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The Art of Happiness: A Handbook For Living

by His Holiness The Dalai Lama, Howard C. Cutler, M.D.

"I believe that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness. That is clear. Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we all are seeking something better in life. So, I think, the very motion of our life is towards happiness..."

With these words, spoken before a large audience in Arizona, the Dalai Lama cut to the heart of his message. But his claim that the purpose of life was happiness raised a question in my mind. Later, when we were alone, I asked, "Are *you* happy?"

"Yes," he said. He paused, then added, "Yes...definitely." There was a quiet sincerity in his voice that left no doubt - a sincerity that was reflected in his expression and in his eyes.

"But is happiness a reasonable goal for most of us?" I asked. "Is it really possible?"

"Yes. I believe that happiness can be achieved through training the mind."

The concept of achieving true happiness has, in the West, always seemed ill defined, elusive, ungraspable. Even the word "happy" is derived from the Icelandic word *happ*, meaning luck or chance. Most of us, it seems, share this view of the mysterious nature of happiness. In those moments of joy that life brings, happiness feels like something that comes out of the blue. To my Western mind, it didn't seem the sort of thing that one could develop, and sustain, simply by "training the mind."

When I raised that objection, the Dalai Lama was quick to explain. "When I say 'training the mind,' in this context I'm not referring to 'mind' merely as one's cognitive ability or intellect. Rather, I'm using the term in the sense of the Tibetan word *Sem*, which has a much broader meaning, closer to 'psyche' or 'spirit'; it includes intellect and feeling, heart and mind. By bringing about a certain inner discipline, we can undergo a transformation of our attitude, our entire outlook and approach to living.

"When we speak of this inner discipline, it can of course involve many things, many methods. But generally speaking, one begins by identifying those factors which lead to happiness and those which lead to suffering. Having done this, one then sets about gradually eliminating those factors which lead to suffering and cultivating those which lead to happiness. That is the way."

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