

Ernstraud Magazine

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happiness sharing as a way to peace

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§1 How to read Ernstraud Magazine:

What you understand surpasses what I intend.

Ernstraud Magazine involves thought and discussion to stimulate learning, not indoctrination. Your response may be consonant or contrasting. The meaning and impact of each article will be individual to each of you, according to the experience that you bring.

This approach avoids using absolute definitions of terms to produce academic rigor and consistency. It is grist for the mill of human understanding, sometimes abstract and sometime concrete. It moves from one possible viewpoint to another in order to explore multiple aspects of an issue, always showing that there is more than one way to appreciate reality. Above all, it requires every reader to define and understand terms so as to make passages meaningful—that is, to *take definitions from the context*. With that mutual accommodation, we will make progress together.

You contribute to the discussion when you pass along material in conversation, by email, or through other means. Note also that the **Ernstraud Magazine Forum** at <http://www.ernstraud.org/forum/> provides a centralized place for discussion. As readers join the forum, its value will increase and the content of the magazine will be enriched. Please join!

§ 2 Generation to Generation

*This self-reassuring self-compliment happens to be sincere.
Take from it such inspiration as you will.*

My parents sacrificed a great deal to leave the country of Adolf Hitler so that I could be born in the country that gave the world nuclear weapons, where profit motivated robber barons buy the government and exploit the cheap labor of a permanent underclass which they perpetuate.

At the end of my church service in Switzerland, the force that brought me back to America was the University of Chicago which, translating from the Latin “alma mater,” became the mother of my soul. Although this institution appears to be financially founded upon the suffering of the underclass, and presently to exercise hegemonic control over its neighborhood, I acknowledge its irreplaceable contribution to my appreciation of the humanities, of the scientific method, and primarily of independent thinking.

Judging by outward appearances, my children might possibly believe that they are beneficiaries of WASP class privileges, being Americans in a time of scientific enlightenment. This may be an element, but it is not the foundation, of their well-being. America is also home to millions of people who are hungry, and people who fear for their personal safety. Often my heart longs for my ancestors’ German society that glorifies hard work, thrift, environmentalism, and universal health care.

In actual fact, the foundation under my children is the practices of a church in which (a) I have never, throughout my 71 years, known or even heard of any person (even marginally participating) who was involuntarily hungry, and (b) they wake up every morning in the full confidence that their earthly parents, like their heavenly parents, are completely faithful to their covenants and to unconditional love of their children.

This is the true heritage that my parents passed on to me, and no greater blessing can possibly pass from one generation to the next.

§ 3 Pursuit of unhappiness

Humans are distinct individuals, and at the same time very much alike. For example, I may prefer kale and you may prefer spinach, but neither of us escapes preferring to eat something.

We reveal ourselves through choices regarding creature comforts, intellectual pursuits, group activities, self-expression, and spiritual awareness of other beings. We differ in the things we choose, but we're all the same in the fact that we make these choices.

Choosing our actions is broadly referred to as the pursuit of happiness. Often we are not happy with the outcome of our choices, *especially when there are forces acting within us of which we are not conscious*. Nevertheless it would indeed be uncommon to say that we deliberately set out in the pursuit of unhappiness.

This assertion makes it difficult to comprehend political bickering in place of action, extrajudicial murder, weapons of mass destruction, overconsumption in the face of starvation. It puzzles the mind that the governmental elite could single out any or all religions for persecution, or encourage repression of sexual minorities. It defies reason that a corporate executive could walk away from a company having accepted more money than the laid off employees will ever see in an entire lifetime.

These egregious imbalances of power must surely gestate in the *repressed darkness* of unconscious misunderstanding of happiness. They challenge us to ceaseless wakeful sensitivity. The path around the pitfalls of unhappiness is the enlightenment that binds us to, not separates us from, our fellow humans.

§ 4 Happiness = Sharing

*The fundamental way of happiness
is to consider the other ahead of the self.*

Is a human born selfish, or born unselfish? In other words, does positive behavior result from nurture, or from nature? Is it human nature to be kind?

Academic studies first clarify terminology. As always, the answer you receive is highly dependent on – almost contained in – how you ask the question. Scientific inquiry, which may be carried on within a system of values, reveals relationships without imposing prejudged values.

Religious doctrines, applied dogmatically, can amount to prejudged values that impede enlightenment. On the other hand, there is an open-ended approach in a Buddhist teaching which proposes that a human being contains positive *seeds* and negative *seeds*. Humans have agency to water the positive ones. This framework, like the scientific one, allows constant evaluation during the journey to enlightenment. The human spirit is always challenged to discern the better way.

Ernstraud Magazine concerns happiness sharing. Like religion, it aims toward a plan of happiness. Based upon a long life of observation, the writer has concluded that *happiness is shared, not imposed*. The very nature of happiness is social, not selfish. Indeed, the principle may be summarized in the writer's signature tag line of many years:

*Life is to promote my neighbors' welfare--not by
competition, but by collaboration and sharing.
Human intelligence is the capacity
to apply love to the details.*