

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Men and Women, Work and Play

All of us are looking for some magic panacea that will bring happiness. It's not only our American privilege, it's our constitutional, God-given right. But somehow our search for happiness seems incomplete. There are always unfulfilled needs. Social movements, such as women's liberation or the interest in Eastern religions, are in part an expression of unfulfilled needs. In the late sixties and early seventies, the women's movement, in its most popularized and therefore most assessible (although not always most accurate) form, tended to convey the impression that a liberated woman was assertive, ambitious, independent, achievement-oriented, employed -- and also happy. Women clients voiced resentment about their trapped lives, complained of feeling worthless and dependent, and found help in assertive training, job retraining programs, consciousness-raising groups. There was a widespread need to gain social status and recognition of equal competency with men.

Executive Stress and Eastern Spiritual Disciplines

During this same period, many young people turned to Eastern religions and the human potential growth movement as a way of escaping the very real problems they foresaw in pursuing the careers, competition, and goal orientation of their parents. These young people

2.

realized that what had been considered assets from a material and technological viewpoint in our male-dominated society (the so-called "typically masculine" characteristics of aggression, competition, rationality, etc.) had been accompanied by a steep psychological and emotional price: a loss of living in the moment, a loss of experiencing, a loss of being. They didn't want to become like the stereotyped, classical harried male executive -- men who complain of the emptiness of achievement, yet who are controlled by their ambition; men who need elaborate biofeedback equipment to interpret their own bodies' signals of tension; men who need to be taught to express basic human emotions of affection or sadness.

Something Gained and Something Lost

During this period of the sixties and seventies, an interesting social phenomenon was occurring. On the one hand, women were anxious to move into the labor force for the sake of some "larger fulfillment," to establish their status and competency. On the other hand, many young people, who looked at their potential future if they moved into the labor force and absorbed the masculine-dominated values of the older generation, were moving out of the labor force, again for the sake of some "larger fulfillment," this time a spiritual peace.

In pursuit of these various forms of "fulfillment," something very

3.

real was gained for women, a sense of self-assertion and self-worth; for the "seekers", a sense of inner harmony and spiritual satisfaction. Yet something may also have been lost. Our women clients are now assertive, independent, employed -- but they may be depriving themselves of the more delicate, harmonious joys of life. They come to psychotherapy seeking methods of relaxation and stress and tension management; they complain that although they now feel themselves positive members of the work force, their lives seem harried and scattered. Our anecdotal observations are borne out by statistics indicating a dramatic rise in the incidence among women of traditionally male-linked occupational stress-related diseases -- heart attacks, stomach ulcers.

May drop-outs of the sixties and seventies also appear in our office. Frequently they are concerned that the process of "finding themselves," which has consumed a large portion of their lives, has proven necessary but insufficient. They are now looking for ways to express their sense of inner peace and tranquillity through increase social commitment.

A New Dialectic: The Third Alternative

It seems to us that American society is now in a position for third alternative to emerge. It is our opinion that this new dialectic may allow for increased personal freedom and options for all of us.

4.

What we are suggesting is that one choice (e.g., a spiritual search, acting assertively) does not need to be at the expense of another (e.g., social commitment, ability to yield). What is needed is an integrative model which reflects an amalgam suited to the temperament of America, and which gives us access both to social accomplishment and to spiritual peace.

Some possible outgrowths of this model, which could profitably be considered by both men and women, might include the following:

ASSERTIVE YIELDING: By this we mean possessing the skills to stand up for your own rights, not be afraid to say what you feel and think; and, at the same time the ability to balance one's own self-interest with awareness and sensitivity to the needs and rights of others; to not feel the need to "always assert," but to have the perceive the triviality of most situations, to avoid petty "ego games." Which may prevent you from having the ability to yield, to be soft and to be compationate.

CENTERED PRODUCTIVITY: Developing a sense of centeredness, relaxation, inner peace, calm and oneness, and acceptance of ourselves. And, at the same time, be committed to acting in the ways of the world; striving for excellence, the ability to be rigorous, instrumental, and productive.

5.

EGOLESS ACHIEVEMENT: This involves the ability to set goals, but not be driven by the need to attain those goals; the ability to separate our sense of who we are from what we accomplish. As the ancient Indian text, the Bhagavad Gita, notes, the person of wisdom is one who does actions, but has no attachment to the fruits of action. The desire to reach the goal at the end of the path should not diminish the beauty of the flowers which lie beside the path.

The above concepts may at first seem like Zen koans -- they appear contradictory and illogical. However, we feel that individuals who learn to integrate the skills of both what might be called "the way of the East" and "the way of the West" will have the capacity to experience the best of both worlds. They may allow themselves to be assertive, but not pushy and aggressive; they may learn to act in the ways of the world, but without suffering the unfortunate consequences of ulcers and heart disease; they may learn to be hard-working and productive and also to learn to love and be tender, not losing sight of the beauty of the moment; the smile of the child, the smell of the morning dew. By combining the best of two worlds we, Americans, as men and women, alone and together, may learn to work hard, have fun, and not know the difference.

Johanna Shapiro, Ph.D., is a consultant to the Stanford Center for Research on Women and works as a social scientist in Family Focus, Stanford Medical School.

Deane Shapiro Jr., Ph.D., is a member of the clinical faculty of the Department Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University Medical School, Dean of Academic Affairs, Pacific Graduate School of Psychology, and most recently the author of Precision Nirvana: Care and Maintenance of the Mind -- An Owner's Manual.

The Shapiros lived fifteen months in the Orient studying Eastern religions. They maintain a joint private practice in Menlo Park, California.

Authors' additional comment forty years later.

In rereading this article some forty years later, we were really struck by the privilege that allowed us to prioritize happiness rather than economics/employment/discrimination as a major motivating force behind women's liberation ; and a similar focus on youth who had the means to "drop out" to pursue studies and experiences in the East rather than working to support themselves and families. It was from this position of privilege that we focused on the pursuit of "happiness" without recognizing that for many women, young people of both sexes and people of color, issues of class and race meant economics and survival would take precedence. We still feel the themes discussed are important, only need to be more nuanced by the above considerations. "

A reader's comment:

Dear Johanna,

I hope you don't mind my making a few comments on your paper -- I always enjoy to read what you and Deane write since I am a firm believer in the integration of the Eastern/Western philosophies -- and their balance. Besides, the women's movement and personal search for identity and happiness, I believe, are of concern to most of us women.

I particularly enjoyed the possibility of balance that you were pointing out.

I would have preferred the ending with the -- joy of the continuous opportunity ~~for becoming~~ -- thus combining acceptance (East) while moving towards a goal (West). I am sure that you can word this better than I can, but that is the general idea. I think that it is the ending feeling which will motivate women to try the "third way" since we are basic searchers of happiness while being able to accept things as they are -- it's how we move through reality in an idealistic way that makes the difference, I think.

Joanna

Note: (Thank you! change was made😊)