

H1: Happiness = Making Progress Toward Your Goals

Dear: Trying to write this chapter on happiness, hoping to help you find more happiness, has caused me quite a bit of unhappiness! So, to illustrate some of what I want to show you, let me first demonstrate how I overcame my unhappiness – which was caused by my making unsatisfactory progress on my goal of writing this “letter” to you.

In **G**, I expressed my hope that, in this game of life, you’ll pursue your own goals. I neglected to mention that pursuing your goals would be a source of both happiness and unhappiness. Thus, failure to make progress toward your goals will be a source of unhappiness for you – just as I was unhappy (frustrated) because I was making so little progress writing this chapter.

Some ways that you might think would permit you to overcome such frustrations probably won’t work. For example, if you set yourself fewer or less challenging goals, probably you’ll be unhappy about the progress you’re making with your life (that is, with progress toward your prime goals, i.e., your trio of survival goals). In my case, if I had abandoned writing this chapter (and therefore this book), I know I’d be unhappy, because I promised myself that I’d complete it – in turn because I hope that it’ll help you (as well as others), and thereby, that I’ll make progress toward my goal of helping humanity. And if I succumbed to the admonishment that you, too, have probably heard many times, “stop trying to be such a perfectionist”, that, too, would be a source of unhappiness, but for a different reason, which I’ll now address.

Thus, in **G**, I also expressed the hope that, in your game of life, you’d

- *Set your own goals – and give them your best shot,*
- *Choose your own competition – that will challenge,*
- *Play well – using your own strategy,*
- *Play by your own rules – guided by your own evaluations, and*
- *Play fair – based on your own set of values.*

That is, Dear, I hope that you’ll live your life according to your own sense of honesty, fairness, morality, and so on, i.e., according to your own sense of “values” (all subjects that I’ll eventually get to, later in this book). In particular, I hope that, rather than accepting someone else’s values, you’ll develop your own standards by which you will judge yourself and what you accomplish.

But in **G**, again I just happened to fail to mention (☹) that following such recommendations provides still more opportunities for unhappiness! For example, you'll probably be unhappy if you fail to abide by the rules you chose and/or the standards you set for yourself. In my case, for this chapter, I could have made more progress if I had lowered my standards for what I wanted to convey, but lowering my self-imposed standards would also have been an additional source of unhappiness. I've yet to find a way to avert the feeling of guilt from cheating on myself!

So, Dear, just in case you had some doubts, let me assure you that it's easy to be unhappy! If you don't make progress toward your goals, you'll be unhappy; if you lower your standards for what you consider to be progress, you'll be unhappy; if you try to cheat on yourself by choosing goals and rules that are beneath you, you'll be unhappy... And let me repeat that, amazingly in this game of life, it's difficult to trick ourselves: we become unhappy not only from failing to achieve challenging goals honestly but also from achieving goals that weren't challenging, or by deceit, or by abandoning our values.

And of course there are many other – and many, much-more significant – sources of unhappiness. You may feel that, not only are you not progressing, you're retrogressing: you may feel stuck in a relationship or in a job; you might be dropped from a relationship or demoted at work; you may be in pain or be ill; you may be fired, broke, or be given only a few months to live; your children or grandchildren might be near death... The unhappiness associated with such survival threats can make failure to make progress on your other goals so trivial as to be unnoticeable.

And why (I hope you're asking) did I write all the above about unhappiness if this chapter is to be about happiness? But I expect you already know the answer. It's another case of the “connectedness of opposites”: it's impossible to know happiness without also knowing unhappiness; pleasure has meaning only relative to pain; success is possible only if failure is also a possibility. But this realization (that unhappiness is essential) should not, in itself, be a source of unhappiness! Look on the bright side: “If there were no shadows, new lights could never shine.” Pity the person who doesn't know unhappiness! As Euripides said ~2400 years ago: “**You were a stranger to sorrow; therefore, Fate has cursed you.**” Please read Euripides' statement again, Dear: it's a curse to be without sorrow!

In large measure, Dear, we find happiness from honestly and honorably overcoming obstacles that were impeding progress toward our goals (where each of us defines “honestly and honorably” according to our own sense of values, the maintenance of which is one of our prime goals). In fact, Dear, one of the main points that I want to make in this chapter is “just” the understanding that *happiness is a right-brain measure (a feeling) of the progress we think we’re making, overcoming obstacles on the way to accomplishing our goals.* (And thus the short title of this chapter: **Happiness = Progress.**) But, Dear, this understanding implies that, to be happy, not only must we successfully overcome obstacles in a manner consistent with our values, but also, there must be obstacles to overcome! And therefore, Dear, perhaps you see how the “stranger to sorrow” is cursed: to experience happiness, you must also experience unhappiness!

THE FOOLISH PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

But all the above has been just a “preamble” to this chapter. For me, the addition of this preamble was the way I overcame the obstacles impeding my progress in writing this to you. How? By making some progress! In particular, with this preamble I finally saw a way to start this chapter, namely, with the following cautionary warnings. [Why is it that, so many times, I end up cautioning you to be careful?! But I trust you know...]

Dear: please be careful, to set realistic goals and standards for yourself. To determine what’s realistic for you, it’s probably best if you build your confidence (in your abilities to set realistic goals and standards) by erring on the side of caution: you can be disappointed by setting your goals and standards too low, but you can be devastated by setting them too high. Also, and especially important, don’t pursue happiness as your goal!

“Huh?” said a certain grandchild. “There must be a bad connection or somethin’; surely that last ‘caution’ has a misprint.”

No, Dear, it’s what I meant – and it’s what I mean. It took me many years (even decades!) to reach the understanding that happiness is an inappropriate goal, and although the result is relatively simple to understand, unfortunately it’ll take me quite a while (most of this chapter) to explain. But for now, let me end this “preamble” to this chapter as follows. In this chapter, Dear, I want to try to explain to you some “advanced stuff” – although, actually, it’s all quite simple. If an analogy for this game of life were made to the game of baseball, then what I want to show you in this chapter is how to hit a

curveball – for life does pitch some weird curves at us. One of my main conclusions will be this:

In this game of life (in which everyone knows that they want to be happy) don't make happiness your goal: forget about the "pursuit of happiness"; just smile at the cute recommendation to focus on the "happiness of pursuit"; in fact, forget about happiness – except when you're unhappy!

To hit a curveball, Dear, don't stand straight and swing where it appears to be going; either lean-in or back-off a bit (depending on which way it's curving), and then, swing beneath it.

Let me try to explain it differently. Dear, although the general goal of this game of life is to be happy, it's not a goal to pursue. Generally, you should forget about this "happiness goal" and just get on with playing the rest of the game, pursuing your other goals. Happiness (i.e., feelings we have about progress we think we're making toward our goals) will then just "come along for the ride"! That is, Dear, happiness needn't be (and shouldn't be!) "pursued". *As you succeed in pursuing your goals, happiness will pursue you!* So, again, Dear, happiness isn't an appropriate goal to pursue.

"Phooey!" exclaimed the grandchild. "If my silly old grandfather thinks 'happiness isn't an important goal to pursue', then I'm not wasting any more of my time reading his stupid book!"

Patience, child. I didn't say happiness isn't important, I didn't say that I didn't want you to be happy, I didn't say that happiness isn't an important goal – I said that "happiness isn't an appropriate goal to pursue." But it'll take me quite a while to show you how to get it without going after it!

Meanwhile, let me try to give you at least a glimpse of what I mean using another analogy (in spite of my previously mentioned caveat about all analogies): *in the game of life, happiness isn't the goal; at best, it's just the score; and usually, it means just scoring another point.* Stated more exactly (but needing more explanation): whereas happiness is a right-brain measure (a feeling) of progress that we think we're making toward our goals, and whereas it's inappropriate – even foolish – to make any feeling a goal, therefore, *"the pursuit of happiness" is foolish.*

To show you how I came to some of these "weird" conclusions, let me start by examining the meaning of 'happiness'. My version of Webster's

dictionary doesn't define the noun 'happiness', but gives for the adjective 'happy' the definition "having, showing, or causing a feeling of great pleasure, contentment, joy, etc..." But this is one of the many cases when dictionary definitions aren't very helpful: if you now look up 'pleasure', 'contentment', and 'joy', the dictionary sends you back, chasing your tale (sic!), to the word 'happy'. I'll comment on this problem of "tale chasing" many times in this book; here, let me stop the useless chase by proposing that the key word in the definition of happiness is the word 'feeling'. Any feeling is our right-brain's synthesis of information. Each of us knows what 'happiness' means (just as we know what 'love' means); that is, our right brain "knows". Defining 'happiness', so that our left brain can dutifully records the word in a dictionary, is rather superfluous!

But my left-brain still finds value distinguishing and analyzing three components of my right-brain's synthesis: 1) the goal of all life is to live (or it would no longer be living!), 2) the prime goal of humans is our trio of survival goals (of ourselves, our extended families, and our values), and 3) feelings of happiness are right-brain signals telling us that we are making progress toward our goals. Right Brain therefore "sees" happiness to be its prime goal – which Left Brain understands to mean that we and our extended families are surviving with our values intact.

"Oh, thanks a lot," responded a certain cynical grandchild. "So tell me: if 'Right Brain... "sees" happiness to be its prime goal', then is happiness to be pursued or not?"

Sorry, Dear, but the answer is "not". Happiness (pleasure, enjoyment...) and its necessary complement unhappiness (pain, loathing...) are right-brain feelings (emotions), similar to emotions of love-hate, freedom-constraint, and so on. In general, I strongly advise you: don't pursue emotions. They are right-brain responses (reactions) to our environments; if you chase them, you'll find that they're unreal phantoms, as nebulous as all ghosts and gods.

"Oh great," inserts a certain heckling grandchild. "So you're also saying that it's foolish to pursue love and freedom, as well as happiness?"

Yes, Dear, that's what I'm saying. I'm sure that you want to be happy, that you want to be free, that you want to experience love, and so on. But if you "love" strawberry milkshakes, for example, then don't seek this love, go get a milkshake (or make one); if you seek the love of another person, then don't seek this love, seek an appropriate person; if you want to be free to speak,

then either speak up (in the manner to which you're accustomed!) or seek an environment where you can; and if you want to be happy, then make some progress toward some of your goals. In general, Dear, if you want to experience a particular right-brain reaction, then don't pursue the reaction, seek the stimulus.

Dear, if you want to cause a certain effect, then it's rather important that you correctly distinguish cause from effect! If you enjoyed the applause from a certain crowd, I recommend that you don't go to the same crowd and just ask for more applause (the effect); I suggest that, instead, you try to repeat (or improve upon!) whatever it was that caused the applause. If you want more of the love you experienced with a certain someone (the effect), then unless that certain someone is a puppy (for dogs are amazing at responding with apparent affection for essentially zero cause!), I suggest that you don't just expect to receive more love (the effect) without stimulating the cause. And similarly, Dear, if you want to be happy (the effect) then don't pursue it; instead, stimulate its cause, e.g., make some progress toward your goals.

Seeking the effect rather than stimulating the cause is the basis of all drug addiction and a substantial portion of "consumerism". With cocaine, for example, the user in search of happiness can apparently find some happiness (very temporarily!) "just" by injecting the chemical – I expect because the right-brain feeling of happiness is, in essence, just a chemical (dopamine?) in our brains. In the case of consumerism, advertisers posit that happiness can be purchased (by buying some product), which is a "come-on" for people who have chosen to pursue happiness (the effect) rather than the cause. Instead, Dear, I urge you (for your own happiness!) to try to make progress toward your goals rather than adopt the goal to proceed directly to happiness: people who fail to distinguish cause from effect, who pursue the reaction rather than promote the stimulus, can end up with a huge pile of purchases that provide no happiness (and potentially much unhappiness, with debt) and some end up as drug addicts.¹

¹ Dear, recently (in 2015), I saw (e.g., at <http://technologyadvice.com/podcast/blog/activate-chemicals-gamify-happiness-nicole-lazzaro/>) that four "happiness chemicals" in one's brain are associated with four different types of happiness, with the first letters of the four chemicals conveniently spelling out the word DOSE: 1) Dopamine, which is "actually involved more with anticipation than the actual 'happiness' feeling", 2) Oxytocin, "the cuddle hormone... triggered through social bonding...", 3) Serotonin, controlling "your greater mood... governed by your state of hunger", and 4) Endorphins, which "help you 'power through'... to push farther and harder as [you work] toward distance goals." Thus, Dear, in this chapter I'm apparently emphasizing your production of some combination of dopamine and endorphins in your brain (without taking drugs, whether illegal or legal!); I'll leave it to you to make sure you're well fed (producing serotonin) and socially active (pumping up oxytocin) – to get your full DOSE of happiness ☺

Similar is the basis of much of “the religious experience”, but I want to push much of my analysis of religion to later in the book. Nonetheless, let me give you just a glimpse of these implications. As an example, think of those people whom you know who are “deliriously happy” in their “love of Jesus”. It’s important to realize that, in general, happiness occurs not from making progress toward our goals but in thinking that we’re making progress. But our thoughts can easily be erroneous. We can imagine all sorts of things, including that the creator of the universe is deeply in love with us (and we with Him), and we can embellish this dream as beautifully, sensuously, imaginatively as we desire – thinking that we’re making progress in our “love of Jesus” (or in our love with anything imagined). That is, people can obviously become truly “delirious” in their daydreaming. And although this deliriousness is undoubtedly better for one’s health than cocaine, it numbs (and dumbs) the mind just as badly. Further, it costs much more than most “consumer goods”: not only the typical 10% of your pre-tax salary that the clerics (the dope pushers) demand, but also, you must yield your volition, i.e., the clerics get to define how you’ll live your life.

And thus the tragedy of humans pursuing right-brain reactions (feeling free, in love, happy...) rather than seeking the stimuli of such reactions (removing constraints on their freedoms, seeking satisfying interactions, making progress on their goals...). Further, Dear (and maybe in part to test how your patience is developing!), I’d like to add some comments on the possibility that Americans may be especially vulnerable to the error of pursuing happiness (rather than letting it pursue them!), because Thomas Jefferson “dumbed down” (for “mass-consumption”) the philosopher John Locke’s description of the purpose of an ideal government. Jefferson described Locke as one of his “trinity of the three greatest men the world had ever produced” (the other two being Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, about whom I’ll write in later chapters). In his *Two Treatises on Government*, published in 1690, the English medical doctor and philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) wrote (to which I’ve added the italics):

To understand political power aright, and derive it from its original, we must consider what estate all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, with the bounds of the law of Nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man... A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another... without subordination or subjection... The state of Nature has a law of Nature to govern it (which obliges every one) and reason (which is that law) teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, *no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions...*

If man in the state of Nature be so free as has been said, if he be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest and subject to nobody, why will he part with his freedom, this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power? To which it is obvious to answer, that though in the state of Nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain and constantly exposed to the invasions of others... This makes him willing to quit this condition which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers; and it is not without reason that he seeks out and is willing to join in society with others who are already united, or have a mind *to unite for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates, which I call by the general name – property...*

As a result of Locke’s analysis (which in turn was probably influenced by the economist Adam Smith and the philosopher Baruch Spinoza), the expression “life, liberty, and property” was common at the time of the American Revolution (appearing, e.g., in “Revolutionary Pamphlets”).

When Jefferson was invited to draft *The Declaration of Independence* (“invited” because he was known to “have a way with words”), he chose to modify Locke’s wording into the form with which you’re familiar [but to which I’ve added some italics and some notes in brackets].

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men [or now, more politically correct, “all people”] are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator [who some people claim means “God”, but actually, it’s obviously whatever created us, i.e., “Nature”] with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the *pursuit of happiness*; that to secure these rights [of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness] governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Of course this was (and still is) an absolutely astounding statement of principles. I sometimes think that, all scientific and other accomplishments notwithstanding, *The Declaration of Independence* is humanity’s greatest accomplishment – for it’s a declaration of independence not just of the American colonies from Britain but independence from all former and future despotic governments, and not only for the people of the new world at that time but for all people of the world for all future times. As Jefferson wrote (essentially on his deathbed, declining an invitation to attend the 4th of July celebration in 1826):

May it be to the world, what I believe it will be (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all), the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish

ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government. That form, which we have substituted, restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion.

All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few bootied and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.

Incidentally, Dear, from Jefferson's paragraph immediately above, you might infer (correctly!) that he strongly opposed all organized religions ("arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves") and strongly supported science ("the general spread of the light of science has already laid open every view the palpable truth that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few bootied and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God").

Yet, from a psychological perspective, maybe Jefferson's wording in the Declaration of Independence was a terrible blunder. Subsequent generations of "unhappy Americans" have devoted themselves to pursuing happiness, failing to see that, if they would just get on with pursuing their goals, then happiness would pursue them! That is, maybe Jefferson's wording (promoting "the pursuit of happiness" as a goal) has been a significant cause in America of consumerism, religion, and other drugs – and therefore of unhappiness. As I'll soon explain, Jefferson apparently didn't see that happiness is impossible without unhappiness, another illustration of the connectedness of opposites (which is another reason why I included, as a subtitle of this book, the phrase "life, liberty, and the Zen of zero").

"Grandfather, get on with it!", shouted the impatient child. "Enough definitions, enough of the history lessons, enough about religion and psychology! Where's the promised ideas about how to be happy?"

THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

Well, Dear, although I admire your persistence, maybe I still need to work on your patience. I'll get to ideas about how to be happy, soon, but first, both your impatience and persistence stimulate me to another preliminary comment, namely, what a screwball species we humans are! Thus, if a certain grandchild is typical, if humans want to be happy, and if this desire is so obvious and universally accepted (so obvious that humans have given their lives to protect a government whose prime purpose is the happiness of

its citizens), then shouldn't we know how to become happy? Shouldn't this be what all parents teach their children? Shouldn't courses be offered in schools to teach students how to be happy? Shouldn't a person be able to get a college degree in happiness?!²

Seriously, Dear, do you know how to be happy? And in case your answer is the expected “Well... sort of... I guess... maybe... sometimes,” then let me immediately offer you some consolation: don't worry about it, Dear, because as far as I have been able to determine, no one has yet offered a prescription that others can use as a guide for being happy. As I've been trying to convince you, certainly the advice to “pursue happiness” is ill advised! Further, Dear, don't worry about it, because you have your old grandfather (who has been awarded an honorary Ph.D. in happiness – by himself), and what he plans to do, finally (!) is to provide you a long overdue course in how to be happy – at least, as happy as you'll be able to be.

Now, Dear, although I repeat that “as far as I have been able to determine, no one has yet offered a prescription that others can use as a guide for being happy”, yet I do definitely encourage you to consider the recommendations made by others about “the pursuit of happiness”, “the secret of happiness”, “the conquest of happiness”, and similar. If that sentence seems to make little sense, I trust it soon will; a useful analogy might be: if you're stumbling in the dark, then even faint lights can be very helpful.

In that sense, please first consider the following advice (of which Jefferson was probably aware when he promoted “the pursuit of happiness”). I've copied these nuggets of wisdom from Bartlett's wonderful book *Familiar Quotations*.

Nothing too much. [The Seven Sages (c. 650–550 BCE)]

Seek not... the life of the immortals; but enjoy to the full the resources that are within thy reach. [Pindar (c. 518–c.438 BCE)]

Slight not what's near through aiming at what's far. [Euripides (c. 485–406 BCE)]

[The] secret of happiness [is] freedom, and the secret of freedom [is] a brave heart... [Thucydides (c. 460–400 BCE)]

² Dear: I've added this footnote years later (in 2006). Recently I heard that, this year, Harvard is offering a course on happiness – and it's one of their most popular courses! But I don't know what's taught in the course – and I doubt if Harvard offers a degree in happiness!

It is impossible to live pleasurably without living wisely, well, and justly, and impossible to live wisely, well, and justly without living pleasurably.
[Epicurus (341–270 BCE)]

The goal of life is living in agreement with nature. [Zeno (335–263 BCE)]

No one regards what is before his feet; we all gaze at the stars.
[Quintus Ennius (239–169 BCE)]

Moderation in all things. [Terence (Publius Terentius Afer, c. 190–159 BCE)]

[To] perceive from what ills you are free... is pleasant.
[Lucretius (Titus Lucretius Carus, 99–55 BCE)]

Happy the man who could search out the causes of things.
[Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro, 70–19 BCE)]

Cease to ask what the morrow will bring forth, and set down as gain each day that Fortune grants. [Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus, 65–8 BCE)]

No pleasure endures unseasoned by variety.
No man is happy who does not think himself so.
[Publilius Syrus (first century BCE)]

Tomorrow's life is too late. Live today.
Martial (Marcus Valerius Martialis, c. 40 – c. 104 CE)]

To laugh is proper to man. [François Rabelais (c. 1494–1553)]

No pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage-ground of truth.
[Francis Bacon (1561–1626)]

That what we have, we prize not to the worth... but being lacked and lost, why, then we rack the value, then we find the virtue that possession would not show us while it was ours. [William Shakespeare (1564–1616)]

How happy is he born and taught
That serveth not another's will;
Whose armor is his honest thought
And simple truth his utmost skill!
[Sir Henry Wotton (1568–1639)]

In small proportions we just beauties see,
And in short measures, life may perfect be.
[Ben Jonson (c. 1573–1637)]

Be not solitary, be not idle. [Robert Burton (1577–1640)]

If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome.

[Anne Bradstreet (c. 1612–1672)]

We are never so happy nor so unhappy as we imagine.

[François, Duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680)]

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
He who can call today his own;
He who, secure within, can say,
Tomorrow, do thy worst, for I have lived today.

Rich the treasure,
Sweet the pleasure –
Sweet is pleasure after pain.

[John Dryden (1631–1700)]

A sound mind in a sound body is a short but full description of a happy state in this world. [John Locke (1632–1704)]

Variety is the soul of pleasure. [Aphra Behn (1640–1689)]

Every man loves what he is good at. [Thomas Shadwell (c. 1642–1692)]

Mankind, by the perverse depravity of their nature, esteem that which they have most desired as of no value the moment it is possessed, and torment themselves with fruitless wishes for that which is beyond their reach.

[François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon (1651–1715)]

Work keeps us from three great evils: boredom, vice, and need.

[Voltaire (François Marie Arouet, 1694–1778)]

Human felicity is produced not so much by great pieces of good fortune that seldom happen, as by little advantages that occur every day.

[Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)]

How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure!
Still to ourselves in every place cosigned,
Our own felicity we make or find.

[Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)]

Immediately, Dear, I hope you'll reflect on how amazing it is (how wonderful it is!) to be able to so easily review thousands of years worth of suggestions and recommendations about how to be happy from some of the brightest minds that ever graced this planet – and then, Dear, I hope you'll find some happiness in that fact!

Next for this introduction to your course on happiness, I recommend that you search on the internet for “Secret of Happiness” and “Secrets of Happiness” – and I hope that, immediately, you’ll reflect on the existence and availability of such a wonderful facility for learning that the internet provides, a facility that other humans created and made available to you, and I hope (even “trust”) that the reflection provides you with substantial happiness. As for the resulting “secrets” themselves, the number of them, alone, could “blow you away”: on Google, I got more than six million hits for “secret of happiness” and more than four million hits for “secrets of happiness”! Here, I’ll just list a few that I found stimulating and links to where I found them:

[The secret of happiness is wanting what you already have.](http://www.aish.com/sp/f/48968901.html) [Jewish wisdom literature, e.g., see the article by Rabbi Noah Weinberg at <http://www.aish.com/sp/f/48968901.html>]

[Acting happy will make you happy... going through the motions can trigger the emotions.](http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200910/the-secrets-happiness) [David G. Myers at <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200910/the-secrets-happiness>]

[Live today while working for a better tomorrow.](http://www.mindpowernews.com/SecretOfHappiness.htm)
[Stuart Goldsmith at <http://www.mindpowernews.com/SecretOfHappiness.htm>]

[The three secrets of happiness... good relationships, positive thinking, and flow \[being absorbed in a mindful challenge\].](http://zenhabits.net/the-three-secrets-to-happiness/)
[Zenhabits at <http://zenhabits.net/the-three-secrets-to-happiness/>]

[It is very important to generate a good attitude, a good heart, as much as possible. From this, happiness in both the short term and the long term for both yourself and others will come... If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/d/dalai_lama.html) [Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, at http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/d/dalai_lama.html]

I’ll leave it for you to find the secrets of happiness listed in the other ~9,999,996+ web pages! But as I’ve already said, I haven’t found a single and universally accepted “secret of happiness”.

Finally for this introduction to your “happiness course”, I should give you a reading list. Some recently published books that you might want to read are the following (all of which are available at amazon.com, where you can find reader’s reviews): *Stumbling on Happiness* by Daniel Gilbert, *Zen and the Art of Happiness* by Chris Prentiss, and *Ending the Pursuit of Happiness: A Zen Guide* by Barry Magid. Here, I’ll list and briefly comment on a few

ideas from one of the brightest minds of the 20th Century, Bertrand Russell, as recorded in his book *The Conquest of Happiness* (which I recommend you read and which I first read – and tried to absorb – when I was your age):

- To be without some of the things you want is an indispensable part of happiness.
- A certain power of enduring boredom is... essential to a happy life, and is one of the things that ought to be taught to the young.
- Whenever you begin to feel remorse for an act which your reason tells you is not wicked, examine the causes of your feelings of remorse, and convince yourself in detail of their absurdity... Look into the irrationality closely with a determination not to respect it and not to let it dominate you. Whenever it thrusts foolish thought or feelings into your consciousness, pull them up by the roots, examine them, and reject them...
- The pleasure of work is open to anyone who can develop some specialized skill, provided that he can get satisfaction from the exercise of his skill without demanding universal applause.
- For women as for men, zest is the secret of happiness and well-being.

In his book, Russell did advance quite a way toward showing others how to be happy, but it appears that he failed for a reason similar to Aristotle's: apparently Russell, too, lived a life of relative luxury. You can see some of this on p. 136 of his referenced book, where he writes: "The wise man fails to observe the dust that the housemaid has not dusted, the potato that the cook has not cooked, and the soot that the sweep has not swept." Such a suggestion is worse than useless to me, when I do my own dusting, cooking, and sweeping! And then, when I read his summary statement (p. 93), "The secret of happiness is this: let your interests be as wide as possible, and let your reactions to the things and persons that interest you be as far as possible friendly rather than hostile", I can't help thinking that the author is someone who generally doesn't have anything he must do (such as dust and cook and sweep!); therefore, he's someone who's overly concerned about how to overcome boredom.

But you, Dear, are similar to the vast majority of us: we don't live a life of luxury, and almost certainly, we never will. We're the lucky ones! We get to do our own dusting, cooking, and sweeping! And so you'll see how lucky that makes you, I'll now (finally!) proceed to show you how you can be happy (at least, as happy as you'll be able to be).

To start to show you, here's what I do when I'm walking to remind myself about how to be happy:

Happiness = Progress. Happiness is a right-brain measure (a feeling) of progress we think we're making toward our goals. Happiness isn't the goal of the game of life; at most, it's just the score; usually, it's just the feeling from scoring another point! Play the game, pursue your goals, and only every once-and-awhile (e.g., when you're unhappy), check the score. Take an inventory: Stop, Look, and List 'em – and accomplish something today.

I then usually proceed to “take an inventory”, in a manner that I'll soon show you.

Already in this chapter, I've tried to explain some of the ideas contained in the above summary; now, I'll to explain more, starting with the following (which I sometimes remember when I'm walking):

“The secret of happiness is that there isn't any – just as there's no secret to living. Living requires it all, from A to Z (Awareness to Zest), with everything in between (Boredom to Bravery, Confusion to Courage, Disgust to Desire, Envy to Excitement, Famine to Feast...).

If I do remember something similar to what's immediately above, then sometimes (just for the fun of it!) I try to get through the whole alphabet, choosing various words and then listing opposites (or antonyms) that are necessary in life: awareness to obliviousness, boredom to stimulation, confusion to understanding, defeat to victory, ease to effort, friends to enemies...

Now, I'll try to explain in more detail. As I illustrated with quotations given a couple of pages ago, many people have suggested various “secrets” of happiness. As two good examples, there's what I've seen called *The Jewish Principle*, “The secret of happiness is wanting what you already have”, and from *The Conquest of Happiness* there's Russell's: “For women as for men, zest is the secret of happiness and well-being.” I agree with the importance of these suggestions, and I similarly agree with essentially all the other quotations I gave earlier. But as for a “secret of happiness”, Dear, the secret is: *there is no secret!*

THE NECESSITY OF UNHAPPINESS

Dear, I'm sorry to tell you (and I'm sorry to disagree with those who proposed and those who subsequently defended the ideas in *The Declaration of Independence*), but for reasons already given, I consider “the pursuit of happiness” to be a foolish pursuit. On one hand, “the pursuit of happiness” is a misidentification of cause and effect, pursuing a (right-brain) response, rather than working on the stimulus (making progress on our goals). And on the other hand, please recall the “connectedness of opposites”. Happiness and unhappiness (or “happy and sad” or “pleasure and pain”) are connected: it is logically, emotionally, and whatever-other-way impossible to have one without the other. Unless you know how to have a coin with only one side, Dear, you'll never be able to be glad without also having been sad.

Now, Dear, I wouldn't be surprised if you're “sick and tired” of my repeating myself. But not only is it the job of grandparents to teach their grandchildren to develop patience, I consider ideas about “the connectedness of opposites” to be so important, that I want to harp on them some more:

- You can't receive a “survival signal” (pleasure) unless your survival is being threatened (pain),
- You can't overcome obstacles impeding progress toward your goals (happiness) if there are no obstacles that impede your progress (unhappiness),
- You won't be pleased when you understand something (another survival signal = pleasure) unless you were confused (a threat to your survival = pain),
- You won't be satisfied that you've preserved your values (one of your prime goals, progress on which is therefore a source of happiness) unless your values were tested (that is, potentially undermined, a threat to your goals, and therefore, a source of unhappiness),
- You won't appreciate “having something to do” unless you have experienced boredom,
- And so on (you won't appreciate your health if you haven't been ill, you won't enjoy your food if you're not hungry, you won't enjoy even breathing if it's effortless...).

As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said (in about 500 BCE): “It is by disease that health is pleasant, by evil that good is pleasant, by hunger satiety, by weariness rest.”

And then, Dear, I wonder if you see: the only possible heaven would be in hell – because that’s where the challenges would be! But setting aside (until later in this book) ramifications of such ideas to religious speculations, consider the following “conditional summary”. Dear, *unless you make a conscious effort* (a critical condition, which I’ll explain, shortly), *you can’t achieve happiness without unhappiness*. Maybe Bertrand Russell saw a little of this when he wrote: “To be without some of the things you want is an indispensable part of happiness.” Surely it’s what Euripides meant when he said: “You were a stranger to sorrow; therefore, Fate has cursed you.” If I were pushed, I might even say: if there’s a secret to happiness, it’s to be unhappy!

I’m sorry, Dear, but that’s the way life is! Life pitches us a “whopper” of a curveball: there’s absolutely no way that you (or anyone) will ever be just happy! Happiness without unhappiness is like a one-sided coin; it can’t exist. Therefore, the secret of happiness is not only that there’s no secret (save, perhaps, unhappiness), but also that there’s no way to be just happy! As sure as a coin has two sides and light needs dark, anyone’s search for happiness will uncover unhappiness: for you to be happy, you’ll also need to be bored and confused, feel threatened and insecure, have enemies and losses, and all the rest. Sorry about that, Dear, but happiness is just one part of the whole of living, as is unhappiness.

And, Dear, I’m even sorrier to report that one way that you might think you could get around this mental impasse doesn’t work, at least it never has for me. Thus, during your boredom or confusion or insecurity or pain or similar, if you have the presence of mind to say to yourself (as I’ve said to myself): “Okay, I’m bored (or confused or threatened or hurting or whatever), but I must go through this to get to the other side; so, let me go with this feeling until it has run its course.” [As I understand it (courtesy books by Alan Watts), this method is what’s taught in Zen Buddhism.] My experience has been, however, that even this “understanding” doesn’t relieve the pain (or hate or whatever). It’s there as much as ever. Maybe you’d like to try this technique, to see what you think of it, the next time you’re unhappy. Again, my experience is that this understanding doesn’t help – although maybe it does, and I just don’t have a good way of comparing feelings with and without application of this technique. Maybe you could develop a method to test it, in your own case. [Can the intensities of emotions be measured objectively – for example, electronically? Can you develop an instrument to measure “e-motion”?!]

Now, Dear, if you've concluded that your "useless old grandfather" certainly doesn't seem to be helping you very much (where's the promised method for becoming happy?!), be patient. I'm certain that it's impossible for anyone to experience happiness without also knowing unhappiness, but I've also learned how to promote my happiness: spending longer periods happy than unhappy, maximizing the happy times, minimizing the "down time". In general, I do this by making the "conscious effort", mentioned above.

Let me show you some details by trying to explain more of what I review with "H", and repeat below:

H: Happiness = Progress. Happiness is a right-brain measure (a feeling) of progress we think we're making toward our goals. Happiness isn't the goal of the game of life; at most, it's just the score; usually it's just the feeling from scoring another point! Play the game, pursue your goals, and only every once-and-awhile (e.g., when you're unhappy) check the score. Take an inventory: Stop, Look, and List 'em – and accomplish something today.

What I'll try to show you, next, is how I make a "conscious effort", taking my "inventory", to "optimize" my happiness.

OPTIMIZING HAPPINESS

Dear, most of the time, we're not conscious of being either happy or unhappy – nor are we worried about how to become happy. Most of the time (probably very fortunately!), we're just "occupied", busy living our lives. Maybe in Thoreau's day, most people lived their lives in "quiet desperation", but even in his day, I rather doubt it. Instead, I expect that, ever since humans climbed down from the trees and started exploring the world on these amazing feet of ours, humans have been busy mostly just overcoming obstacles that impeded progress toward their goals. In this pursuit of goals, happiness and unhappiness come along for the ride (as feelings or "measures" of progress and setbacks). In general, stopping the pursuit of our goals to think about "how to be happy" or "how to avoid unhappiness" is a mistake – because it means stopping! As I already urged you, "forget about the pursuit of happiness; just pursue your goals"; then, as I already said, happiness will come along for the ride.

If we do make "a conscious effort" first to ascertain our "state of happiness", then we see that it's a right-brain measure (a feeling) about the progress we

think we're making (or think that we're failing to make) honestly and honorably overcoming obstacles that impede our making progress toward our goals. Thus, happiness isn't a normal goal in this game of life; at most, it's the current score; and usually it's just the feeling we get when we score another point.

Every once-and-awhile in this game of life, however, we stop playing to check the score, i.e., to detect our "happiness state". This "happiness score" informs us how our game of life is proceeding. Sometimes we "check our score" when someone asks "Are you happy now?" or asks the familiar "Are we having any fun yet?" Normally, though, we don't need to "check the score" consciously – and we shouldn't!

In the limit, constantly worrying about (or consciously working toward) one's happiness is like playing any game while constantly watching the scoreboard – but you can't play the game well, if you continuously staring at the scoreboard! Pursuing happiness is like pushing the "pause button" on a VCR! That's why I remind myself, in H, to: *Play the game, pursue your goals, and only every once-and-awhile (e.g., when you're unhappy) check the score. Take an inventory: Stop, Look, and List'em – and accomplish something today.*

That is, Dear, to "optimize my happiness", to "minimize the down time (of unhappiness)", I've found that the best time to check my "happiness score" is when I'm unhappy! Thus, as I mentioned in an earlier chapter (in C, with "careful with chemicals"), I've found that when I'm unhappy, my brain seems to generate "unhappiness chemicals", which then start polluting many aspects of my life: when I'm unhappy about... [fill in the blank] and then start thinking about... [fill in this blank with something else], then I start to think about unhappy aspects also with...[fill in another blank]. And so on it goes – which a physicist or electrical engineer would describe as positive feedback in a nonlinear system, and a psychiatrist would probably describe as depression.

To stop this nonlinearity, to "snap out of the depression", what I do is start to "think happy thoughts". I expect that this sounds trivial, Dear, but what's important for me is: it works! In most cases I can get out of some rather deep depression starting from some rather trivial stuff: my research is going poorly, the kids are having major troubles, my health is falling apart... but, at least I figured out how to stop the valves in my old truck from "ticking", and my headache has gone, and my leg feels better than it did yesterday, and

the kids are all healthy, and I still have a job, and the house is paid for, and there are no snipers shooting at me, and there's actually very little chance of a world war, and the sun is still shining, and... Gees, I'm lucky to be alive!

In general, Dear, I urge you to do similar: forget about the pursuit of happiness, just smile at the suggestion to focus on “the happiness of pursuit”, and instead, get on with playing this game of life, pursuing your goals – checking the “happiness score” only every once-and-awhile, for example, when you're unhappy. And when you're unhappy, before you tackle ways to overcome the problems that are causing your current unhappiness, review all the reasons that you have to be happy! I do that, Dear, in conjunction with the rest of what I review in this part of “H” to promote my happiness: *Take an inventory: Stop, Look, and List 'em – and accomplish something today!*

Let me now show you what I mean. [And I trust that you understand, Dear, that I need a simple way to remember all this, when I'm in the desert, which is why I borrowed the familiar rule of the road: “Stop, Look, and Listen”, changing the latter word to “List'em”.] Sometimes when I'm walking, I might remember these details:

STOP – and smell the roses... be aware;
LOOK – at all the reasons to be happy (take an inventory), and dig out causes of any unhappiness;
LIST'EM – list your hierarchy of goals – and accomplish something today!

With *STOP – and smell the roses... be aware*, I'm borrowing a familiar line (to “stop and smell the roses”) whose source I don't know. What I'm trying to do is remind myself to be aware, which I've already described to you in **A**. Of course, a person should do this only when it's “appropriate”; I try to do it at least twice per day (once during my walk in the desert, usually in the morning; once with the help of your grandmother, when we walk during the afternoon or evening).

As I've already said, normally we humans are neither happy nor sad – just occupied, pursuing our goals – which, I think, is the best way to live. But many times, we get ourselves “tied up in knots” chasing our goals; then, we can become oblivious to our surrounding and can miss some wonderful “survival signals”, also known as “pleasure signals” (i.e., happiness). I therefore encourage you, Dear, to stop (when it's appropriate) to be aware:

of the sunrise, clouds, flowers, birds, people, buildings, institutions, your freedoms... and should you be so lucky, the meadowlarks.

Actually, there's another thought that sometimes enters here when I'm walking. It's from a poster that you've probably seen in our TV-room: "Forget about the pursuit of happiness... [and] concentrate on the happiness of pursuit." Obviously I think that this idea has merit (the poster states: "an idea lifted from George Plimpton's father"); my interpretation is that the author has realized the value in "being aware" while savoring the survival signals detected by our senses (good smells, pleasant sights, "swell sounds", and so on). The poster adds: "[Explore Zen and the art of being happy – try paying closer attention to everyday life so that you will notice small pleasures as they flow by.](#)"

[Oh, by the way, Dear, there's something I wanted to mention to you. In the desert, yesterday, I encountered a bird that sang while he or she was flying! Amazing! In all my 60 years, I've never seen (or heard) that before. I don't know what kind of bird it was; it looked something like a wild canary. Singing like crazy (not just a few "chirps") while it was flying! A beautiful song. So much for my hypothesis about birds singing to claim their territory – unless of course this little bird was claiming the whole sky! Talk about "attitude"! Can you match it?!]

So much for "STOP"; now consider:

LOOK – at all the reasons to be happy (take an inventory), and then, dig out causes of any unhappiness.

Dear, my experience is this. As I already wrote, we humans seem to be very strange beings! But now I mention it for a different reason: we struggle and struggle to achieve some survival signal (maybe to accomplish or acquire something, or maybe to overcome some obvious threat to our survival or the survival of our genetic code, such as a major illness or the near death of a child), and then we (stupidly?) quite quickly forget our accomplishments! But maybe it's not stupid; maybe there's survival value to "put the past behind us", so that we can focus on overcoming the next set of obstacles impeding our next set of goals. In any case, though, there's value (happiness signals) in reviewing our accomplishments.

Besides, my experience has also been this. Happiness is not so much in surviving, but in receiving the survival signals as we struggle (i.e., "scoring

another point”). This is consistent with another “off-hand conclusion” I’ve reached that I consider important: much of happiness is from “daily stuff”, not major “life-moving” events. I think that you’ll agree that this is “common knowledge”, Dear, if you analyze your own experiences or the experiences of others. For example, frequently people have said to me something similar to “our happiest days were when we were...”, and then, they proceed to describe times when they were obviously struggling very hard, daily, to survive – and were obviously successful in their struggle.

But I’ve learned that “happiness” is also available from reviewing our accomplishments; therefore, I “take an inventory”. I do it because it makes me feel good. Enough said – meaning that I don’t even want my left brain to analyze it further! On my walk, my inventory may seem rather simple, but it makes me feel better. Again, enough said! For example, my inventory might be: “my headache’s gone, my leg isn’t hurting so much today; my back feels much better; these boots are great; so is this jacket; it’s not raining today; there’s my old truck, with its transmission now working like a charm; the mortgage is finally paid off; the kids are doing fairly well now; my grandchildren are reading amazingly well...”

I’ve found that, then, it’s extremely useful to look at the causes of my unhappiness -- but only after I’ve taken my “inventory” of reasons to be happy, so “happy chemicals” dominate rather than “unhappy chemicals”! It’s useful to review causes of my unhappiness, because it sets the stage for moving on to the next step: listing my goals. That is, our goals are primarily to overcome obstacles blocking our progress; to overcome these obstacles, therefore, first we need to know what they are! Stated differently, it’s very hard to wisely set your sail if you don’t know which way the wind is blowing, it’s very hard to choose a road forward if you don’t know where you are, and it’s extremely difficult to figure a way forward if you don’t even know if you’re on land or at sea! In my “inventory”, therefore, I then try to answer questions such as: Why am I unhappy? What are the causes? What are the threats to my trio of survival goals? What are the obstacles that must be overcome?

If you choose to do something similar, Dear, of course you’ll need to create your own list (daily!) of obstacles to overcome and problems to solve, but let me comment on how you might address some common general sources of unhappiness: a relationship, a threat (to yourself, to a family member, to a friend, to your values), the environment in which you find yourself, looking forward to a bleak future, and so on. What I recommend is that you create a

list (in your mind or on paper or on your computer) of all your problems and how you might tackle each (including the possibility of resigning yourself to what appears essentially certain that you can't change, e.g., the ingratitude of fellow humans, flaws in our legal, political, economic, cultural system, etc.). Then, when you're sure that your left brain has stated right brain's "feelings" well and when your left brain has analyzed the problems and possible solutions well: 1) Begin the design of strategies to implement each solution, and then 2) Sleep on it!

That is, Dear, after your left brain has designed plans to overcome the obstacles and solve your problems, then allow your right brain some time to "picture" each strategy. If, as I expect, your mind works in a manner similar to mine, then I expect that, eventually, your right brain will identify a strategy that it's "happiest with", after which, your left brain should then make sure it understands and agrees, and you can set your goals. Thus, as I wrote in the "versification" in **B**:

Left Brain with your analysis,
Where logic can excel,
In every case your prime job is
To state the problem well.

Then Right Brain, when the problem's known,
Exposing what is real,
It's up to you – go on alone –
And tell us what you feel.

And then, Left Brain, it's you who's free
To analyze the thought,
To test out practicality,
Rejecting what is not.

And when these tests are all passed through,
Relieved of any doubt,
Then Right Brain picture what to do –
And Body carry out.

Then, finally for this "stop, look and list'em", there's:

LIST'EM – list your hierarchy of goals – and accomplish something today!

In **G**, I already tried to show you some general ways to put your goals in priority (like assembling those Russian dolls), but that was all quite general;

in the next chapter (**H2**), I'll dig more deeply into ways that you might want to set priorities for your goals. Here, what I want to do is just show you the technique that I use, i.e., show you details of what I mean by LIST'EM.

First, though, let me admit that I'm now caught in conflicting goals – which is another common source of unhappiness! On the one hand, I want this chapter to be reasonably brief (and I admit that I'm already seriously straining that condition), and on the other hand, how can I show you details if I don't go into details?! And my resolution? Let me try to minimize my unhappiness (or, equivalently, maximize my happiness in an unhappy situation, i.e., “optimize” my happiness) with a compromise: I'll try to *briefly* show you some details! In **G**, I already listed some instinctive and emotional goals; here, let me jump directly to the “tough one”, setting (and listing) priorities for mental (left-brain) goals.

Organizing your mental goals can require a lot of thought (unsurprisingly!), and then, almost as soon as you finish the task, it must be redone – as new problems arise, and therefore, as new goals are needed. What I do, Dear, is put my list of goals on my computer (so they're easy to view and to change) and also, I save (in a separate file) the goals that I've already accomplished (because, as I already mentioned, it's useful on occasion to review the goals you've achieved and to compliment yourself for achieving them).

Using my computer, I first order my mental goals in different “categories”, for different time periods: *Routine, Today, This Week, Soon, Long Term, and Always*. Then, generally, I put goals for each time period in priority (if their priority isn't obvious). In case you want to use a similar method, let me show you what I mean by giving you some examples for each time period. [And, yes, I appreciate that these goals of mine may seem rather “trivial” to you, kid, but I'm retired now! That, itself, was a major goal – now accomplished. Now, I get to goof off (that is, for the past five years, writing this book, I've only worked had to work hard 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, 55 weeks per year...)]

For the category *Routine*, my “goals” (or, just what I usually do) are as follows (I'm reading this from my computer's print out, and have added the stuff in brackets, [], to try to explain the meanings to you):

- Up [usually around 2 AM] – ~8 AM: book [this one!] & investments [watching the reports on the overseas stock markets, etc., plus read financial news on the internet, etc.]

- ~ 8AM – ~ 9AM: snooze.
- ~9AM – 5PM: walk in desert [although, as you know, I go at sunrise during the summer], work [in yard and on vehicles], shop, walk [with your grandmother], exercise, shower, eat [I then usually go to bed quite early and sleep ‘til ~ 2AM; I could count on my fingers the number of times I’ve had 8 hours of sleep, at a stretch, during the past 20 years!].

Of course this routine was much different when I was working (for example, then I had to start preparing dinner at 3:30 PM, so that dinner would be on the table for your grandmother when she got home from work at 5!), and it was substantially different when the kids were home, but maybe that’s enough to show you what I mean by this *Routine* category. Also, of course I break this routine on many occasions, not only because “something new” comes up at home but also because, quite frequently, we take trips (e.g., to visit certain grandchildren).

Probably I don’t need to use much space showing you what I list in the category *Today*. For example, on my computer right now in the *Today’s To-Do List*, I have “change the lawn mower’s oil”, “put upper-cylinder cleaner in the LHS”, and “dig out first triangle of north garden”. But it might be useful to mention something that I’ve learned (from your grandmother): make sure that “today’s tasks” are “do-able” – so that you can “cross off” completed tasks at the end of the day (or the next day). In contrast, if I listed “dig out north garden” (which will take me a month-or-so to finish!), it would be a long time before I could accomplish the task – and then finally cross it off my list. And Dear, if you enjoy smiling (even at yourself, or maybe better, “with” yourself) then the first item to include on *Today’s To-do List* is “Update Today’s To-do List”: then, you’re guaranteed that you’ll be able to cross off at least one item from your “To-do List”, everyday!

Again, Dear, the most important thing about “today’s goals” is to make sure that you accomplish at least one of them – unless something very special comes up. That is, at the end of day, you should be able to cross at least one item off *Today’s To-do List*. When I’m walking, that’s what I remind myself with *accomplish something today!* I expect that you, too, will find daily accomplishments a source of daily happiness. I’ve found that the only compensating exception (that is, when I still feel okay, even if I don’t cross something off my list) is if something better came up. As an example for you, maybe you had planned to clean up your room today [or, if that’s too big a task to complete in one day (!), maybe you listed just “clean up the top

of my dresser”!], but at the end of the day, you would find that you were just as happy if, instead, you helped your mother fix her computer.

For my *This Week* and *Soon* lists, which are shifted around quite a bit (!), the main point is to have some idea where I’m headed this week. In your case (and in mine when I was working), your week is probably quite structured already. For me, now that I’m retired, I finally have the freedom to schedule my near-term plans any way I want! [Stop drooling kid – you’ll get there soon enough!] My *This Week* list becomes especially busy if at the end of it we will be heading out on a trip: even trips to visit the grandkids require preparation.

And as for my *Soon* list, I have a huge (!) list of tasks that I have yet to undertake, e.g. (reading from my list): purchase a small vacuum cleaner and vacuum all books, install an eaves trough above the cement patio at the back of the house, put almond caulking all around the house, replace slats on south gate, etc. [There’s about 20 such tasks on my list! – mostly because of the ~20 years of neglect of the house and yard, courtesy how much time I devoted to my career].

In contrast to your list of *Long-Term* goals (which probably is quite difficult to create and which probably is quite long), now that I’m retired, my list of *Long Term* goals is fairly easy to create and isn’t very long. Over the years, my long-term goals have included: do well on my final exams at high school (well enough to receive a scholarship to get into university), earn my bachelor’s and master’s degree, get my Ph.D. (a goal that I almost didn’t achieve!), get a job, get a better job in a better location for the kids, buy a house, sell various research contracts, help the kids financially to get through college, stay funded, and earn enough money so that I could retire comfortably. Now, my list of *Long Term* goals is much more comfortable: one is to finish this book; then, I may try to learn what I can do with the software package “Mathematica”; then, maybe I’ll try writing a novel – or maybe I’ll just “while-away my time”, bugging certain grandchildren – although I must admit that something else is intriguing me: as I’ll be mentioning later in this book, trying to discern “general principles” is very difficult; also, I think they’re very important; so, maybe...

And I wonder if I should add something. Dear, I sure hope you haven’t set yourself the long-term goal of reading this whole book! That could be a terribly oppressive, depressing goal. I mean, at most, put on your *Soon* list:

“read another chapter of my grandfather’s stupid book”. Or, if a whole chapter is too much, how about just a few pages?

Finally in this “List’em”, I have a list of goals that I label with the time period **Always** – meaning, really, that they aren’t goals that fit within this scheme of arranging my goals in different time periods. And actually, most of these goals I don’t list on my computer; instead, they’re in my head. The *Always* goals on my computer won’t be of much use to you (e.g., “get out of regional funds and stay out of them”; that is, stop investing in specific regions around the world). The *Always* goals in my heads are really the rules by which I’ve decided to play this game of life (and which I’ll describe to you later in this book), such as “think, promote humanism, evaluate, be kind but with keenness, abide by my code: everyone has an equal right to claim one’s own existence.” The message about these *Always* goals that I want to get across to you is this: you should always know how you want to always behave, so when you look back, you’ll be pleased with how you did. That is, Dear, I encourage you to define your own sense of values (honor, justice, morality...), concepts that I’ll get to later in this book.

If you create similar lists for yourself, Dear, I recommend that, for each time period that you use (e.g., *Today, This Week, Soon, Long Term, Always*), you decide on the priority of your mental goals, striking what for you is a “happy balance” between security and insecurity, stimulation and tranquility, company and solitude, work and play, the achievable and the fanciful, drudgery and dreaming... taking special care to evaluate your hopes (the central topic of the next chapter) and to live according to your own sense of honor. I recommend that you use your lists to keep track of progress toward your goals, because as I’ve tried to explain, happiness is not so much in reaching goals as in making progress towards them! In large measure, happiness is a state of mind, being aware, taking inventory, and making progress toward your goals. I would even go so far as to suggest (but not too seriously) that happiness is having lists – and using them intelligently! But that possibility aside, Dear, I do strongly recommend that, no matter what else, make some progress, accomplish something, today: happiness is mostly a measure of today’s successes, not yesterday’s or tomorrow’s.

Nonetheless, of course you should give thought to the future. Certainly you should seek pleasure in the “here and now”, especially seeking happiness in little things: the sounds and smells and sights of the morning, your food, a smile, a new experience, a cloud, and so on. But today is almost certainly not the last day of your life; so, with deliberation, prepare today for future

happiness: work hard on your homework and do it well, so you'll get good grades and be able to go to the college (or graduate school) of your choice; choose a course of study at college that will prepare you for the type of employment that you will want (for much of your life will need to be devoted to nothing more eventful – and nothing more satisfying! – then providing for your own essentials for surviving); and if it becomes desirable for you, choose a partner with whom to live who shares thoughts similar to yours (or who is intelligent enough and kind enough, so you'll be able to usefully and comfortably discuss and resolve differences of opinion – or live with the differences).

And on the other side of the pleasure-pain ledger – although there's no doubt that we all seek to avoid pain – don't avoid pain “at all costs”. Maybe while you are experiencing the pain you won't have sufficient control of your emotions or sufficient clarity of thought, but eventually you'll see that the pain is needed to permit you to experience pleasure. There is no way that you can have one without the other. Sometimes I remind myself of this “connectedness” of opposites (pleasure and pain, confusion and clarity, happiness and sadness, and so on), i.e., that these feeling must “come in pairs”, with: *Life's a game, you win by being born! The rest is just picking up more winnings – carefully... and mostly in pairs.*

As for the winnings available to pickup while you're playing your game of life, they're too numerous to list. Yet, let me list a few: the fragrance of a rose, the beauty of a sunset, Beethoven's Seventh Symphony (the one with sounds like laughter!), the silkiness of a baby's hair, the taste of a good strawberry milkshake, going for a walk in the woods, strolling along the beach, climbing a mountain, getting survival signals from good grades in university, getting another degree, landing a good job, bringing home a paycheck, having sex, helping your children grow, owning your own house, getting more survival signals in your career, developing long-term friendships, having enough money so you can retire, having grandchildren, trying to help them enjoy their lives by showing them what you learned... Winnings such as these – hundreds of thousands of them! – are available to you if you see *Life's a game, you win when you begin! The rest is just picking up more winnings – carefully.*

Again, Dear, please be careful. For example, I know that we can be happy with the thrill of overcoming “contrived” threats to our survival, purposefully putting ourselves at risk (skiing, mountain climbing, motorcycle riding, and so on). But, Dear, please keep the risks reasonably

contained. Of course I'm not advocating that you shouldn't (on occasion) participate in some "thrills". But, Dear, be wary: the treats to our survival may be contrived; nonetheless, the threats are real!

For example, when I was 19, I was almost killed. One rainy night (when I shouldn't have been out riding my motorcycle) a car went through a stop sign on a cross street in front of me, and when I braked and turned, the back wheel slipped, I toppled the bike, and it slid toward the car. I can still see the side of that car getting closer, until I was knocked unconscious. Lucky for me, I ended up with just a dent in my helmet; without that helmet, I wouldn't be here – and neither would you! After that accident, I was a much more skillful "defensive driver", i.e., always assuming that every other vehicle on the road is being driven as stupidly as possible! That's a skill that I implore you to learn: always assume that all other drivers are idiots! I guarantee you that, during the course of your driving career, you'll collect a huge amount of data to support that hypothesis!

Similarly, Dear, please be careful of bogus survival signals (such as those obtained from eating too much, especially too many sweet and fatty foods) and traitorous survival signals (such as those obtained from the chemicals in alcohol, nicotine, cocaine, and other addictive drugs): in the short term, they'll give you pleasure; in the long term, they'll cause you enormous pain (for you'll know they'll be killing you). And similarly for confused thoughts, such as religious "ideas" (or better, "nonsense") about "life after death". I'll come back to those in later chapters. For now, just think for a moment about the limiting cases of the Christians who "happily" went to be eaten by the lions and of the Muslims who still "happily" strap explosives around their waists, all happy with their mind-numbing "beliefs". I'll summarize by underlining here what I review when I'm walking: *happiness is thinking that we're making progress toward our goals* – even though our thoughts may be wrong and our goals may be crazy!

Again, Dear, the "secret of happiness" is that there isn't one! Just get on with playing the game, and only once-and-awhile (e.g., when you're unhappy) check the score. Take an inventory – Stop, Look, and List'em – and then accomplish something today.

SOME SUMMARY COMMENTS

Well, Dear, that's pretty much completes the advertised course on happiness. If it has helped you, then feel free to award yourself with an honorary Ph.D.

in happiness! In fact, I'd award you the degree if you learned just the key concept: *don't pursue happiness, pursue your goals – happiness will come along for the ride.*

Nonetheless, let me try to summarize, and maybe show you a few more ideas, by including the following **list** (☺):

- Forget about “the pursuit of happiness”, pursue a hierarchy of goals, trying to strike a “happy balance” between security and insecurity (“nothing too much”).
- No matter where you start (or where you are), set your goals. If you must, set your goals to be basic survival goals (get air, water, food, warmth, shelter...); if you're beyond that, then set yourself mental or artistic or other goals.
- Don't spend substantial effort concocting fake threats to your survival (skiing, motorcycle riding...). Even the Kennedys chose other goals, such as in politics. The choice of goals is boundless! If you're already the world's best... then try to be better – or try something else! Why? To be happy! In the main, happiness is making progress toward your goals.
- Set yourself rational / realistic goals: don't include “to be able to walk on water” and don't choose “to obey”. It's true that happiness is thinking that you're making progress on your goals, but if the goals can't be achieved, then either you won't make progress toward them or your thoughts (that you're making progress toward them) will be wrong.
- Try to draw a line of distinction between “zest” and “zeal” – or maybe better, to distinguish between rational and irrational interests in (and enthusiasms for) anything. Pursue your interests with zest, but never become so zealous that you forget that *Life's a game you win by being born! The rest is just picking up more winnings...*
- Don't worry about always winning: “zealots” who do, seem to have nothing on their minds except the current score. Instead, only *every once-and-awhile (for example, when you're unhappy) check the score...*
- In large measure, happiness is “just” a state of mind! (He has polio, yet he's happy; he has no legs, but he's happy... *versus* he seems to have everything – expect happiness.)
- An approach to life? Do “happiness” exercises every day – to keep your mind in shape. Take an inventory; make lists; *accomplish something today!*
- Be aware and be prepared: aware of the past and the present, prepare for today, tomorrow, and the distant future.

- Be active. A great way to become unhappy is to sit around thinking about how to be happy! Instead, read a book, water the flowers, do your homework, clean out the bathroom, cut the lawn... whatever! Accomplish something!

As the psychotherapist Victor Emil Frankl wrote in his 1969 book *The Will to Meaning* (here quoted from an article on Ethics in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*): “Those who aim directly at happiness do not find it; those whose lives have meaning or purpose apart from their own happiness find happiness as well.”

I should also mention, Dear, that although I’ve found (in the pursuit of my goals and to optimize my happiness) a good “rule of the road” is STOP, LOOK, and LIST’EM, actually, I don’t want to promote an analogy between living and traveling down some “road”. [As I already explained, I use the words “stop, look, and list’em” only as a mnemonic.] The problem with this “road analogy” is that, for me, it sounds too serious! Of course we must sometimes be serious, but we need to strike a balance between seriousness and frivolity. And though maybe Robert Louis Stevenson went too far, I frequently remind myself of his wonderful line: “I travel not to go anywhere; the grand affair is to move! ”

Again, Dear, the trick is to see that, although we all want to be happy, happiness is not a goal to be pursued – except when you’re unhappy! And I don’t mean this as some special trick that you rarely use! It’s the way to play the entire game: forget about the pursuit of happiness; just smile at recommendation to “concentrate on the happiness of pursuit”; my experience tells me that, except when you’re unhappy, you should forget about happiness and just pursue your goals, subject to a few “rules of the road”. If you do this, you’ll find that happiness will be there, coming along for the ride. The major part of happiness is seeing that you’re winning in this game of life – that you’re successfully overcoming whatever is obstructing your progress; but don’t focus on happiness, focus on succeeding – and only every once-and-awhile (e.g., when you’re unhappy!) check your score.

And, Dear, should you ever become extremely unhappy (and probably all of us sometimes do), if you seem to be “losing it”, if you can’t cope, if all is despair and/or out of control, if it all seems too much, if you’re asking “what’s the point?” – then I recommend that you check if you have air, water, food, and so on; check if you have done at least one thing right in your life; check if there is imminent threat to your survival; check... and then try to accomplish just one thing today! Can you go for a walk for your

body? Can you read a poem for your mind? Can you prepare yourself for solving a problem? Can you help someone carry a burden? Can you clean up your room? – Okay, okay, sometimes I get carried away.

I'll end this chapter with three additional comments and quotations. My first comment (on a remark that I made earlier in the chapter) is that maybe Jefferson's phrase "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" wasn't just "the dumbing down" of Locke's phrase "life, liberty, and property." Maybe the problem is our misunderstanding of Jefferson's meaning. As I mentioned, Jefferson stated "I am an Epicurean", and the Greek philosopher Epicurus seems to be the first who understood (or at least clearly enunciated) that the goal of all humans was to be happy and that

It is impossible to live pleasurably without living wisely, well, and justly, and impossible to live wisely, well, and justly without living pleasurably.

Therefore, maybe Jefferson saw farther than Locke, but our usual reading of Jefferson's phrase is wrong; maybe we should read it, not as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", but as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" – and then realize that the only happiness available is in reviewing successes achieved in the pursuit of our trio of survival goals (of ourselves, our families, and our values), or more briefly, our successes in solving our problems intelligently, or as Epicurus said, in "living wisely, well, and justly."³

Next is an enlightening statement⁴ by the philosopher Julian Young, published in an article by Scott Horton entitled "Reconsidering Nietzsche – Six Questions for Julian Young" in the 15 September 2010 issue of *Harper's Magazine*:

The aim of Epicurus' philosophy was happiness. Specifically it was about achieving happiness *whatever happens*, happiness in the face of an uncertain, usually hostile, fate. Since suffering is caused by a dissonance between desire and reality, and since

³ Wow the internet is amazing – courtesy so many people, of course including those who developed the search engines. For a later chapter, I was searching for a statement by James Madison (dealing with his concern about the new form of government); I was led to a book that I hope you'll read (*The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist*, author unidentified, available at www.angelfire.com/planet/thebgma/BGMA.pdf), where I found the following (p. 24): "Epicurus... coined the concept of a *nature-given right* [italics added] to "life, liberty, and safety..." If that information is coupled with a statement by Jefferson in his 31 October 1819 letter to William Short, "I... am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us...", then no wonder Jefferson was stimulated to write what he did: two of his "heroes" (both Lock and Epicurus) had written such similar phrases.

⁴ From <http://harpers.org/archive/2010/09/hbc-90007601>.

we can usually do little about the latter, Epicurus' advice [similar to the Buddha's] is to reduce one's desires as much as possible, particularly those that are uncertain of satisfaction, such as the desire for power and influence.

Nietzsche's health reached its nadir in 1879, forcing him to abandon his Basel professorship. Since bodily sickness is a paradigm of the hostile fate Epicureanism was designed to raise one above, it is unsurprising that his affection for Epicurus reached its peak during that year. We find him advocating self-control, the reduction of desire, and withdrawal into the world of thought, a realm in which, despite his bodily 'torture', he could still experience pleasure, the joy of intellectual adventuring. [As Aristotle would have recommended!]

By the time he had completed *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883 to 1885, Nietzsche's health had somewhat improved and he had made two important discoveries. First, that the "will to power" – or "growth" – constituted the human essence. And second, the paradox of happiness. "What does happiness matter to me!" exclaims Zarathustra, "I have long ceased to strive after happiness, I am striving after my work." To which his animals reply, "But Zarathustra, are you not lying in a sky-blue lake of happiness?", forcing him to admit that he indeed is.

Nietzsche's point is that aiming directly at happiness is a bad strategy, since true happiness is a *byproduct* of aiming at *something else*, of passionate commitment to a meaningful goal. (This is surely correct: Jefferson's remark about "life, liberty, and the *pursuit* of happiness" has misled Americans for hundreds of years.) Given these twin discoveries, a farewell to Epicurus became inevitable. We can no more abandon the will to power/growth – the life of "victories" and, of course, defeats – than we can abandon the will to live. And the possibility of happiness lies, not in following a philosophy *aimed at* happiness, but in forgetting about happiness and directing one's will to growth in a meaningful direction. This is why, in 1888, Nietzsche describes Epicurus (together with Jesus) as a "*décadent*."

Finally for this chapter, Dear, I want to show you a quotation that's from an unknown source. I remember this "poem" or "prayer" or "salutation" (or whatever it should be called), because my mother had it framed and hung on the wall, where I saw it every day. And now that I think of it, that was rather strange, because she was a very committed Roman Catholic, and if I recall correctly, even the version of the following that she had on the wall was called *A Sanskrit Salutation to the Dawn* – and I doubt it would have been approved by the Catholic hierarchy. But then, maybe it illustrates my mother's wisdom: to recognize and adopt wisdom, regardless of its source.

As you may know and as my dictionary states, Sanskrit is "the classical Old Indic literary language, as cultivated from the 4th century BCE onward and still used in the ritual of the Northern Buddhist Church..." As for the original source of this "salutation", I searched on the internet for a while to find it, but eventually gave up. Maybe it's a Zoroastrian or Hindu "prayer"

(“worshipping” the Dawn); one web site suggested that it may have been written in ~1200 BCE, but I’m not sure if that date can be trusted (it’s the date commonly given for the origin of the “holy books” of Hinduism, known as *The Vedas*). And maybe I should mention, also, that in my search on the internet, I found several slightly different version of this “salutation”; I assume that the differences arise from different translations, but maybe some people have taken some “artistic license” when quoting it.

In any event, Dear, although I’ve suggested that no one knows “the secret of happiness” (because there isn’t one!), whoever wrote the following, however many thousands of years ago, saw “the secret” about as clearly as it can be seen.

Invocation to the Dawn

Listen to the exhortation of the dawn!
Look to this day!
For it is life, the very life of life.
In its brief course, lie all the verities
And realities of our existence:
The bliss of growth,
The glory of action,
The splendor of beauty.
For yesterday is but a memory,
And tomorrow is only a vision.
But today well lived makes every
Yesterday a memory of happiness
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well therefore to this day!
Such is the salutation to the dawn.