing to be free of worry in order to be happy, we actually need to be happy in order to be free of worry. Until we have dealt with this basic dysfunction of the mind, we will continue to find that our problems are interchangeable.

If we were to think of our distress as a tree, focusing on the immediate trigger of our anxiety might be thought of as plucking off a leaf. After a brief period of relative contentment, we would soon find another concern springing up somewhere else—like an endless whack-a-mole of worry.

In contrast, redirecting our attention away from the object to the anxiety itself, as one might do in therapy, would be like sawing off a branch—a more productive, but still not entirely satisfying or lasting result.

If our worrying isn't ultimately directed at anything in particular, there's little point in settling for a temporary, palliative solution. Instead, we might ask ourselves: "What is the true source of *all* my anxiety?"

Fortunately, the astute practitioner of meditation has a more potent option in his arsenal of arboreal tools, what Buddhism or non-duality would term the 'direct path.' Here one concentrates not on applying pruning shears to the leaves of the tree or on sawing off the branches, but on taking a chainsaw to the whole forest of worries, attacking the problem at its root.

If we really want to uproot the Worry Tree altogether, we might first consider the possibility that our habitual anxiety isn't really a problem at all, but something calling us home to our true nature.

The basic problem we have as a species is that we mistake ourselves as being separate, physically and mentally-confined beings, and because of this misunderstanding, we think of our feelings of happiness or sadness or whatever is present as being real, and being ours alone. That misconception leads us to feel alone, and to search for happiness and security in the world outside ourselves and in others, where it can never be found.

If we imagine that our happiness has a cause—a wonderful partner, a great job, a lot of money—our happiness proves to be fleeting and ultimately unsatisfying, because *true happiness has no cause*.

Naturally happy people know that they are responsible for their own emotional state. They don't expect someone else to make them happy or rely on outer circumstances being a certain way. They choose happiness *here* and *now*, because they know that is the only time and place it can ever be found.

When we think, "I am happy" we are not really happy, because in that moment we have created a dualistic concept called *happiness* and *unhappiness*, each dependent on the other for its existence—and this naturally creates clinging, a desire for the happiness not to end. If we are actually happy, we wouldn't think of saying, "I am happy" because in that moment there is no knowledge of unhappiness—and more to the point, no *knower* of the happiness.

It isn't enough, however, to grasp this intellectually, as just another concept. We must fully internalize it, following our thought patterns back to their source, as we might follow shadows projected by a tree. Indeed, it is our recognition that they are only shadows that will lead us to the tree.

One might say that rather than seeking to move us from an unhappy self to a happy self, the practice of self-examination in meditation helps to move us from an unhappy self to our true nature as no-self. Mere happiness pales in comparison to this simple, timeless, deep joy of being.

This radical approach to dealing with our fears and anxiety could just end in a life altogether free from worry. After all—who is there really to worry?...*Nobody*. ■