

The Human Experience Pt 4: the Illusory Nature of Happiness

"Frank let's have a coffee today at 3pm" says Rose, passing his desk. "I can't. Got too much on." snaps Frank without raising his head. Rose pauses, "Frank..." No response. Again, she repeats his name. And again, before he looks up and says "Sorry, what is it?" Their gazes lock. "What about some coffee now?" she says. Frank sees that this is not a request but an invitation that he can't refuse.

"Can you remind me what your insight was when you went camping four weeks ago? You remember, the one that had such a powerful impact on you?" says Rose, as they find a quiet table near the rear of the café and place their orders.

Irritated, Frank replies "What!?" Rose gently gazes back, unperturbed by his offensive attitude. She seems compassionate rather than condemning; and Frank relents just a little...

"I'm sorry," he says "I just don't have time for coffee and pleasant philosophical chats at the moment."

There is an uneasy pause. Frank bows his head, fists clenched, not so much resentful of Rose's questions, but at his own disquiet. In truth, he finds the subject confronting, even painful.

Rose takes his hands in hers, saying again, "What did you see so clearly?"

"Maybe it was an illusion" he responds quietly. He is unused to being touched but cannot seem to draw his hands away.

"What was the illusion?" she asks.

"Oh I don't know. Maybe our desire for happiness is just an illusion. Maybe it is all just a joke, an idea in our heads, mocking us."

"What did you see so clearly about yourself? No... about LIFE?" repeats Rose.

They sip coffees in silence, Frank in contemplation. Finally, he says lightly "Maybe I need to go on an inner hike. What do you reckon?"

"You already ARE! We ALL are! Maybe you're on the hot sweaty part of your hike and you'll come out of your tent, lay back on the cool damp grass and experience the unity of the cosmos once again. Maybe you'll realise what is real and what is illusory then." says Rose.

Wholeness Revisited

Have you ever been where Frank is? Have you come back from a powerful life-changing experience and within weeks seen it evaporate; relegated to the past? Do enough of these types of experiences and you can become disillusioned, or find yourself hot to trot to the next event. Off to the next camp, the next conference or the next life-changing event in search of contentment and happiness.

"Alas! if the principles of contentment are not within us, the height of station and worldly grandeur will as soon add a cubit to a man's stature as to his happiness."

This somewhat confronting reflection from 16th Century Anglo-Irish novelist Laurence Sterne is as true now as it was in his day. What are the principles that Sterne is talking about?

As human beings, we have a powerful capacity to create our personal life experience. Like Frank and Rose, we experience our daily lives. Like Frank, we sometimes get lost in our own State of Mind, our own thinking, our own pressure. We lose connection with ourselves and others. It's as though we don't appreciate 'THAT we think' - we are too busy with 'WHAT we think' - the inner principle that Sterne eludes to: our capacity to create our own content or discontent.

Rose was not confronting Frank (he was doing this very well all by himself). She was asking him to remember his insight. To become aware, not of his experience, but what he realised about his inner world and what he saw as a truth. And another principle is being conscious or self-aware of our experience moment to moment - understanding its genesis. Frank was unaware, his feeling of connection, being whole on that hiking trip, lost in the maze of days and weeks that followed. His feelings were trying to awaken him. Rose could see it. Yet Frank was unable to SEE why his life was so stressed.

Via Rose, Frank had an opportunity to reflect, calm down and be refreshed by his spirit. Yet, he needed to invite himself back to commonsense and clarity of mind. Each of us has a 'Rose' inside, reminding us of our feelings. An exuberant LIFE is. We are simply required to pay attention and listen deeply to our own consciousness. ■ ■