

JOY IS WITHOUT 'WHY'

Translation by Alberto Gabba / Gordon Leonard Symons

“Chiefly, do not persistently invite unhappiness, as is usually done”.

“The world has lost its happiness, because happiness is in the spirit. Those who have turned away from the spirit must endure unhappiness, because how else would they return to the spirit? Therein lies the meaning of great events”. (Agni Yoga)

Assagioli hoped for a development of the “*psychology of joy*” and he spoke of joy as the “*most marked characteristic of the Superconscious or Spiritual Self*”. With an evocative expression he wrote: “Joy is the thermometer of the relationship with the Self”.

St. Francis had a natural disposition to joy, so much so that the call to be a knight of Christ caused such a joy to germinate in his heart that “*he could not contain himself*” (Thomas of Celano) ⁽¹⁾.

The more he lived his love for Christ, curing lepers, rebuilding ruined churches, and finally abandoning every earthly good, the more his joy in God increased.

Prayer too was a source of holy joy for him.

“He avoided melancholy, the worst of evils, with the utmost care, so much that he ran as quickly as possible to prayer, as soon as he felt some sign of it in his heart” (Idem).

Neither disease nor suffering ever succeeded in taking away serenity of mind from Francis.

Francis’ joy was spiritual, joy from God and in God.

“*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete*” (John 15,9-11).

In the songs and hymns composed by him we find

a surging and luminous source of joy, one for all and very famous the Cantic of the Creatures; they are testimonies of his soul full of joy in the Lord.

St. Francis knew that man needs joy: for him, holy joy in God is the support against the desire to seek happiness elsewhere.

I wanted to begin this article about joy by citing one of the best known and most loved saints in Christianity and perhaps not only Christianity.

From the description it is clear that joy is of a very special nature and is not attributable to all those material acquisitions and life events that can actually make us happy, but for a short period, after which the search for something outside us resumes.

If we ask someone what the joy of living is, many will be tempted to give as an answer that it consists in earning a lot of money, doing the job they like, advancing in a career, being reciprocated in love. But these are all partial explanations, centred around possessing material assets or meeting a soulmate. They concern external situations, while the joy of living is first and foremost the ability to rediscover the taste for life and to appreciate its many facets.

Anyone, from an early age, pursues happiness; in this constant search we tend to forget the most important thing: feeling serene and satisfied depends on ourselves. It is a matter of perspective. We can rejoice in our achievements, in what we have, the goals we have reached, the way we are, the expression of our potential, but we must know that these are all effects that do not last forever.

Joy is a feeling that must come from within our soul.

Before examining this subject more closely, I would like to address the difference between joy, pleasure, and happiness, which are often and wrongly used as synonyms, but are very different.

Those who frequent Psychosynthesis know all too well that each of us is a sometimes-inextricable set of needs, instincts, desires, emotions, thoughts, and images that overlap, merge, push us to act and often dominate us.

Need is a state of tension that occurs when the organism requires the consummation of acts that are necessary for the survival of the individual and / or the species.

We think of hunger, fatigue, sexual instinct.

The consummation of these acts leads to a state of relaxation which restores the physiological balance. Physiological needs add up to social needs, connected to learning process, for example the need of being recognized and esteemed.

The result of satisfying basic needs and social necessities brings **pleasure**.

In the same line, the satisfaction of instincts also procures a pleasure that borders on happiness.

When, for example, the instinct for self-affirmation is fulfilled, we feel pleasure and satisfaction within ourselves; the same applies to the other instincts, that is the sexual one, the research instinct and the gregarious instinct, that of being together with others.

The satisfaction lasts until a new need arises that pushes us to implement behaviours aimed at its fulfilment.

This process never ends because our personality goes into ceaseless states of tension and constantly requires the satisfaction of its needs.

Happiness, another term that is confused with joy, but is of different nature and sign, is the result of the satisfaction of emotional needs, desires and mental needs.

Desire is a feeling of passionate search or expectation for the possession, the achievement, or the implementation of what is felt to suit one's needs or tastes.

It implies something that we feel as a lack and can also refer to fantastical satisfactions.

How to define happiness?

According to the Treccani dictionary, happiness is the *“state of mind of those who are at peace, not troubled by pain or worries and enjoy their state. The aspiration to happiness is characteristic of classical ethics, which named it eudemonism⁽²⁾. Neglected in modern philosophy, after the rigorist position taken by Kant, the notion of happiness has remained alive in the Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition, inspiring philosophical, social and political thought”*.

Happiness is a state of inner well-being characterized by a sense of fulfilment towards life and by a high frequency of positive emotions.

It can be the effect of the sense of physical well-being, when one is healthy and relaxed, or of the contentment in relation to the other people in our environment, of satisfaction with the agreement that is established on the lower mental plane for the favourable occasions offered by life and for professional or economic achievements. As it is easily understood, happiness is the goal of the separate lower self.

Much happiness is unfortunately diminished and even hindered by poor health, difficult circumstances and karma accumulated over many lifetimes, not only individual karma, but also family's, national or human karma. The happiness of youth, or the selfish and self-centred happiness of the person who lives apart from the world must not be confused with joy.

“The Poor man from Assisi” never confused spiritual joy with the happiness one feels when living a secluded life seeking God.

In common parlance one term is often used for the other, and differences between pleasure, happiness and joy are subtle and nuanced.

Our civilization has made the pursuit of pleasure and happiness its workhorse, a fetish that permeates every commercial, every show, every cultural event.

It has invaded the common feeling and psychology itself, which should help human beings to seek the inner source from which springs that lasting state that is not linked to the circumstances of life.

Yes, because pleasure and happiness are linked to the satisfaction of emotional and mental needs and desires, that can or cannot be given to us. Life is too complex and impermanent to guarantee seamless fulfilment: ups and downs alternate and our wishes are not always granted. Alternating fortunes oblige us to a “psychic gymnastics” that educates us to flexibility and to remain open and aware of the flow.

It is a common experience that needs and desires never run out and that the pursuit of their satisfaction risks wasting us, leaving us exhausted, never really satisfied.

The only hope of salvation from this swirling wandering is to try and find within ourselves something that

depends neither on the circumstances, nor on others and their behaviour, and not even on moods that follow each other, projected as they are by the sub-personalities⁽³⁾ stirring in us. A silent and quiet calm that forms the background to life and to which we can always turn to when we need it. It accompanies us in every moment of the day and lays there like a mirror of clear and still water.

Assagioli used to state that “*joy is a duty*” for the human being: it is our task as men to look for it and to make it a permanent state that nothing can disturb.

Joy is an inner state without ‘why’, in that it has no particular reason, it flows without an apparent cause.

But we must not be deceived: joy is the effect of a search, but not its goal, rather a side effect, an added value.

Joy is the result of meeting needs and aspirations of a higher order.

Its sources include:

- nature
- art and beauty
- love
- knowledge
- friendship
- service
- prayer
- meditation

but above all the intimate contact with the Source that we define the Higher Self or Soul.

All the minor sources mentioned above are means and tools to access this contact.

Happiness is based on the emotional level and is a reaction of personality.

Joy is a quality of the Soul.

OBSTACLE	HELP
Pain created by adversity	Detachment
Attachment to suffering	Sense of humour: evaluating oneself objectively
Taking things too seriously	Ability to make fun of oneself
Rebellion against suffering	Acceptance
Being demanding towards oneself and the others	Sympathy and sincerity
Haste to get results	Patience
Fear	Trust
Strong aversions: anger, hatred, resentment, envy, and jealousy	Forgiveness towards oneself and the others
Attachment to a lost pleasure	Simplicity Living in the here-and-now
Not communicating your pain	Knowing how to be satisfied: seeing oneself in abundance
Haste	Gratitude
Anxiety	Disciplining oneself
Not taking time for oneself	Expressing one's talents
Inability to live in the present	Beauty
Regrets and sense of guilt	Cultivating the Transpersonal aspect: feeling one with the self and with the Self
Loneliness experienced as isolation	Benevolence
Giving credit to the criticisms of others	Seeking and cultivating one's real needs
Creating false images of oneself	Proper nutrition, rest

In speaking of joy, it is also necessary to refer to the consciousness of unity and solidarity with all beings; When we try to live as souls, personality's happiness suffers a decrease in value, and we feel joy in living group relations and in helping all those we come in contact with to express their soul qualities.

"This bringing of joy to others, in order to produce conditions in which they may better express themselves, may have a physical effect as we seek to better their material conditions, or an emotional effect as our presence brings to them peace and uplift, or an intellectual result as we stimulate them to clarity of thought and understanding".⁽⁴⁾

The effect on us is joy, since our action is devoid of selfishness, independent of circumstances or social conditions.

It is certainly a paradox to say that in the midst of the deep anguish of personal unhappiness the joy of the Soul can be felt and tasted. This is a truth that many can testify to from their own experience, and that is what every human being who seeks must aim to. Let us briefly mention the bliss that partakes of the nature of the Spirit.

It is a further passage that is difficult for us to understand, as long as we have not reached the fusion of the Soul with the Monad, the identification of the Son with the Father.

This fusion must be preceded by the fusion of the Soul with the personality.

Here opens another chapter of our research on joy which, however, it is not possible to treat, and perhaps not even fully understand, since we are all more or less at an average degree of evolution, we are personal beings in relation to the world of senses. However, we can experience fleeting moments of "bliss" in certain moments of deep meditation, when the ego is cancelled and we feel the unity of all Life.

Then, the praise we find in the wonderful Canticle of the Creatures of St. Francis spontaneously arises:

"...Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour: Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness..."

I want to conclude with the suggestion that joy is luminous, adamantine, it radiates outwards even physically, from the face, from the eyes of those who experience it; it attracts more joy and spiritual light.

I believe that it is the basic state of Creation, an intimate outpouring that permeates all of the Creation, the joy of the creative act emanating from the Mind of God.

It is a radiant energy that is transmitted to all beings and dances in the rays of the sun.

Lina Malfiore

Notes

1. Thomas of Celano, an Italian friar minor (Celano 1190 ca - San Giovanni in Valdevarri, L'Aquila, 1260 ca). First biographer of St. Francis, he was also one of the first disciples of the Saint.
2. Eudemonism. Doctrine that considers happiness as natural for man and assigns to human life the task of achieving it; it must be distinguished from hedonism, which places this task in the attainment of immediate pleasure.
3. According to Psychosynthesis, personality tends to be considered as an organism, or complex system, made up of multiple independent and at the same time interacting subsystems, to which Assagioli gives the name of sub-personalities. Each of these sub-personalities is structured in such a way as to possess specific and peculiar functions, mutually interconnected, even if normally the individual passes from one to the other without having clear awareness. These functions are useful in everyday life, in the situations where we are inserted, for example the role of child, parent, professional, friend, etc. They constitute the whole repertoire of roles, functions, and parts that we play and represent, from time to time, according to situations and relationships. We must think of subpersonalities as miniature personalities that have all the characteristics of the whole personality: they have a core around which emotions, sensations, desires, thoughts, a will are structured.
4. From Alice Bailey's writings, "Ponder on This".