



Pursuit of Happiness & Achieving Contentment

Interview with Jerry Ruhl

The pursuit of happiness was written into the U.S. Declaration of Independence as our inalienable right. While advertising uses this to sell all kinds of products and we are encouraged to pursue happiness as life's goal, psychologist and author Dr. Jerry Ruhl argues it is the problem not the solution. He asks: Who or what in us is doing the pursuing? Why this unending desire, and why does it never seem to be satisfied for long? And what is happiness really? Joy? Ecstasy? Contentment? Elation? Equanimity?

Despite an abundance of material goods, there is an epidemic of unhappiness. It is the tragedy of our times that no matter what we achieve, how much money we earn, or how many blessings come our way, more is never enough.

Instead of chasing after outer things, Dr. Ruhl argues that we might beneficially turn our attention to accepting the "gifts of wholeness," many of which we already possess. "A gift is something that is bestowed upon us, provided without compensation. The best gifts often come as surprises; they are not delivered from duty or obligation. Many of us have trouble accepting gifts. They may not be exactly what we would have picked out," Dr. Ruhl says.

"We can learn to cease seeking a fix or an answer and find deeper satisfaction in things as they are. Some "gifts" can be difficult to recognize (confusion, paradox, ordinariness, detach-

ment). Can you be happy while suffering? While facing the death of a loved one? Wholeness requires active acceptance. Instead of trying to push reality around to go the way you think it should, can you allow life as it is and find meaning in the whole?"

How do you know when you are really happy?

The Danish novelist Isak Dineson (Karen Blixon), author of *Out of Africa*, once said there are three moments of true happiness: 1) When we have an excess of energy, 2) at the cessation of pain, and, 3) when you are in alignment with the will of God. I like that quote. The first is frequently the province of youth. We mortgage our energy as badly as our finances in adulthood. The second relates to suffering, which must be allowed. The third is the opus for the second half of life: how to get the ego and Self in alignment. Happiness can be associated with times and activities in which you have energy for what you are doing. Happiness may appear when you accept suffering, that is, allow the WHOLE of life; when you stop wasting energy fighting "what is." The last "moment" of happiness can be brought about through prayer, meditation, walks in nature, quieting the noise of your life so that your inner knowing can be heard and responded to.

Who and what motivates you?

Jerry Ruhl is our May speaker. See page 2 for his bio.

My dreams. The people I love.

How do you know you are on the “right path”?

Every rounded action, every intimate contact with another person, every deeply integrated experience connects us to the Greater process. Spirituality is not outside ordinary life; it is inherent in the texture of our being. We lose our way, not because we do not know, but because we look in too many directions at once. Inner guidance is knowing when a course of action is right, not the “rightness” that comes from an external source or authority. It is being attuned to the flow of things. Knowing is obscured by confusion, fear, and clinging. Set aside what you want, become empty, listen with the whole of your being.

If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?

That we learn to stop projecting our darkness upon our neighbors, whether down the street, across the border, or across the sea. To see life whole is to understand opposing qualities as essential to its existence and to stop trying to interfere by clinging to pleasant portions and trying to hide or cast away the unpleasant, i.e. love life and hate death, cling to youth and reject age. This is like expecting a mountain to have one side. We know motion by stillness, heat by cold, joy by sorrow. The meaning is in the whole.

Do you embrace change or fear it. Why?

Embrace impermanence. Change is constant. Death awaits. It is all around us, in the animals and plants we eat, in the transitions of the seasons, in the crisis that fill the news. Can you live now, be aware of only this moment? To experience more we have to become more: more present, more aware, more connected. At any moment we are here and nowhere else. Then we simply take the next step. We lose our way not because we do not know, but because we look in too many directions at once. Get quiet. An inner guide tells us when a course of action is right, not the rightness of any external source or authority. This subtle sensibility is obscured by confusion, fear, and clinging. We must set aside what we want, become empty, listen with the whole of our being.

What’s the greatest change you’ve personally experienced in your life?

The painful teachers: Getting polio at the age of 18 months. Watching my father die from cancer when I was 22, and years later watching my 52-year-old wife die from a brain tumor after a three-year struggle with cancer. The joyful ones: the gift of my son, Learning to love again even after unimaginable loss, learning to resist comparing the present moment to past ones.

Since we cannot change others, what is the best way to help them through challenge?

Through compassionate relationship. Relationship is that

magical, mysterious force that creates a new combination, a new whole that is more and different than the sum of the parts. It is a resonance of our process with another. I notice two kinds of people, those who are connected energetically to others and those who are not. The disconnected, who may be in the company of others, look tense, pensive, encapsulated. They are separate and isolated.

Wholeness is not a goal to be achieved, it is an ever unfolding process. Do you want to be fully alive? Are you willing to give up certainty, security and comfort to embrace the wildness of spiritual life? Do you have the discipline to keep striving even when the goal is seemingly impossible? Show me a sermon.

Do you have any advice on how to direct the course of change in our lives?

Breathe. Say “Yes” to life. Consider a poem by Rumi: “Today, like every other day, we awake—suspended between desire and fear. Don’t retreat to your study. Dance with the music given. Let the beauty we love be what we do. Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”

One Cold Morning

by Ron Hutchins

One cold morning...

She flies; no, she soars, sails—with no wheelhouse, no mast—
on a rough Sea that seeps into the yawning cracks in my frail boat

Constantly.

As leaves scatter crackling across the spewed icy fingers,
and the last whirling seeds of Fall careen toward rebirth,
she is fixed black silhouette caught in the firm grip of Winter,

Silent and still,

as the world whorls and crashes by,
until a subtle shift in the winds dips her away from Dawn, yields
a sudden flash of a dancers gentle curves, cream colored leotard
terminated in toe shoes, talons, of similar curve
but with infinitely different

meaning.

Ron Hutchins has been a student of the theories of Carl Jung for more than 30 years. His interest in dreams and mythology has been a powerful balance to a life of technology as a career. For Ron, poetry has always been similar to dreams in the ability to touch soul.