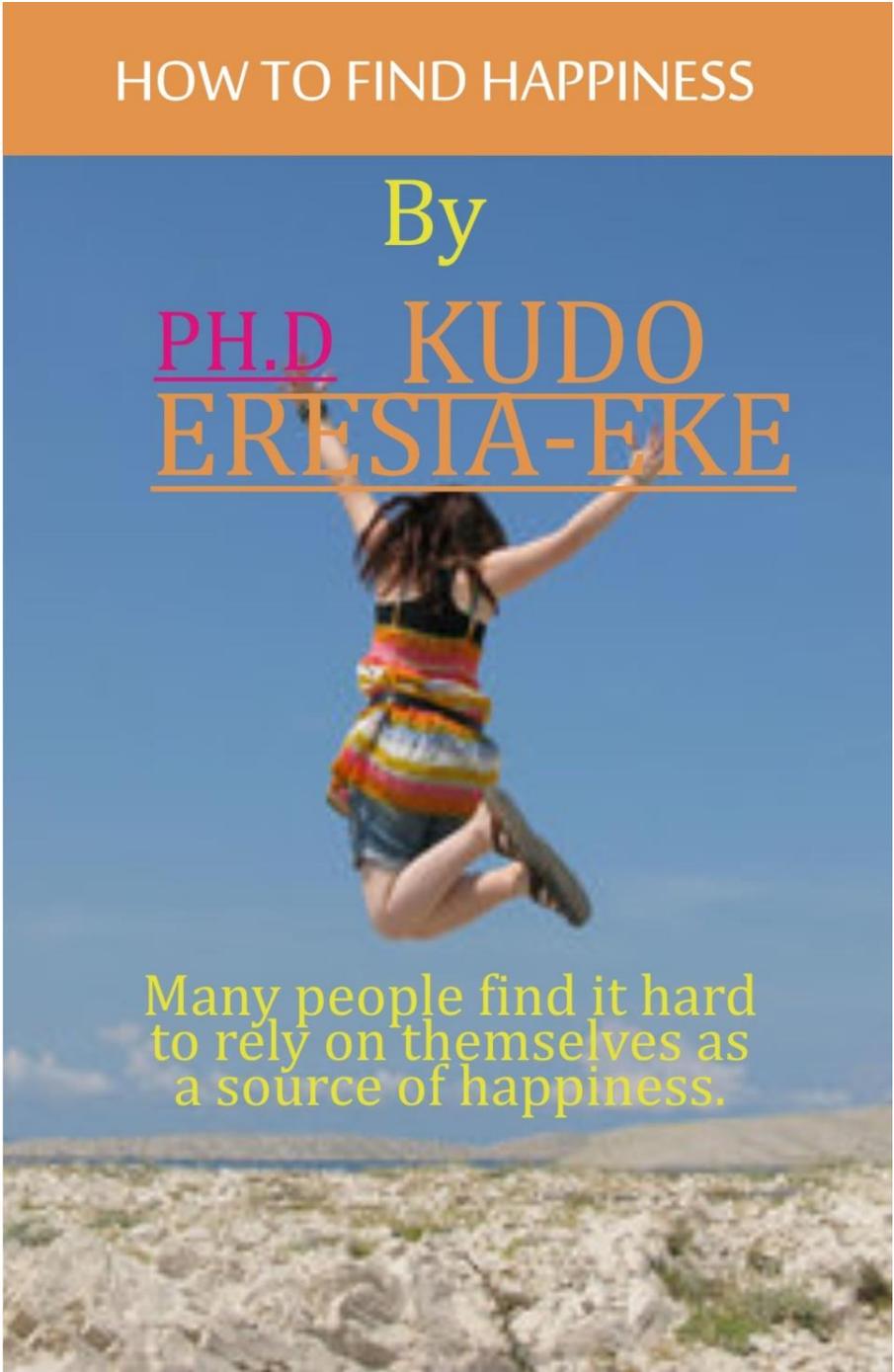


HOW TO FIND HAPPINESS

By

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Many people find it hard
to rely on themselves as
a source of happiness.



Chapter One

HABIT

I have watched you for months and can't help admiring you. You seem to generate much personal magnetism. Is it what they call charm? It is so unwavering, almost not subject to the mood of the environment.

Quite frankly, I feel flattered by your comments. I would never have thought that I had such a happy effect on people.

Your laughter rings with profound unmistakable joy. You are always jubilant, like a happy child. How do you do it in this world of turbulence?

Attitude!

What do you mean?

My father taught me a long time ago that attitude or behaviour is a product of habit.

I thought it was the other way round; that attitude is actually what makes habits.

Quite frankly I do not know what the books say; but what I have found to be true for myself is that habit is actually a mechanical process. Habits recur like the grooves on a record. It does not matter how many times you place your pin on the record, it just traces the grooves as etched on the record and what is produced is exactly the same sound as you heard before.

I do not get it.

What I mean is that your mind works like the grooves of a record. The grooves on it are the paths through which the mind must run when triggered by a particular stimulus. Over time the mind develops stereotypical methods of responding to specific stimuli.

That reminds me of Sigmund Freud's experiments.

I think you are right. There is a clear association there. The point Freud was making was that, if a specific stimulus elicits a specific response continually, over time the response automatically follows the stimuli.

Now if I were to translate that into my own expression, what it basically means is that repetition helps to etch reactions deeper in the membrane of the brain; causing a strong link or association between stimulus and reaction. So that once the stimulus is introduced, the reaction is as good as predictable.

Sounds interesting.

Yes, I also think it is interesting. It works in probably the same way the recall mechanism works. We find it so much easier, for instance, to recall the names of persons we meet regularly than the names of those we seldom meet.

The repetitive recall etches them more deeply in the brain and therefore makes remembrance easy. On the contrary, the names of those we hardly meet only form faint impressions on our brains; hence recall is a bit more difficult.

What you are driving at here is that the mind is a phenomenon of habit?

Sure. It is a habitual entity that can be trained, to enable us behave in a certain way in certain circumstances. We can, for instance, train our minds to react angrily, no matter what someone whom we consider an enemy does. We can consciously form this habit in ourselves and in other people whose minds are vulnerable, and susceptible to our bidding.

So even where the so-called enemy acts positively and in our interest our programmed reaction remains negative?

Precisely! The programmed mind is no longer an open mind capable of objective or dispassionate evaluation of ideas or actions from that particular individual or group seen as enemy. It has been trained and indoctrinated to behave in a certain negative way to the perceived enemy over a prolonged period. So, of course, the stimuli almost instinctively elicits a negative reaction, no matter how good his intention.

Now, how do all these shed light on my original quest for the secret of your happiness?

Simple. The same way we can train a mind to react in a hateful manner, through repetition, to a particular subject or subjects, we can train it to react in a loving or happy manner. The logic is the same. Through repetition and indoctrination, the mind could be made to react in a friendly manner to a particular kind of stimulus; so that once the stimulus is introduced the milk of love and kindness is gingered to flow.

This is probably the kind of situation we have with most mothers and their children. Anything about the children, following years of experience and indoctrination, automatically elicits a love reaction.

Can the same apply to happy reactions if desired?

Yes. But I must say that this is usually a tall order and requires constant, minute-to-minute practice. The reason it can be so difficult is that for years, people would have made deep negative grooves of anger, jealousy, envy and the like automatic reactions to fellow beings.

The raw, animalistic part of the human appears to happily make the negative grooves almost with natural ease. Undoing the deep dirty grooves and possibly replacing them with fine happy lines is therefore difficult. But not impossible! It just takes a bit of determination and hard work. The tricks to be used are exactly the same as for the cultivation of the contrary - imagination, education, information, experience, and, above all, repetition.

Please level with me. How do you do this, practically speaking?

As I said earlier, it is a tall order, but it can be done. For as many hours as possible in the day, fill yourself with the feeling of joy and happiness. Look out for opportunities for laughter and joy. Smile from the depths of your heart. Try to feel your presence with happy images - images that call up gladness and sweet memories.

But above all, reaffirm your determination daily to be happy, no matter what. Develop all manner of reminders to keep you happy. It will not be easy, I must say. But it is possible to turn your mind into one with a ready happy frame.

Please continue.

In conclusion...

I didn't say you should conclude. I say you should continue. I am enjoying your discourse.

Perhaps I should say that once you make up your mind to make happiness a habit, even your outer circumstances would become friendlier and happier. Whether indeed there is a link between happy thoughts, happy feelings and happy experiences in life would be for you to prove in time. But my hunch is that, indeed, there is. Stay happy. Life is good.

Chapter Two

AVOID HATE

Good morning, sir.

Good morning, beloved.

I see you are beaming with happiness. What fills you with this jubilation?

Very many things, my dear.

But how can you be so happy this morning when only last night we heard the news of your betrayal by your friends castigating you unfairly before the world?

What does it matter? I have life. Life itself is happiness. The dent of wickedness and backstabbing of men is only a fading illusion. They fade as dew in the morning sun, if you are calm and happy. Let each wrong doer carry his own burden of guilt. Do not share the burden. Keep your good cheer. The burden does not belong to you, neither does the guilt.

You speak as if it were the easiest thing in the world to do. Personally, I have been sad lately because I was badly cheated by people who I thought were deserving of trust. I have been sad because I could not understand how some people could be so unkind to others.

Do not think like that my friend. Do not let sadness get to you. Fend it off the best you can. Keep cheerful. Keep doing your best even to those who do not like you. Let no evil into your heart. At first it will be difficult; I know, but do not succumb. If you fail, your adversaries would have succeeded in dragging you down their pit.

What do you mean, sir?

Happiness is the jewel that we all seek, whether we know it or not. Happiness is the prize we all yearn for. The victor in every situation is the one who retains happiness. The reward for retention of happiness is beyond quantifying.

Can you just give me an idea?

Retaining happiness in your heart shuts out hatred and enlarges the joy in your life. Refusal to allow hate into your heart is also a refusal to allow sickness and disease into your body, for happiness increases your level of immunity.

Is that really true?

Maybe you can do some research on that. But there is a relationship between happiness and health. Or better still; observe your own body against your moods. But these are even minor effects of retaining happiness in your heart in spite of hatred against you.

What more other benefits can there be?

The more subtle gains are far more important. Once you confront hatred with love you immediately feel an inner rise in consciousness. You gain a special morale and spiritual strength.

I do not understand.

How can I explain this to you? You see, the natural way to react against hate is to hate. That is the way the world works. So when you react against hate with love, you totally confuse and unnerve the world. You become mysterious, inexplicable, and enigmatic. The world can no longer understand you. This disarms haters, and forces an inferiority complex on them. That is why their gaze must falter, even if they dared to look at you.

Okay, I am beginning to get it.

As their gaze is laden with guilt, so are their hearts, so are their heads, so are their bodies. They suffer an all-round degeneration, and hurl a spiritual burden, which they may carry for a long, long time.

Please tell me more of what I can gain, as the one who refuses to let hate into my heart. That interests me more.

Naturally. Listen, beloved, our state of the mind generally governs the circumstances around us. To keep it simple, an unhappy state of mind tends to attract unhappy circumstances to one's life.

How does this apply in this particular love-hate situation?

I am sure you can deduce it for yourself, especially as it applies to you. If one succeeds in hurting you so much that hatred takes over, and ugliness fills or preoccupies your heart, he would have succeeded in the long run in sentencing you to an ugly life. The ugliness in your consciousness will ensure the replication of ugly circumstances in your life.

With a heart full of anger and unhappiness you are bound to attract unhappiness, and that is the ultimate victory of the adversary. And that is precisely what you do not want. What you rather desire is to produce the opposite effect of happy events and circumstances in your life. To achieve that you need the happy state of mind.

So while your effort and spiritual understanding help you to happier circumstances through a happy state of the mind, the reverse is the case for the guilty, the hate minded?

Yes. Of course they usually do not know it; for if they were aware they would not fill their hearts with hatred. But that is the way of the world. Be mindful of your own state of mind. Stay happy.

Chapter Three

GIVE JOY

I find your all-time happy disposition amazing. In spite of everything, you remain so cheerful, so bubbly, and so full of joy every time I see you.

What do you mean by “in spite of everything”?

I mean in spite of the rather humble life you live in the midst of all the needy people. Ordinarily it is not the happiest of conditions.

That is probably where the error is introduced. Happiness is a state of mind, not a physical condition.

Please explain.

Let me rather illustrate. I grew up in a royal environment with all the trappings of wealth and power. But I was not happy. There was hollowness in our family, generally. Nothing mattered except the material. It was somber existence. The few times we came close to being really merry were when we had someone to show off to. But even then the feeling was still hollow.

You mean the wealth could not confer happiness?

Precisely! Our egos bottled up any possibility of happiness. We were only concerned about ourselves how much more money to be made; how much better off we were; the pleasure of the latest car models. You know, stuff like these.

You did not enjoy them?

Well, as comfort to the body, yes. But unfortunately the body is not the source of happiness. It can never be. Happiness must be tapped from a much deeper and subtle spring within.

Please explain.

I will. But I must confess that it was when I decided to quit the palace to this humble home in this vastly poor country that I began to know true happiness.

Poverty conferred happiness?

No. It was not the poverty that made the difference. What I have learnt from my many years away from the palace is that joy, the elusive joy, fills me so easily with every effort to give joy to another, especially to the needy.

What manner of the needy are we speaking of here?

Good question. By “needy” I mean those in need of happiness. My new job as a missionary or organiser of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) is to try to do whatever I can to spread the happiness I crave for, to others. And there are many routes people take to offer happiness. For some, the way is to help with access to better health. For others, it is meeting the need for clothing. Some other persons take the path of just lending a listening ear. What you do depends on what the particular need is.

How do you cope with the vast variegation of needs?

My purpose is simple and singular - to help people find happiness. The avenue may differ from person to person, but the destination remains the same. So all I do is focus on the destination.

How do you manage, given the heavy demand that must be made on you?

I had long decided to put all my resources at the service of the goal of happiness for others. These include my mental, spiritual, material and other creative resources. I deploy all in pursuit of these goals for others.

And you have never found the need to reverse your decision at some point?

Never. The more people that have a taste of happiness through our modest effort, the more of a happy high I get. Sometimes I am truly ecstatic with joy.

Can you describe the pleasure?

I am sorry I can only feel it. It is sweet. It is heavenly. It is spiritual, rich and fulfilling. It is the kind of happiness that nothing can take away from you.

Is this how you plan to spend the rest of your life?

Luckily I know that life will never end. But even if mine were to end, I am more than grateful for the privilege of finding the great secret of the ages.

What secret?

The secret we have been talking about all this time the secret of joy, the secret of heaven; the secret of happiness.

I am sorry, but what is this secret? I know you have illustrated, giving examples from your life experience, but please tell me in a simple, explicit manner that all my readers can grasp.

I must say that I am not alone in the camp of those who have found this secret, through various other experiences, which may be totally different from mine. My experience is only illustrative. Those who are looking for happiness, like I was, would find it. For some sooner, for others later; and many through different routes than the one I travel; but get there, I believe, they all will.

I understand that, but please share the secret more clearly as I requested. How does the layman find happiness?

Let me put it bluntly to find it, please give it, not to yourself, but to others.

That sounds like a paradox.

Tell me, what is life, if not a paradox?

Chapter Four

LOVE YOUR JOB

What can I do to maintain a happy emotion?

Many things.

Like what?

Like loving your job or primary duty.

How?

Notice that you spend an awful lot of time at work. It does not matter what the vocation or profession is - medicine, journalism, law, broadcasting, teaching - it really does not matter.

That is correct. I would say that I spend more than one third of my time at work.

Much more than that my friend; for beyond the time that you actually sit behind your desk, you are very much at work. A lot of the times when your thoughts and conversations are about your work, you are at work.

But talking or thinking about work and office is not being at work. Or is it?

Thinking or talking about work, I would argue, is being at work. For as long as your consciousness is in someplace, there you are also.

I do not understand?

Listen, if you are usually sad at work because you do not like your job, the hate or envy of your colleagues; once you think about the office, what emotion do you feel?

Sadness.

That is exactly what I mean. For as many times as you visit what you consider a “sad” place or event, even in thought, you relive or reactivate the sadness.

I don't get it.

What I mean is that the emotion you feel at work is stretched beyond the time you spend there, if your thoughts and consciousness are glued to the office. And this happens naturally because the work place you often see as the source of your daily bread.

Secondly, your work is usually something that people identify you by and also by which you identify yourself. Imagine you were a doctor, for instance, you continue to be a doctor long after you may have closed from your clinic. Indeed many will acknowledge with pride, that they are doctors for life. That means doctors all the time. Doctors **24/7**. For every moment of their lives, they are doctors.

I am beginning to get it.

I am glad.

Please go ahead.

Now imagine a situation where the person in question hates his work. For such a case would it be a surprise if he ends up a really sad person, almost all his life?

Now I see why you always emphasise making the right choice of vocation.

I am happy you see that now. Your profession or vocation is a primary factor in helping you to a happier life. Picking the right vocation is as fundamental as picking a life partner.

Let us take a positive illustration. Imagine a man who loves to teach; one so in love with his teaching, that he loses a sense of time when practising; one who is happy to teach at any time; one who comes alive when talking about his job, because he is deeply in love with it.

Now tell me, since work tends to dominate consciousness as we explained, would such a teacher likely be a happy person or not?

He will likely be a happy person.

Now you get it. This is why I say it is unwise for parents to, for whatever reason; force their children into vocations the children explicitly dislike. In a sense, by doing so, they sentence their own children to lives of unhappiness. Some of such children actually live and die unhappy men and women, thanks to overbearing parents.

You really mean what you said about the choice of a vocation being as important as the choice of a spouse?

I would even stretch it to say it is much more important, because for all intents and purposes, your profession, or vocation is your primary spouse. The evidence of this is in how much time the job claims; in how much attention the job gets. In some cases the job can even determine who you marry or whether the marriage succeeds or fails.

You mean it?

Well, chew it over carefully and you may reach the same conclusion.

Would you then advise those who find themselves in unhappy, wrong vocations to change?

Of course! And to add, it is a fallacy that some vocations fetch good money and others do not, which often is the reason for wrong choices. For any man who loves his vocation will eventually become so good at it that he will attract higher and higher incomes. The love of the vocation guarantees his spending more and more time to perfect his trade, which in turn fetches higher returns.

But the best part of it all is that the one with the right choice of a profession or vocation earns money for having fun, for enjoying life, and for doing what makes him happy. Could it be better?

Chapter Five

FORGIVENESS

Thanks for granting me audience.

It is good to have you here.

My mission is still on the quest for happiness. We would like you to share a tip that can lead one to a happier life.

I am glad you say “a tip”, because there are many tips. Happy people place emphasis on any combination of them.

Which would you readily want to share with us?

Have you ever considered forgiveness as a tool for a happier life?

No.

I would definitely recommend it. Most of the time when we are sad, angry or generally unhappy we could actually trace it to some clash or misbehaviour, at least in our own perception, of somebody else. Often we believe that person has somehow maltreated, cheated or dishonoured us. So we get angry. This is so rampant in life, isn't it?

Yes, but why is it so rampant?

Trampling on one another's space, dishonouring, cheating, or maltreating other people is almost a natural result of the basic nature of man, which is greedy and selfish.

Imagine you lived in a very small community of persons, each selfish and greedy. The social behaviour would easily reflect an uncaring attitude towards the next person. There would be a general lack of respect of individual freedom, spitefulness, and encroachment on others' property, intrigues, conspiracy, and all manners of deviousness. Not so? The logic of greed and selfishness necessarily drives us to that conclusion.

I agree, but does it have to be so?

Oh, sure! So it has to be, because each person in that community sees the world only from his own myopic viewpoint. This is the quintessential worldview of the classically greedy and selfish. The only real goodness he recognises is himself. Others do not really matter.

Everybody else is an expendable tool useful only in helping him achieve his selfish end.

Can you illustrate for my better understanding?

The examples are all over us. Take a selfish woman, for example, who hankers after another woman's husband. In her obsession, which is how selfishness behaves, she has no hesitation in hatching all manner of evil plans to smear, maim or even kill the wife, while luring the husband with every means at her disposal, including wicked and fetish means. That is one example.

Take another example. A man is ambitious and wants to govern a people by all means; he violates the election process by force of banditry, hurts, maims, and even kills. Nothing matters but the actualisation of his selfish ambition.

Sometimes, the issue could be plain greed for money. In such a case all the rules of fairness can burn. It matters little whether the comfort, privacy, property or lives of others perish in the process. The only thing that counts would be money, the object of his greed.

So the world is full of people just hurting themselves?

Unfortunately, that is generally correct. We hurt ourselves with the blade of the sword, the nib of the pen, the tone of the tongue, and whatever else we find instrumental. The world is like one where all in society wear skins like porcupines, so that almost every meeting is hurtful.

How does all this relate to happiness?

Easy. In a world as described, only a fool would expect not to be hurt often. Only a fool would rest assured that people would not attempt to violate his space or property. That fool would be akin to one living in a den of thieves, but does not bother to lock his doors.

Given the circumstance, there surely would be attempts to rob him because of the overwhelming number and nature of the worms of greed swarming in the social space of the robbers' den.

Let me add that some people in such a society of the selfish may not come at you directly as a robber would. They may resort to other

means like psychic, including some methods of prayers, to try to deprive you of what is rightly yours.

Not clear.

Look around you. Open your eyes, my friend. And while you are still doing that, let me return to the relationship with happiness. Living then in this world of compulsive hurters, getting hurt is common. Now, in a place where people are so vulnerable to hurt so often, imagine a man that is bereft of forgiving spirit.

It is beginning to make sense.

At every turn, he would be engaged in mental, emotional or physical combat. His head would be filled with a never-ending list for revenge. His mind would be occupied by anger. His suspicion would be beyond paranoia. We are here describing a man who is verging on insanity. That is the lot of one in such a culture of selfishness and greed in this world. Without forgiveness, how would he find a place in his heart for happiness?

But a man inclined to forgive would continuously cleanse and free his heart. With each hurt and the wounds of anger it necessarily inflicts, the forgiver washes away the stains and continuously heals his heart.

Now I can understand why forgiving appears to lift off heavy emotional and spiritual burdens.

Without forgiveness, hurt and anger weigh down our hearts; incapacitating our ability to be happy, for only from the heart that is pure can true happiness come. The heart is the home of happiness. Where the heart is constrained, so also is happiness. We could actually declare that we are only as happy as we forgive, for continuous hurt is inevitable in this world, given the character of greed and selfishness of its inhabitants.

Chapter Six

EXERCISE

Hi! Coach, how are you doing?

Hi! My dear lady, how is the going?

Pretty good, I'd say. What about you?

Always good. I feel great.

I wish I felt as great.

Sure, why not?

C'mon you don't feel that great when you have to carry a body weight as heavy as mine around.

Why not?

Well you know, you are always somewhat awkward, with a size like mine. Even getting into a vehicle can be a project. And my husband does not make it any easier. He always nags me about having to shed weight, having to exercise.

You don't agree with him?

Am not so sure I don't. His nagging is even spikier because I know that what he says is true. But I just cannot muster the strength or the willpower to do what he says.

Ah, I think there is something wrong there.

Where?

In what you just said.

What? What did I say wrong?

You give the impression that doing the things he says would be to satisfy him. I think that his satisfaction may just be incidental. The true and primary satisfaction and indeed happiness would be yours.

Why do you say that?

Now don't get me wrong. I believe people should choose their body sizes. If it makes you happy to be slender, please be slender. If it makes you happy to be fat or even obese, why not, it is your body. The only thing I would like to put attention on is the connection between physical exercise and happiness.

Interesting. Tell me.

I am not a medical doctor or anything like that. I am just a coach. But I can say from years of experience that there is a happy high that is released to your physical system as a result of exercise. Your mood improves, your outlook brightens, and you feel lighter and happier. I speak from personal experience, and many others say the same.

And that is?

Whenever you exercise, you give yourself a chance to be happier. To be honest, I do not know how it works. I do not know what particular chemical reactions or actions bring that feeling about. But what I know is that it is real. It is real that exercise tends to increase happiness.

Some psychologist friends of mine attribute it to the sense of achievement that accompanies a successful exercise session. I do not know if they are right or wrong. But my suspicion is that there is far more to it than that explanation.

Are you suggesting that exercise can change my rampant moodiness?

You try and see. For me, it is one of the prime tonics against moodiness. If an issue weighs me down or something hurts me bad, and I need a lift badly; one of the things I have learnt, no matter how pressing the problem, is to exercise. It helps me immediately with happiness-high, and appears to help me reach a solution faster. I am convinced that exercise helps my brain work better and faster.

Are you sure?

Now again, do not ask me to explain for I do not know why that happens. I just know that that is my experience, and those of many others.

So exercising is not just for losing weight and keeping healthy?

It is for far more, I can assure you.

I see.

But back to the discussion between your husband and you; I think he really loves you and wants the very best for you. He wants you to reap the benefits that he is reaping from exercise. I know him as a faithful jogger.

Oh, he is a disciplined jogger. And I must confess that he always comes back from each jogging trip, happier, more ebullient, and loving. If we had quarrelled before his exercise, you can almost be sure that after his routine the quarrel is over. None of our fights have lasted beyond any of his jogging sessions, except of course I insist. So your theory makes a lot of sense. It sheds a lot of light on his post jogging behaviour.

Well, I am glad you think so. But the point I really wanted to make is that what he is asking you to do is not really for him. He would certainly benefit from your exercising in several ways, but you remain the prime beneficiary, especially being a rather moody person. Exercise lifts your spirit almost instantaneously.

Would you recommend any particular kind?

No. You would have to choose which pleases you. There are many kinds of exercises. I love outdoor exercises, though. They get fresh air into your lungs. And I believe fresh air is itself rejuvenating.

Would jogging be best for me?

As I said, any exercise would do provided it is one you really enjoy doing. Jogging suits my nature that is why I chose it. You know, long distance running is generally a lonesome, individual affair. I like the loneliness because it allows me to talk with myself.

For you it may be different. You may prefer a team game that allows you to chat with friends. It all depends on what suits your nature, and, more importantly, your health condition. You might need

to have a doctor first check you and advise. But do get on some exercise or the other. Make it regular and win medals of happiness for yourself.

Chapter Seven

ACT AS IF...

Greetings, Wise One.

Greetings, my son. How are you?

I am fine, Wise One.

What brings you here?

It is an interview request I had made to speak with you.

Oh, I remember. What would you like me to speak on?

Happiness, Wise One. I run a weekly column and would like you to please share some of your insights on the subject with my readers and I.

That's a noble venture. Do your readers appreciate what you are doing?

I do not know, Wise One. I just do it for love.

I like your reason for action, son. Keep it up. Love is all there is. As for the reason why you are here, what do you want me to say about happiness?

To please share some tips that can help people live happier lives.

Oh that is simple. To be happy, look happy. Pretend to be happy and you will be happy.

Wise One, these appear to be simple words that you have spoken, but I have difficulty grasping their true meaning.

Try not to read beyond the simplicity of the words. The matter is as simple as I have stated it. To be happy, look happy. Do all those things you would ordinarily do, when you are truly happy.

Such as what, Wise One?

Are you sure you do not know what you would do when you are truly happy? Of course you do. On particularly happy occasions some wear pretty clothes, perfume their bodies and look truly happy with life.

You mean dressing up nice can aid my happiness?

Yes, it can. And indeed it does. It helps your self-satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-contentment - prerequisites for happiness. The idea is to begin to act as if you were truly happy, as if you were specially celebrating life for the abundant goodness and happiness that it offers you.

If I understand you correctly, Wise One, you are saying that to be happy, I should do those things that I would ordinarily do if I were really happy? Laugh? Be cheerful?

Exactly! Keep a sweet smile on your face. Smile deep from your heart. Hum a happy song, feel joy run through you. Warmly greet all around you. Be generous with gifts and with praise. You know it.

But how can I do these things when I am not happy? Just pretend?

Yes, pretend. Act as if you are happy and you will be happy.

But what you teach me now runs contrary to anything I have learnt. I was made to understand that it is the changes within that transform the looks outside. You seem to stand that on its head.

Not quite. My thoughts are just a bit more dialectical. My assumption is that, as the inner influences the outer, so too can the outer influence the inner. Let me ask you Have you ever experienced a greater sense of self-esteem, when wearing exquisitely fitting beautiful clothing?

Yes, I have.

Now that is a simple example of the outer influencing the inner. Again I ask you Have you ever felt a sense of elation when someone actually honestly and publicly commends you for a job well done?

Surely, often it is a great morale booster.

Again that is the outer influencing the inner. The key is in affecting your mind through a carefully chosen external stimulus.

So the external acts as ginger for the mind?

Correct. Visit a home that sparkles with cleanliness, and the immediate tendency is to try to be clean, too. Receive a warm happy smile, and the tendency is to smile.

But wouldn't one just be deceiving oneself, pretending that one is happy when one is not?

But who says one is not happy? To be happy or not to be happy is a matter of choice. Let the external stimuli you choose demonstrate that choice.

So to be happy, I choose stimuli that give the impression of happiness?

Correct. In fact I like the way you have put it. Experiment and see if it works for you. I know from personal experience that it should work. The sub-conscious finds it difficult to distinguish between what is reality and what is pretence. Both register on it as the same.

If the chosen external stimuli are those denoting sadness, the subconscious, childlike as it is, interprets it as such and proceeds to reproduce sadness within.

Conversely if what is desired is the happy state, what to do is to act out the traits of happiness, irrespective of the current state of the mind. Really act them out consciously like a professional actor on stage. Sooner than later the subconscious mind, more precisely, accepts the action as fact, and proceeds to reproduce happiness within.

When a goal is scored in a football match, the cheering that follows is only a reaction from so called supporters, passively enjoying the success of their team. If they were real supporters they ought to be active co-creators of goals with their teams. Active support is the anticipatory cheering that leads to the goal. Here the fans are active participants in creating the goal, rather than mere cheerers of a goal scored already, an easy role for anybody.

Meaning, Venerable One?

Enough. I think I have said enough. Those for whom this is intended will understand.

Chapter Eight

SERVE OTHERS

As I prepared to go out for another interview in the series, the doorbell rang. I wondered, glancing at my watch. It was too early for a visit, this Saturday morning. Members of my family were still sleeping.

I walked to the door and found my friend, Harold. It was not unusual for Harold to show up at any time of the day. I was glad to see him. We hugged.

I noticed he had come along with a friend, who was wearing a flowing white gown. He had such long hair that rested on his shoulders.

He smiled somewhat knowingly like a man of much accumulated wisdom; and he was strikingly handsome, almost beautiful, tall and slender. His face was smoothly shaven. I had to look twice to assure myself he was a man for he could have passed for a very beautiful lady.

Together we went into my study, my favourite room for cherished visitors. I hinted Harold that I was about going off to one of my Happiness Interviews, and of course invited him and his friend to come along. But he had ideas of his own.

He had brought me this incredibly calm person to save me the trouble of the outing. He introduced his friend, who for purposes of anonymity we would simply know as GD. Harold believed that GD was more than worth being interviewed for the column. I was delighted and straight away, the interview started.

The first thing I notice about you, sir, is the calmness in your eyes. They are incredibly calm. You must be a very calm person. How do you do it, in this city of turbulence?

Ha...haa...haa! You are interesting, yourself. To pick on that as a first question is telling.

So will you tell us the secret behind that satisfied, contented, and joyful look in your eyes, on your face? Is it always so with you?

Yes. And it can be same for you as well.

That is why I am interested for my readers and myself. Please share with us, how we can achieve such serene happiness; how we can have this light of joy that is always in your eyes.

I am glad at what you say. To see the light of joy in my eyes, you must have a glint of it yourself, either in reality or in potentiality.

Please teach us.

Permit me, but let me ask you. Are your readers really desirous of being contented, happy, and joyful?

Sure, I believe so. Maybe, not all. But there are many, I would say, who are eager for the wisdom to be happy; given the turbulence that is their lives. They seek succour. They seek peace. They seek comfort. Above all they seek happiness. Maybe they seek it everywhere, but in the right place, I don't know. Please assist.

Of course I will assist. I live to assist.

Really? You live to assist?

Yes. I live to assist. And, maybe, that is the summary of what I have to share with you as the secret of my calmness, the secret of my happiness and the light of joy in my eyes, as you put it.

I am listening, sir.

You are interesting; a good listener; good trait for an interviewer. One of the traits that people like me must have. As life assistants, we must listen and understand before we can help as needed. So keep it up. Who knows? One day, you too, may live only to assist life.

Sir, please go deeper into this issue of living to assist life. What does it mean? How can it confer happiness?

OK, maybe I should use you as an example to help illustrate what I mean. OK with you?

I am glad, if it helps me and my readers better understand how to find happiness.

You have a family, don't you?

Yes, I do.

Is your family your assistant or you the assistant of your family?

I am principally their assistant and steward.

How do you do this?

You are turning the table and acting the interviewer. I should be asking the questions.

I know, but we agreed; just to help with the illustration.

I understand. I serve my family. I look out for them. I anticipate their needs. I am concerned for them. Usually, I put them first in any decision I have to take. Sometimes it could be strenuous to do this, but their happiness means the world to me.

Good. You do pretty well. You are a classy assistant and steward of your family, from what I hear. You are their first class servant. Now tell me, do you find joy in giving them joy.

Incredible joy, I tell you. Serving them lights me up. It is the oxygen of my life.

There you are! Imagine all you had to do in life was serve your family alone. Imagine how happy you would be, if it were so.

Oh, yeah.

I bet you would be wondrously happy. You would beam with joy always at their joy because of the amount of love you have for them. It is the love in your heart that compels you to serve them without grumble. It is the love that watches out for them. Your heart throbs for them in a genuine and sincere way. That is the secret. That is my secret, if you want to call it that. That is the reason for the light of joy that you say you see in my eyes. It is the privilege of servants of love. It is the privilege of all that serve just because they truly love.

However, life is not all about serving the family alone. Often, if not most of the time, you have to attend to people who do not know you, people who do not like you, or even those who hate you. You have to meet others who have no cares about you or your feelings.

I agree with you. But notice how much happiness serving your family brings you. Imagine extending that same service, with genuine and sincere love to all of life. Then the harvest of happiness would come, not just from the family service, but indeed from all of life. The obstacles you enumerated about an uncaring world are basically the ladders, which you must climb to pluck the fruit of joy. They are the steep pyramids to lead you to heights of happiness.

Sir, it is very difficult to extend love to the world.

I know, but that is the challenge. That is the price.

Can one ever be able to serve and love others as one loves one's own family?

Maybe not exactly. The love for outsiders does not have to be as passionate, physical and warm as that of your family, but at least you can give goodwill. You can have no evil thought against anyone. You can sincerely wish everybody well and mean it. You can genuinely give a present of goodwill to everyone.

Let all who meet you be lifted in some way. Give without ceasing. Serve with sincerity. Do to others only things that would uplift them. Be ready always to assist with a heart of love; gladly, willingly, and cheerfully. Do these and the spark of joy will ever dwell in your eyes and in your heart?

So that is your secret?

You have called it so.

I am awfully grateful to you.

I am grateful to you too, for helping me to share; for you are indeed assisting me with my job as an assistant of life, whether you know it or not.

Haa...ha...ha! That sounds like being your apprentice.

With gladness, I would like to have you.

Chapter Nine

KNOW YOUR TRUE SELF

It rained heavily this morning. The roads were flooded, and traffic was bad. Slow, sluggish. It took longer to get to the interview venue than we anticipated. Cars swam through the lakes that were the roads. Some got unsolicited water baptism as vehicles splashed through the waters. At the bus stops many were drenched, shivering and waiting. It was cold and damp. The atmosphere was moody and sombre.

But this was in sharp contrast to the warmth that greeted us, as we stepped into the sitting-room of our interview subject today. He beamed as he saw us, eyes lit up like torchlight. He offered us warm water in tea cups.

It was a strange but welcome offer as far as I was concerned. I surveyed the smallish looking man, in his robes. He wore beards with streaks of grey. His eyes were small, and when he smiled, as he did often, they elongated in a single slit, like a shy cut on a skin. His laughter was full and rich, sounded like a choir.

Sir, thank you for granting us this interview.

Oh, it is my pleasure to have you here. Welcome. Welcome indeed. It must have been interesting arriving here so early in spite of the rain.

Yes, it was quite an experience but we are glad we made it here on time. The scenes on the road were quite depressing. Maybe it is the rain. Generally, when it rains people are not as happy or bright as they ordinarily are. Do you notice?

Sure I notice. It happens to a lot of the people. But not to all, I must say.

Does it happen to you?

What?

I mean do you get moody, generally, when it rains? Does it dampen you in some way?

No, why should it?

Why not? When everywhere is wet, damp, cold...

Yes, so what? No matter the weather, I am happy.

Precisely, how do you do it?

How? I don't get your question? You mean how do I remain happy in spite of the damp environment?

Yes, Sir.

Do you mean that figuratively or literally?

Well, first literally. How do you do it?

Simple. I am not the weather. I am. The weather is. We may be related. But we are not the same. I have freedom to be as I choose, in spite of the weather.

Doesn't the weather affect you? Like when it gets cold or wet, or damp?

Let me see if I understand what you mean. If I place my body under the rain, of course my physical body will get wet. But that is my physical body. Not me. Not Soul. Not even my mind. Not my emotion. It is just my physical body that gets wet. I, as Soul, I never get wet. I am always bright, sprightly, beautiful and happy.

Excuse me, you have said so many things, please let me try to follow. Are you saying you are not this person I am seeing? This physical being that I can touch?

You are funny. But seriously I am not this being you are looking at. What you are looking at is my physical shell. It is not me. Just like your clothes are not you. They are the covering of your physical body. So your clothes getting wet, does not mean you getting wet, or does it?

I am still confused.

No, do not be. The matter is very straightforward.

But it is not clear to me, sir.

Okay, let me put it this way. Do you know that you are created by God? Do you know that you were created from the Holy Spirit?

No, what I know is what we are taught; that God put his breath in man, and man became a living Soul.

Good. Even that is good enough. So you are made from the breath of God?

Yes.

Excellent! But notice that the Holy Spirit is the breath of God.

Yes.

So you are a living Soul as you say, made from the fabric of the Holy Spirit.

Yes.

Good. So now you know you are Soul, individualised Spirit. Ever happy.

Ever happy?

Yes, ever happy. Soul, by nature, is happy.

But sometimes I am sad.

By choice upon the use, or wrongful use, of the mind. Soul is like a prince, dressed in golden light but free to roam, as it wills. Sometimes it can roam to regions of dirt, as it likes. But it does not mean that because it is in the region of dirt, it is itself, dirty. But Soul can permit the mind to play that trick on it. So by being in a dirty or damp environment, Soul can decide to assume oneness with the environment, and thus feel dirty or damp. It is the choice of Soul. But that choice does not negate or nullify the happy nature of Soul.

So whether the environment is wet, damp or cold as the case may be, Soul reserves the right to remain its happy self?

Fantastic! You got it. Now I think what is generally missing is the lack of awareness that we are Soul, and not the body. And that the body is subject to us, as Soul. Not the other way round. There is also general ignorance that Soul is happy, by nature. The whole strive of

man to find happiness is a preoccupation to rediscover his timeless happy nature as Soul.

What I say here is by no means original. It has been repeated and regurgitated in many forms through history. One of the most popular means of expressing this idea is probably the Socratic command 'Man know thyself!'

So what you are saying here is that once I know my true self, I find happiness?

Of course! For we are happiness itself. Happiness is the very chemistry of our makeup as Soul. This knowledge and a continuous reminder of it are bound to induct our bodies with happiness. It even gets better when we begin to express ourselves as Soul. And eventually come to the full realisation that we are truly the captains of our own ships; where Soul is captain, and ship is our destiny in the ocean of life. For with the freedom Soul enjoys it can always create happy circumstances for its enjoyment, and thus reinforce the awareness that it is made of the fabric of happiness. That it is happiness by nature.

Unaffected by the weather or the changing moods of the world?

Thank you. Soul is like the sun or the moon, well beyond the vagaries of the earthly weather and more. Whether it rains or not, '*il ne fait rien*', as the French would say. The shining, the beaming, the happiness continues unadulterated as long as we remain conscious of who we are as Soul.

So to be happy?

Live as Soul.

But how?

I think I have said enough. But if I must add, please know that the chief characteristic of God, Spirit and Soul, is Love, Divine Love. Love without expectation of rewards. Practise this to the best of your ability and it will surely lead you to true and lasting happiness. *A bientot!*

Chapter Ten

FASTING

What was the use of attending, if you were not going to eat?

I came to honour your invitation.

But that presupposes that you also enjoy the food which we have prepared for the occasion.

Please do not get it wrong. I truly appreciate the invitation. And I deeply share in the joy and significance of today's occasion.

Then why don't you take some food?

Now I see you are really getting concerned. If you've got a few minutes let's take a short walk.

Sure, you are today my most important guest and I would really have loved to see you enjoy our food with us.

But who says I am not enjoying the food?

The one you have not tasted?

The fact that others are enjoying it, and I am part of the merry making is enough.

As you can see it is not enough for us, the hosts. We would have liked to have you taste something.

Would you have preferred that I did not honour your invitation on the grounds of a fast?

You mean you are fasting?

It has become necessary to tell, so I do not spoil your mood on your birthday.

Oh! I see. Now I understand. Forgive me, but is there any special reason for the fast? We, your friends, could join if need be.

You could join in for a fast, one day in every week of your life?

Why one day, every week of my life?

It is just a routine fast for no special reason, but to help put attention more on spiritual things and less on the material and physical.

Is it part of the injunction of your faith?

Yes and no. It is recommended in my religion, but not a command. People can choose to fast or not to fast. People could modify their fast, in fact. Some prefer the dry fast; that is fast without taking anything from dawn to dusk. Others take only water throughout, some others do the fruit fast, in which case they take only fruits throughout the period.

This must take a lot of discipline, for it to be done routinely a day every week.

For us, our choice day for fasting is Friday. You can join if you like and see if it is good for you. I am definite it is good practice. And I can say with certainty that even outside the spiritual benefits you would see clear benefits regarding your physical health as well.

Now you are joking.

No, seriously the fast is an excellent health tonic. It particularly provides a reprieve period when your body system rejuvenates and cleanses itself of impurities. It is an excellent discipline for health.

You mean it? Is it part of the secret of your good health?

I must say that it is. I enjoy my Friday fast, because of the spiritual and physical blessings that it bestows. Generally I put a lot of attention on my health. I think it is well worth it. Life without good health is inconvenient and painful and unhappy.

You know this is a lesson, which many people have not learnt. The pursuit of material achievement, and the rush to win the rat race, whatever that means, completely pushes questions of health to the back burner. So easily, stress and other distressing ailments build up in the body until it is too late and then you are forced to take up regular appointments with doctors and hospital beds.

What you are saying makes a lot of sense. In the course of daily hustling, we find no time to unwind or take care of our bodies. So, sooner or later illness forces us to make the time, at great inconvenience and even at most inauspicious times, not to speak of the pain.

You have never attended any of my counselling clinics. One of the things we deal with is this whole question of striving to live the balanced life. It is really ironical that people stress so much to provide the comfort of life for themselves. And they usually succeed in gaining the material but losing their health, which should help them enjoy the proceeds of their sweat, in the first place.

This is probably the message I really needed most to hear today. It is probably my best birthday present.

I am glad you see it as such. The pursuit of happiness can be such a mirage, such an elusive target, if we do not enjoy good physical health. Life appears to lose its salt, when the physical body is unwell. So I always advise my clients to invest on their health; exercise daily, even if for a few minutes, generously have fruits and vegetables and watch the kind of food they eat.

What do you mean by watch the kind of food they eat?

Food should be an extension of medication. That is what I think. Your food should assist in running the body, not in ruining it.

What kinds of food ruin the body?

I am sure your nutrition expert can guide you on that. But really do put some attention on good health, and see how much of a booster of happiness it is.

Chapter Eleven

LAUGHING AT ME

Eresia had two wives. Both wives were once my friends. We were all school mates in secondary school. I knew them both fairly well. Leka and Ulakun.

Leka was fair, almost half-cast, and slim, with a small but pointed nose. She carried herself with elegance and grace. When she walked it was with a spring on her feet. Her smile was sweet, revealing a set of sparkling rows of teeth. But she had a poor sense of humour. She was arrogant and touchy.

This was in sharp contrast to Ulakun who was fat, and looked older than her true age then. But she was very jovial and full of humour. She was dark in complexion, with a full chest, which her good height could not quite conceal. When she walked her legs bent out sideways making an inverted V while her knees struggled in friction against each other. Some said she had a 'K' leg. She was the butt of jokes in class.

But the strange thing about Ula, as we called her, was that she laughed loudest when you tried to make fun of her funny features. She would laugh until tears stood in her large lovely eyes. A newcomer would never know she was the person being ridiculed by the rest of us, her classmates. She was such a sweet jolly fellow, with what today I understand as a great sense of humour.

In character Ula and Leka were poles apart, almost opposites. Naturally, both did not get on well in class. They seemed to belong to two separate clusters of female friends. Although Leka was from a fairly humble background that struggled to pay her fees, she carried herself with stupendous arrogance. She was snobbish and rude. She was really a contrast to Ula, who was easy going, from a well to do family, generous with gifts, humble and warm.

How they ended up marrying the same man is a mystery, which I would rather allow to rest in the carrot-coloured store of memory.

Forgive, reader, I had to detour to Ula and Leka because my interview-subject today, an old woman, Kitiana, adulteration of Christiana, whose only means of communicating with me was our local dialect had referred to them.

Kitiana's face is lined with the grooves of age, but her eyes sparkle like two little balls of crystal in the sun. She is devoutly religious, and an unsung village counsellor, especially of young couples. Her wisdom attracts me to her. I thought we should, today,

talk about happiness. I thought she would have some uncanny insights, which I could share with you.

It was in trying to illustrate her points on happiness that she referred to Leka and Ula. They were now her daughters-in-law. She predicted that Leka was going to age faster than Ula although Ula was the first wife and slightly older.

Why, Mama?

Because Ula likes to laugh.

I agree.

What I like best about Ula is the way she laughs at herself. When we married her, my younger children did not support the marriage. They were not happy with her looks. But I loved Ula from the day I met her. She had beauty that the eyes could not see. And that was the kind of woman that I wished for my first son. My wish was realised in Ula.

Mama, I do not know where you are going to land with these illustrations, but I just mean to remind you that what we are talking about here are secrets of happiness.

Exactly, that is what I am sharing with you. I am sharing what God and experience have taught me. I referred to age and the process of aging because there is a relationship between habits of happiness and aging. Ula knows how to stay young for my son.

How, Mama?

Through her sense of humour. She laughs at herself. It is a great quality. Instead of getting bitter with a correction or even an abuse she turns it into a joke, and laughs at herself. That way her heart is hardly bitter. In spite of the fact that her husband defaulted in putting Leka in the family way and then being forced to marry her, Ula still enjoys a good relationship with her husband. And I believe it is because of her sense of humour. Her husband enjoys her company.

I see.

Let's face it. Who likes an ever frowning face and touchy heart that takes offence at every bit of misbehaviour?

Nobody.

Nobody. Of course, nobody. Cheerfulness is good for company. But above all it is good for happiness. And it is good for health, and from my experience, it is good for retaining youthfulness. A man who is always cheerful will never age early. And to remain cheerful, people should not take things too seriously. Occasionally yes, but for most of the time, find the humour in every event and enjoy it. From that point of view Ula is my heroine. They say her face is ugly and her legs even uglier, but for me she is the most beautiful girl on the face of this earth. If I had girl children, I would have ensured that they imitated Ula.

You love her that much?

Believe me, my son. It is a wonderful trait to have in men and in women. If you do not have it already, try to cultivate it. If your wife does not have it, encourage her to do the same. Tell her that I, Kitiana, the old, feeble woman in your village that walks on three legs, said so... ha, ha”

Mama, I cannot see the third leg.

What do you call this my support stick here? Leg, of course. Without it can I stand or walk?

Mama, you are so funny.

You better be funny too, and above all find humour in laughing at yourself. I recommend it. Tell anyone that a toothless old woman in your village, called Kitiana, said so. Listen, boy, if not for humour do you think I would have lived till now? I would probably have killed myself in sorrow. Do you know that I was childless in this village for a long time? I gave birth when everybody had given up hope, including my husband. Why do you think Ula’s husband’s name is Eresia? It means unthought-of, unexpected. Against the ridicule and pressure of the village, God gave me a sense of humour that helped me survive.

Thank you, Mama. Thank you, so much. I wish I could stay longer but I must go now. I will be back.

Thank you, too, my son. My warm regards to your wife. Tell her to take care of you, her husband, very well otherwise I would find my way there and become your second wife!”

And we both laughed!

Chapter Twelve

A TIME TO SOW

Sir, I wonder if you have ever come across my newspaper column.

Yes, I have. I recognise your face from your mini picture. I however notice that lately you have been volunteering descriptions and in cases initials of your resource persons.

Yes, sir. I do that at times.

I do not know about the others you have spoken to, but I would not like any descriptions of me.

I would respect that.

Now straight to the business you have come for. As you must know by now there are innumerable paths to happiness. Still there is only one path. But do not let the paradox throw you. Let's rather talk about something as common place as my hobby.

What is your hobby, sir?

Before I come to my particular hobby, the point I wish to begin with is that people who seek happiness should have hobbies. Something to do just for the love, for the joy, for the enjoyment, for the giving and sharing.”

Sir, what you have just said reminds me of a conversation I had yesterday with the Chief Executive Officer of a local bank. I had asked if he had any hobby to help him relax. He actually scoffed at the question. For him, at this time of his career, hobbies are a waste.

What a pity? He probably needs to know how much of a window of love these hobbies are. He needs to ventilate his heart and let in some freshness. It should help to greater vigour and interest in what he does for a living. Shut your love windows and you are actually a working corpse. For love is life. Life without love is hell unimaginable.

So what is your own hobby, sir, if we might get on to that question now?

My hobby is gardening. I love to plant seeds and watch the wonders of their first sprout, and opening. For me it is a miracle to behold the enigma of life, growth and beauty. The hobby opens the doors of my heart every time and fills me with joy beyond words. When I speak of this love of my gardening, I believe my eyes light up even more, for truly it gives me so much happiness. Any time a seed transforms into a tiny little plant, it recreates the marvel of creation. Sometimes I wonder at the joy that God must feel in watching things such as seeds nurtured over years, grow into full maturity.

I wonder too.

But you can find the same joy at your own level, in planting a seed and watching it grow. It is an exercise, which I often have children partake in. It helps their sense of wonder at the miracle of life. I recommend it to you and to your readers. It is cheap and easy but the harvest of joy and happiness is rich.

How often are you in your garden?

Everyday, as much as I can help it. You see, the seeds I plant are my responsibility. I feel responsible for helping to bring them to life. As I plant, I see myself as God's extension worker, helping to materialise His dream for greater life and abundance. I see myself as undertaking a deep spiritual and divine assignment in planting those seeds and watching them grow. The plants become like a part of my family, that I must care for, that I am responsible for.

Do you ever lose some plants, in spite of the care?

Hardly. But even if that happened for whatever reason, I would still be grateful for the opportunity to have shared some intimate moments with that slice of life, that slice of God that came in the guise of a little plant. Do you have a garden yourself?

No, but I do have some potted plants and flowers, because I love flowers. But I had never looked at them in the sense in which you speak of the plants today, as possibly members of the family, completely dependent on me for critical elements of survival.

You know the best of it all? Gardening is an avenue for me to practise Divine Love. Divine Love is giving or loving without any thought of a return gratitude or reward; just giving for the joy of giving.

How does that apply?

Loving plants simply for their sake. The plants are never able to say thank you for love. They will never be able to help win a contract, or find a job. They do not get involved in selfish human calculations. They just are. Love them or leave them.

But who practises Divine Love these days? In the hustle of everyday life, people are very manipulative. They do sweet things; say lovely things always with a motive of gain. Even a hearty good morning these days from a neighbour may mean that a request is coming.”

Is it then a surprise that so many people are not happy? People may flash phony smiles, just to deceive, but in their hearts, do they feel the love of God? Do they feel Divine Love? Do they feel the source of happiness? Do they touch the garment of God?

Happiness, my son, is hidden in the simple things of life. Things as simple and mundane as planting a seed, watering it and watching it grow.

Many would see this kind of hobby as childish.

No, my son. The word you are looking for is child-like. Is it a wonder that children find happiness easily, while their parents grope in endless, fruitless search? The gifts of heaven are for the children. Those who think they know may never know. The babes, who know nothing and wonder at everything, know everything. The paradox again. But don't let it throw you.

So, sir, if I were to take a simple sentence message today from you as recipe for happiness, what would it be?

It would be as simple as Join me, let's together marvel at the wonder of creation, in planting seeds, watering them, and watching them grow. This will open your heart, in ways you never thought possible.

I am grateful sir.

So am I! You have made my day. May the blessings be!

Chapter Thirteen

A HEART OF GRATITUDE

Sir, I have done many interviews in the course of this series, but for once I am tempted to deviate from my primary concern of the paths to happiness.

Why?

Because too many good sections of life shoot out from you so poignantly that I am tempted to focus on them.

Things like what?

Frankly, I do not know which to start with. Should I for instance concern myself with your secrets to such great wealth and riches, which you possess? Or should I try to extract from you the secret of what seems like eternal youth which you possess? Or should I try to find out why your health seems to be in such excellent condition? Or is it the ever-present sweet calmness on your face? Or the almost palpable joy around you all the time? There is so much to learn from you. I am confused.

You are so kind to credit me with all these goodness. I thank you. And I thank God who makes it all happen. If you really want to know, I hardly deserve any credit at all.

What do you mean?

I mean that all the credit belongs to God Almighty. And I do not mean that in the usual frivolous sense just to appear humble before you. That is absolutely unnecessary.

How do you mean it then?

I mean it in the simplicity in which I have said it. My experience is that it is God, and only God that truly makes it all happen.

But you must have strived. You must have paid your dues.

What dues? How much dues have I paid more than others? There are many more out there who are more handsome, more faithful to their religions, more hardworking, more intelligent, more armed with knowledge, but who may not be enjoying a minute fraction of what I daily take for granted.

You are so self-deprecating.

No, no, no, seriously that is not the issue. I am merely emphasising that I truly owe it all to God Almighty. I have not in any way deserved what I have got in life. At the beginning I used to arrogate to myself achievements which I thought were largely due to my work. But all that, I know today, is fallacious. There are many out there better than I, in so many ways, but who are not half as lucky.

What made the difference then?

What else? The grace of God, of course.

Don't the others also enjoy that grace of God?

Of course we all do. It is a blanket grace. It is an unquestioning grace. It is a non-judgemental grace. It is a non-value grace. It is an unconditional grace. But it is live-grace, only upon acceptance. And in many cases, the depth of acceptance translates to the depth of grace that we enjoy.

So the critical difference is in the acceptance of the grace?

Yes, my brother. I cannot find another reason for the difference but total acceptance and active submission to the will and guidance of the Invisible Guide, which is however visible to some. And, of course, a heart and attitude of gratitude.

Please correct me if I am wrong. You are saying that there are three elements responsible for your happiness in every sphere of your life?

Yes.

You say they are One, Total Acceptance of the Grace of God. Two, Active Submission to the Will and Guidance of the Invisible Guide, who is however visible to some. Three, A Heart and Attitude of Gratitude.

Correct. That is my recipe for happiness any day, any time. In fact to keep it simpler, I would say that my fast track, digital link if you like, to

happiness is a heart and attitude of gratitude. That third element encapsulates the other two.

How can one internalise this attitude?

You said it. It is an attitude. To imbibe a new attitude, is to practise, practise, and practise.

So one should practise gratitude?

Yes. By all means, if you desire to be happy. My experience is that gratitude is the shortest cut to God. And it is also the shortest to happiness.

Really? So gratitude is the secret of happiness?

That is my experience. That is what I have found for myself. No matter the situation, once I can tune my mind to what I call the channel of gratitude, that which was seemingly grave begins to find its grave, and I can then find my wings to dizzying heights of happiness.

Do you mean gratitude to God or to your family or the social life around you or what?

I mean gratitude to everything that has life. But above all, I mean gratitude to God Almighty.

Gratitude for what really?

Gratitude for everything. Gratitude for life. Gratitude for health. Gratitude for family. Gratitude for business. Gratitude for food on the table. Gratitude for protection. Gratitude for affection. Gratitude for joy. Gratitude for laughter. Gratitude for oneness. Gratitude for peace. Gratitude for yesterday. Gratitude for today. Gratitude for tomorrow. Where shall we begin? Where shall we end? Everything begins and ends in the womb of God, whether we know it or not.

Tuning in to this channel of gratitude suddenly brightens your mood?

That is an understatement. Tuning in to the channel of gratitude catapults me to moods of heaven. It enlarges my heart until it completely envelops me in its balm of sweetness. And where I am deeply, sincerely grateful, I feel the electric vibrations of joy run through my entire being. And I am not ashamed to admit that sometimes the joy overflows down my cheeks and I cry like a baby.

Chapter Fourteen

LET THE MUSIC PLAY

Still on your quest for happiness?

You guessed right. That is why I am here.

Now what can I tell you?

You know what to tell me.

What?

How to find happiness. That's what my column is about.

Yes, yes, yes, I read the column myself.

You like it?

Oh yes, I do.

Glad. Today it is your turn to contribute.

I know, and I will. I was only trying to figure out how to convince you that I am serious when I tell you what I have to contribute.

What, sir? I am glad to hear it. We can go straight to the point.

Exactly what I intend doing.

So what is the secret of happiness?

Listening.

Oh my God. How?

Just listening. Opening your ears and paying attention.

Attention to what?

Attention to yourself. Attention to your inner being. Attention to your make-up. Attention to you as Soul. Attention to God within. Attention to the music of the ethers. Attention to happiness as sound.

Now I am totally lost. Sir, please be patient with me. Please explain to me, so I can understand. I do not seem to follow.

Relax, what I say is nothing complicated at all. You have merely complicated my simple words with your sophisticated scholarly mind. I do not at all mean to be scholarly. I mean to be simple and clear. So take the words I have spoken simply.

Simply?

Yes, simply.

You mean that listening is a path to happiness?

Yes, especially listening to the music within.

What music?

Inside you. Inside me. Inside all of us, there is an ever-playing music. It is the music of God. It is happiness as sound.

How do I do this?

Again it is simple. Put your attention within. Another way of saying it is, open your spiritual ears.

Oh my God. I have heard about spiritual eye. The third eye. The tisra til. The door of Soul. But never of spiritual ears.

That you have never heard of them does not deprive you of their ownership. It is just that you have them but do not use them. If you have money bequeathed to you by a relative, and you are not aware of it; it does not take away the fact that it is yours legitimately. The day you know, you claim it.

So there are spiritual ears?

Very much so.

There are eyes for seeing and ears for hearing. The twin manifestation of God is often as light and sound. The spiritual eyes see the light. The spiritual ears hear the sound. Usually in the sound is

the light, and in the light is the sound, although some people may perceive them as two different manifestations. But that is probably taking you too far afield. Let us return to your basic quest for happiness.

So how do you get the spiritual ear to hear?

Let me confess that this is both a simple and a complex question. It is simple for some who have had certain kinds of spiritual privilege and training. All they do is simply shift their attention to the inner side of their being and they can hear the music of God. And that is what I referred to earlier as happiness, as sound. It is a most uplifting and enlightening sound. But for most of the people, it is advised that they still try to shift their attention inside and listen to the silence. This silence can be heard because it is itself a sound, but one of fine vibration. And it is part of the music of God. The music of happiness.

This presupposes that one must find a quiet place to do this listening?

Generally yes. Even though I must add that there are many spiritual students who can hear the quiet even in the midst of a rowdy meeting. But it is advisable to find a quiet place and period, when you can hardly hear any external sound. Find a comfortable place to sit, shut your eyes to avoid distractions, relax, and simply listen to the silence.

This is part of the music of happiness?

You can also call it the food of love for in listening with an open heart you are actually refuelling your being with Divine Love and Happiness.

Because of the necessary quiet would it be best to do this exercise in the morning?

Any time actually. The important thing is to find the right quiet conditions, although I agree that for many practical reasons it is easier to locate such times in the early mornings.

So the listening helps to boost happiness?

Yes. It helps to fill one with contentment and joy. It fills one with God-like characteristics of joy, freedom, wisdom etc. And this generally tends to fortify one against the temptation of the world. It provides us with better happiness stamina, to withstand the taunts and

tantrums of this world. It fills our tanks of happiness so we can journey into the day with good shock absorbers to sail easy over the possible potholes, gullies and gutters of the day.

How often would you recommend me doing this exercise?

At least once a day.

For how long a day?

It all depends on you. Maybe 10 minutes, may be 15, may be 20. Over time, no one would need to remind you to practice your quiet time, because you will know the difference by experience.

How can I thank you?

It is I who owe you gratitude. Thanks very much for coming. God is always with you.

Chapter Fifteen

APPRECIATE THE MOMENT

Sir, in the midst of all the confusion in the world, how can we find happiness?

You are looking for happiness?

Yes sir, that is why my microphone has been roving from place to place for the past 6 months now, trying to get clues from the likes of you.

But you must have found it by now. I have been following your column myself and have found it particularly enriching. It has covered so much and given so many clues to achieving the elusive state of happiness. I doubt that there is much I can add.

Sir, I believe there is much you can add.

Why do you think so?

Sir, you know better than I do that the wisdom of God is boundless. The quest for true happiness surely is the quest for the Highest. So it is the Highest that may be informing the rest of us through channels like you.

I am glad you put it that way. I hope that God uses me as a channel even as I discuss with you today, and if there is something to be added to what others have contributed, I am glad to be the voice for saying it.

I am glad you now see it as such. So what is the secret of true happiness?

What shall I say? Maybe I should put it somewhat differently and ask what is the secret of God?

It is your question still.

I know. The secret of God, the secret of realising God in one's being, in one's presence, in one's situation, is immediate, moment to moment recognition of ITS presence.

IT?

Yes, IT. For God is beyond gender.

I see. Sorry for the interruption. You were driving towards a point, about the moment to moment recognition.

Yes, the reality of God in our lives requires a moment to moment recognition, or better still, a moment to moment appreciation of the Divine presence. But the Divine presence, by definition, confers true happiness.

So?

So finding true happiness is a moment to moment realisation. That is why I guess it is a slippery state of consciousness. One moment you seem to have it, another moment it is all gone.

Please go ahead, sir. I am listening.

The point I am making is that happiness has to be won, on a moment-to-moment basis, just like the realisation of God in our lives, through perpetual appreciation.

Perpetual appreciation of happiness?

No, rather perpetual appreciation of the grace and gifts of the moment. That is what confers the tingling excitement of happiness. We should practice uninterrupted appreciation of life every moment, no matter the place, the event, the time, and the circumstances.

So your recommendation is that we appreciate every moment?

Yes, recognise the Divinity, the life, the opportunity, the gift, the grace and the holiness of every second given to you as from the heart of God.

So one should continuously be grateful for the gift of life in order to find true happiness?

Be continuously grateful for the moment and for all with you in that moment, for all of them are gifts from God.

You mean if I find myself in a bus now, for instance, I should be grateful for being there. You mean I should be grateful for the bus, for the people in the bus, for the comedies of the moment, for the comfort or discomfort?

Yes, my son. I mean all of that and more. I mean also that you deeply show appreciation for every soul or person that you meet. For everyone that you serve or that serves you are Divine gifts coming to you in very subtle ways. All are harbingers of true happiness. Happiness is everything and everything is happiness.

Those were almost the words of my 5-year old child.

Your child said so?

Yes, sir. I was dazed. I could have been concerned, if I had not been taught that Higher Wisdom often finds children fine vessels for passing on Its message to the waiting world.

Surely, it is amazing having such wisdom coming from a child. But it is true that children are worthy channels of the Divine Wisdom; if only we would pay them attention and listen more to them.

Sir, let us return to the advice you were giving. Are you saying that we should appreciate all that we meet?

Yes. It should always be a privilege to meet another soul. The meeting of souls is always an opportunity for more learning, and for more wisdom, and for more happiness. Appreciate the gift of having others in your life at every turn, no matter how fleeting. Be appreciative of your boss, be appreciative of your father, be appreciative of your sister, be appreciative of your opponent, be appreciative of your competitor, be appreciative of your friends, or your colleagues. These are all God's gift to you.

How?

I am afraid I will not be drawn into a mental discussion. My suggestion to you and your readers is that you practice and learn by your own experience whether this approach wins you more happiness or not.

So the secret is in appreciation?

Yes, the secret is in appreciation. Once you are spiritually tuned to this vibration of appreciation, you have automatically done several things at once. You have declared and acknowledged the presence of the Divine One in that moment. You have also acknowledged that all things come to you from that Divine pool as gifts of grace. You have also set up a direct line of communication with the Gift Giver, who now knows that you recognize ITS presence, and thus is encouraged to give you more.

Could this explain the common wisdom that the appreciative ones increase?

Sure. Indeed, why not? For appreciation means increase. When something appreciates it is known to have increased. With appreciation increase is a given. Appreciate more and see how much increase of happiness and general goodness you bring to your life.

Sir, how can I thank you. From the bottom of my heart I really appreciate your time and wisdom. I feel exalted. I feel excited.

Chapter Sixteen

BE GENEROUS, FREELY GIVE

Mister *How to Find Happiness!* What brings you here this morning?

To talk.

You should be enjoying your forced holiday from the nationwide strike.

It is rather an opportunity for me to catch up on my interviews, ma.

How did you get here? No molestations on the road by protesters?

No, surprisingly the roads were empty and free.

It is very generous of you to deploy your time this way for a non-paying venture like running a column these days in the dailies.

I appreciate your kind words, ma. But I think you are rather generous on me. What I am doing is no big deal.

I insist that it is.

You are so generous and so kind. But let me turn the focus to you; to the reason why I am here, to interview you as you must have guessed about your secrets of happiness; secrets I could share with my readers.

I know that is why you are here, but I wonder if I have any secrets to share with you. (Pause) Maybe there are.

What could they be, madam?

Generosity is one virtue I know that will always deliver abundance of happiness to your heart. There is never a generous man without a heart full of gladness. That is what I believe, and evidence, which you also can investigate, would bear this out.

I know generosity. It is a common word we use to mean dashing people things. I do not want to take my common sense understanding

of the meaning of the word without hearing your own definition. So when you say generosity what exactly do you mean?

I think I mean what you know. Generosity is giving, but more importantly, it is giving freely. Between those two there is a major difference.

Please explain, ma.

Giving with intent to receive any form of reward, cash, position, recognition, and etcetera is different from giving without any thought of gain. The generosity I refer to is the latter. A truly generous person is no scheming giver. He is no calculating giver anticipating dividends from the gift given. A gift from a generous heart is one totally without strings, without expectations of reward.

Forgive me, ma, but more clarity is required please. If I give a gift to a charity home for instance and I have the media cover the event for public kudos or image purposes, you would not regard that as generosity?

Strictly no. At least not for me; but which is not to say that those who do so are wrong. No, they must have their reasons. It is just that it does not fit into my particular definition.

I understand, ma. What if I make a huge public contribution to my church, and spontaneously have the congregation give me a rousing ovation. It would not fit into your definition?

No, not quite.

What if I pay an indigent girl's school fees, so I could befriend or marry her?

No, I am sorry it would not fit. The generosity for me that counts and yields load of happiness is the one done in secret, almost anonymously, and without thought of gain. To be sure, the secret giving could also take place in public. The critical thing is that there must be no **motive** of gain. If a gain happens to come through the inexplicable workings of life, fine. But it should not be the reason for the generosity. It is not like a politician handing out fortunes so he could win elections, for instance. That would not fit.

So the motive is really what makes the distinction?

Yes. In the motive is everything, in this case. Hence the emphasis on giving freely. Without strings. Without thoughts of repayments or rewards. Without conditions. In a sense, to give like God.

That is tough.

No, no it is not. It is a matter of love, and of discipline.

Is the generosity you refer to limited to material giving?

No, not all. Sorry if I gave that impression. Material giving is only one small aspect or way of giving. There are more and probably more important means of giving freely.

Like what?

Like forgiveness without conditions. That is giving greatly and freely. Like kindness in the way we treat people, the way we talk to them, the way we approach them with love. Those are also great ways to give freely, without expectation of reward. Especially if we give the kindness to all, irrespective of what they think, or how they act towards us. That is generosity.

Interesting.

Yes, it is. And so is holding beautiful thoughts of all, irrespective of how they think of us. To sincerely wish everybody well and mean it from the bottom of the heart is great generosity, for no one sees your heart. Only you know what thoughts you harbour for the next person. It is really in the utmost secrecy of the heart that generosity finds its quintessence. For indeed generosity is a matter of the heart. I can imagine that nothing gladdens the heart of God more than the giving from a generous and cheerful heart.

So giving in secret but with a grumble is not generosity?

I have doubts. The key word is **freely**, meaning happily, sweetly, cheerfully, willingly, voluntarily, eagerly, lovingly.

I see.

I am glad you see. Be generous my son, it is the secret of happiness that you have been looking for. Be generous with compliments to people, especially sincere compliments. Actively look out for the

good in others and compliment them. Do it with relish. Do it with love. But do it with sincerity.

Please continue, ma.

I have given you what you are looking for. Give freely. Give generously. Never miss to commend the goodness in others. See all as precious creatures of God, respect and appreciate their unique gifts and presence. That is generosity. In your thought, be generous. Think kindly of people. Think kindly of places. Quietly bless without ceasing, seeking neither recognition nor money. That is true generosity. Do these and watch your heart blossom with gladness. Do this and experience God massage your heart with sweetness, and closeness you never thought possible.

Really?

May your experiences answer your question.

Chapter Seventeen

ENJOY THE PRICE

Nicholas! Long, long time. Where have you been?

In Nigeria.

Are you in business or working some place?

I work in a regular but large firm.

Great! You must be doing well.

I am glad to say that I am.

I am not surprised. You have always been much focussed. Very optimistic. And always ready to pay the price of success.

You were not much different either.

But you are outstanding.

I must say that I have learnt over the years that the concept of paying the price of success that we had in the university was not quite right.

Really?

Maybe that is putting it too strongly. We were probably right in believing that we pay, but I have found that we should not actually be paying for success.

What should we be doing, if not paying? How do we achieve it?

What I have found is that rather than pay the price for success, we should be enjoying the price for success.

What is the difference?

Paying for success presupposes a certain level of pain or suffering leading to our object. But enjoying the price connotes happiness in course of the journey to success.

Now that sounds radical. But it appeals to me. So please expatiate.

What I mean is that the road, or better, the structured, designed road to success should be something that excites happiness with every step.

Exciting thought.

Let me illustrate. I am married to the most beautiful and wonderful woman in the world.

Nicholas! If you describe yours in such superlatives, how would you describe mine?

Relax, let me make my point. You see, before I got her to marry me, it was quite a struggle. And you know I am ugly. But I knew in my heart that she was my wife. I was convinced beyond all doubt. So I tried and tried and tried again.

Mister Die Hard!

Each time she rebuffed me, rather than feel sad, I was filled with gladness and excitement because I knew in my heart that every attempt was getting me closer to my goal, even then it was not evident. My friends wondered at the contradiction.

My man!

What they did not understand was that I knew that good things take time sometimes. And that the rough road to success should engender happiness, not sadness. To cut a long story short, in the end she agreed and today we are married.

With beautiful children?

I would say with fantastic children. For me, the journey to success is happiness, not suffering. Often when I want to drink from the pot of happiness, I set high goals for myself and begin the hard work. With each step along the way happiness fills my heart, in anticipation of success.

Your idea is fascinating.

Let me give you another example. You see in this country, the popular refrain on the lips of most graduates is 'No Job'. After school, I

refused to accept that song. As an accounts graduate, I asked myself what it was that companies look for in an accountant? I took my time to find out, and then set about acquiring them first of all. Within a short time, I had enough to begin the search for a suitable job, armed with due qualifications and professional affiliations.

Interesting.

I combed the newspaper that used to publish vacancies every week, along with other sources for vacancies. I set myself a goal of applying to at least eight jobs weekly.

Wait a minute. You mean you sent out 8 applications every week?

Say it loud. That was what I did. Within 10 months, I had sent out about 400 to 500 applications. And I enjoyed every bit of postage because I knew in my heart that the results would come.

Did you get replies?

At first none; indeed for nearly a year, the replies were not coming. But I kept on enjoying my price. My brother, when the replies now decided to start coming, they came in droves. Various interview calls from various parts of the country. I started choosing which ones to attend, and which ones to leave. And so also were the job offers.

You do not mean it?

I swear. As at the time I accepted to work in my current company, I had three other offers, equally juicy. My wife and I had to pray to make the right choice.

This is inspirational.

That is my experience. The road to success is strewn with happiness.

Really?

My brother that is the story of my life. Structured, designed road to success is my recommendation for happiness. As I am now, I am already looking ahead, enjoying the price of tomorrow's successes.

Nicholas, you have just written my next week's column.

You can't be serious.

Chapter Eighteen

CHOOSE JOY

It is a funny, interesting and beautiful world.

Why do you say so, Father?

I was just enjoying ruminating over the many contrasts there are in life.

I guess that is what makes life so colourful.

Yes, that is what makes life so colourful, and so full of choices, so full of alternatives. It is this abundance of options that makes choice so imperative.

The way you put it, it is almost as if choices are the prime defining factors of living.

You got it; for what is life without choices. It is the choices, which we make that enliven and effectuate the freedom that the Almighty extended to all of us. Choices activate our liberty and give meaning to our freedom. Choices are testimonials to the inexplicable generosity of God. It is in the boundless choices that are available to us, that one can begin to appreciate the unfathomable depth of the goodness of life.

But most people complain about the constraints of life. Some would rather live their lives differently. They would rather be happy, but they are sad, owing, as they say, to difficult conditions. They would rather be rich, but are poor. They would rather be free, but are slaves.

Good insight, son. But those constraints are all part of the choices they have freely made.

I beg your pardon?

You heard right. Those constraints that people complain about are direct choices that they themselves have made. Some of them may not have consciously made the choices, but ignorance is no excuse. If you throw a seed on a soil that meets all the conditions for it to sprout, it

would of course germinate. That you threw the seed consciously or not makes no difference.

Really?

You tell me. Does it make a difference? Does it make a difference that it is a child or a man who dips his hands in boiling water, knowingly or unknowingly? It does not matter. In either case the person would be hurt. So ignorance is no excuse. It is always in the place of Soul to know.

Can't some understanding be shown where it is for instance a child involved?

In the universe, Soul is equal to Soul. There is no adult, male or female Soul. The body in which a Soul chooses to manifest is again a matter of choice. It may be conscious or unconscious choice, but it is still a choice.

Life must be lived by choice. Whether in the physical or inner planes, it does not matter. To act is a choice, not to act is a choice, to be indifferent is a choice, to be kind is a choice, to be angry is a choice, to be stupid is a choice, to stand is a choice, to sit is a choice. Life is full of choices, no one can escape it. Whatever you do or think or say, is a choice. To be happy is a choice. To be sad is a choice.

This is tough to accept, I must confess.

Again acceptance or rejection of truth is a choice. So you are acting well within your freedom to choose to accept what I am telling you or not to accept. It is all your choice.

So you mean I can choose to be happy or be sad?

Surely, you can choose to be happy or to be sad. Happiness or sadness is like the clothes we wear. You can choose clothes for celebration or clothes for mourning. It is all a matter of choice.

I am interested in the happiness. Let us talk a little more about that.

That again is choice. You are still exercising your inalienable right of choice as Soul.

What can I do, Father, to choose happiness?

Just choose it. It is as simple as that. Keep your mind tuned to happy channels and of course you will remain happy.

Please explain, Father. This is getting very interesting.

This morning as we drove to work, I recall you were toying intermittently with the radio dial, looking for good happy music. Anywhere you found what you were looking for you left the dial there, until the channel programmed something else that did not interest you, then you searched for another channel with happy music.

Yes, I was doing that, looking for cool, love music.

Good. What you were doing with your radio dial is what you are expected to do with your mind. The world is full of incredible variations, permutations, and combinations. Each person or entity, like a radio station, transmits its own unique vibration into the atmosphere. So you have countless mini radio stations all around you broadcasting different frequencies of signals. Using your mind as the radio dial, you decide which ones to tune to. You follow?

Yes, I follow.

Since you want the happy channels, you make sure your dial always rests on the frequencies with happy vibrations. Let your mind feel steadily for joy. Let it continuously listen to joyful channels. Let it always sheer and participate, even if mentally, in the joy of others, known or unknown. Genuinely empathise with the happy ones and be genuinely grateful for the joyous events.

I guess it goes without saying that such a seeker of happiness like me should also avoid stations that transmit anger, hatred, jealousy, gossip and the like.

You got it! Let the seeker of happiness look continuously for happiness. Let him continuously give happiness to others.

I see.

But to give it, he must be continuously filled with it. As you know, no man can give what he does not have. To give happiness you must have it. That is why your mind must unceasingly feed on happy events, happy situations, happy dreams, happy words, happy people, happy thoughts, happy friends, and happy feelings.

So having been filled with happiness, you can give it with ease?

Not only do you give it with ease, it shines through you. You become, in a sense, a happy star, which radiates happiness. This is because you have exposed yourself so continuously to happiness that you have taken its nature. You know people unconsciously inherit the traits or characteristics of the people or events or situations that they are continuously exposed to.

So if you are continuously attached or exposed to happiness, you gradually become a personification of happiness?

Correct. Knowingly or not, you become a prophet of happiness. *Must you become a prophet of happiness to stay happy, Father?* Without

doubt, because happiness remains dormant in you as a potential until you give it. It is the continuous sharing that sparks the fire.

So the rules are, if I may summarise in trying to see that I have grasped the lesson:

- a. *Keep my mind dial continuous on happy stations.*
- b. *Share the resulting joy with others by giving them happiness in whatever way I can.*
- c. *This sharing is what ignites and sustains the happiness in me.*

Excellent! The only thing I would like to add is that in sharing happiness try to understand that you must respect the space of others. Do not assume that other people would like to be like you. Some may even prefer sadness, knowingly or not. You must respect others' choice.

Father, even where I mean well?

No matter how good your course or, better, how good you think your course is, never cross the boundaries of freedom of the next person. Present what you have, but do not push, do not force. Enjoy your channels of happiness. Subtly spread your good news, but grant others their right to have their choices, even if of sadness.

Chapter Nineteen

DON'T EXPECT GRATITUDE

Can you imagine that she could so bitterly bite the finger that fed her? I cannot believe that I could be so generous to her and receive ingratitude in return? Can you believe I bought her a brand new gold watch and she did not as much as say a word of thank you? These must be familiar questions.

Yes, I recognise them. I must have asked them sometime or the other too, in the past. They are common questions. There must be very few of your readers who have not asked such questions ever.

But must it be so? Must people turn so ungrateful for acts of kindness?

I do not know whether it must be so. But I know that it is so.

Why is it so?

I repeat; I do not know. Maybe it is because there are many ungrateful people in the world. But why bother with these questions?

Well, the reason I ask is because such negative reception of good deeds makes otherwise generous people sad and in some cases deter them from giving.

It shouldn't.

But it does. Everyone likes to be appreciated. If you do something nice to another, the least you expect is a form of gratitude.

But why do we have to expect gratitude?

I would rather say why not? It is natural. If you have done a kind deed to another, you deserve a thank you, at least.

So what if the beneficiary doesn't say thank you?

If he does not thank you, he discourages you, or in cases even annoys you.

But why should you be annoyed because someone did not thank you for a good deed?

Why shouldn't I be offended? I did something good to someone and he is ungrateful; it is just not right.

Why is it not right? Doesn't the person reserve the right to be grateful or not to be? Is there a law in any sphere, physical, psychic or spiritual, which says that people must be grateful for a good deed?

Well, none that I know.

Now that is the thing. So why are we usually so fussy about gratitude? I admit that ingratitude has its own natural consequences at all levels. But the consequences are the individual's choice and they come in perfect obedience of the order of the universe.

Are you encouraging people to be ungrateful?

No. Do not get me wrong. All I have said is that people can choose whether to be grateful or not and freely reap the consequences of their choice. The giver should not be concerned with what choice the receiver makes, whether to be grateful or not. I also believe that no receiver or potential receiver should stand in judgement over the giver or potential giver, regarding the choice to give or not to give.

I still do not get your point.

The point I am making is that none should stand in judgement over another for being ungrateful or otherwise. The universe has its immutable compensatory mechanisms. It meticulously hands the deserved consequences of our thoughts and actions to all with unflinching precision.

Therefore, if I do a good thing to someone I should not bother whether he says thank you or not?

Precisely! Mind your own business. And your business as a giver is to decide whether or not to give. And the business of the receiver is to decide whether or not to be grateful. Whether they know it or not they reap the due consequences of their actions, one way or the other.

I see.

What is generally missed is that when we complain of someone's ingratitude, we are actually judging that person. The advice of all the great teachers of character has always been that we should minimise judgement of others. They advise that we should avoid condemnation of any sort. Their preference is always that we give the benefit of doubt or even completely overlook what may appear as another's weakness. And I say appear because we may not have all the information to adequately grade an action a weakness or not. Often we do not. Or more frankly, cannot!

I see.

Maybe it helps to reorient our whole attitude towards giving, by asking ourselves Why do we give? Do we give for the thanks that we expect? Do we give for the kudos? Do we give as an investment? Do we give for love and love only?

If the giving is in the vein of generosity, surely the answer is that we give for love, and love only.

Excellent! Now if we give for love and for love alone, it means we give without expectation of reward. Correct?

Yes, that is my understanding.

Expectation of reward may include expression of gratitude, pay back, commitment, loyalty, and the like.

I see.

Secondly, my understanding is that giving for love is really another way of saying giving for God.

Yeah. I share same view.

I am glad you understand it. Now, the implication of doing something on behalf of God is that the credit should not belong to us. But to the One on whose behalf the deed is done. If the receiver wants to be grateful to God and show it in being grateful to you, the instrument by which God has reached him that is entirely his business. Not yours.

I am following.

Lastly, the expectation of reward causes so much disappointment in life, because too many people are simply ungrateful. So that as long as we carry the consciousness that expects gratitude for every kind gesture we get hurt and unhappy. Rather than enjoy the joy that comes from generosity, we reap sadness from disappointments. Now that is really sad.

Now I see.

I am glad you understand. Do not lose the joy that giving confers by expecting rewards for your generosity. Rather, act purely as a detached giver; more like a messenger. Give without seeking reward or gratitude in any form.

If gratitude comes, fine, be grateful. If it does not, fine, be grateful still. That way your joy from giving keeps multiplying, irrespective of the attitude of the beneficiary.

Chapter Twenty

ENJOY THE CHILD

Your countenance has suddenly changed. The aggressive face I saw this morning has suddenly transformed into a sweet smiler. What changed?

I went to a clinic.

I did not realize clinics have that transforming effect on people.

It depends on what you go for.

What did you go for that transformed your countenance?

I went to visit a friend's wife, who had just had a baby.

Yes...?

Yes, that's it.

Was the effect from the clinic staff or the friend's wife or the baby?

The baby, of course. Harmless and charming as he lay, he wiped away all my anger. His touch was a master tonic. His looks a wonderful energiser. His eyes were simply heaven. Babies always have a fantastic effect on people. How sad can you be that a baby will not make you happy?

Shall I read you to mean that people should keep making babies to be happy?

Surely there is nothing wrong with making babies. I encourage it. It is a divine service in many respects, especially if it is done in sincere love for the mate and for the child. But this is not, strictly speaking, what I mean here.

What do you mean then?

I mean that any baby would have that uplifting effect on you, if you sincerely open your heart in love and acceptance of the child; no

matter whose child it is, for babies are bundles of love literally. I recommend this to you. If you ever feel low, find a baby to love, even if for the moment. Hold the baby and look into its eyes, behold the deep innocence and trust in them. Marvel at their delicate body. Feel their soft slim fingers. Wonder at their colour at birth. Watch the abandonment with which they yawn. See the countenance when the mother holds it to breastfeed. The feeling you get is simply magical.

I can relate to that easily.

I am sure you can. I wonder who cannot, for we all have savoured this enchantment of babies at sometime or the other.

I agree with you. No grown person could have been denied that magic at one time or the other.

Sometimes when we ourselves are yet babies, parents bring home more babies as siblings. And even as children it is always a rare and simply wonderful experience.

So you are seriously recommending baby care as a tonic for happiness.

Yes, if you would choose to call it that. In fact, I think that is a very good way of putting it. For whatever you do genuinely and lovingly for a new born - carrying the baby, rocking the baby, washing the baby's clothes or giving the baby a bath - surely leaves you with the feeling of love and happiness.

The key is to do it with love?

Yes, that is the key. To genuinely love the child. Not to pretend by putting up an appearance for the purpose of pleasing a boss, a colleague or a neighbour. Do it not because society expects you to, but because you genuinely love to, then you can truly feel and know the transforming effect of babies.

Those who do not have babies around them obviously cannot benefit from this happiness therapy.

To some extent not having a baby physically can be a constraint in employing this therapy; but only to some extent.

What do you mean?

You do not have to have the baby with you to have the benefit. What do you do with your imagination? Use it. In depressing moments, take a soul journey to a baby you know.

Soul journey?

Forgive the jargon, what I mean is imagine a baby you know and love. In your imagination get close to the baby. Carry the baby gingerly. Give the baby a big warm smile - the kind of smile that emanates from the deepest of your heart. You can even whisper *I love you*, and watch the baby react, possibly with a smile in return. And you know how baby smiles are. For me, they give the most charismatic and magnetic smiles you ever knew. Do this and see how you feel.

You want me to do it now?

Not necessarily, you can practise it any time you need a lift. Or in fact any time you are high on gladness and need to be even gladder.

Can I imagine another person's baby?

Of course it would have been better to imagine your own, if you had one. But if not, you can imagine any other baby of your choice that you love. Now, that is the key element Love. You must approach the child with a heart of love.

Why?

I am surprised at your question. You should know by now having interviewed so many people on this subject of happiness. Love is always the channel of true happiness. Love is what fetches you the reward of happiness that you seek. Not power, not hate, not money or any material possession or wicked intention.

If there are no longer such young ones in the family, can I imagine my younger siblings when they were new-borns?

Why not? This is the beauty of imagination. It can take you as far or as near as you want. It can take you into the future, and it can lead you way into history. It all depends on what you want and imagination is at your service.

I wonder why I never thought of this.

Maybe you did at one time or the other. You probably just did not dwell on it long enough to savour further goodness from the thought.

Thanks so very much.

One more thing before you go. My suggestion is that you can reap so much happiness not only enjoying the goodness of babies in reality or imagination but also in helping the helpless young ones. There are so many of them littered all over in need of someone to care for them.

How?

There are many children in the world without parents or even people they could call their own kindred. They need the likes of you to help. Any help to them is bound to reap for you, more happiness than you ever imagined.

You mean help with material support?

Yes, I mean that Food, clothing, medicine, etc. But they also need the warmth of love. They need your hug. They need your embrace. It does not have to be money-based. Love is love and it can come in any form.

Are you campaigning for Motherless Babies Homes?

I am not interested in your politics or social categories. I am interested in love, especially to young ones, for those of you who love to be happy.

Chapter Twenty-One

MUSICAL KEYS

Sir, thanks for granting me audience. I really appreciate it, considering how much your time means.

Thanks for coming, too. I usually like to share my philosophy. I guess that is how it can be useful to others.

I am glad.

Get on with your interview; I need to get back to the studio soon.

Thanks, sir. My question is simple How do you find happiness?

In many different ways, but especially in the studio. I love to be there.

The studio gives you happiness?

It lifts my spirit every time.

Just by being in the studio, your spirit is lifted?

Well, yes. But what I really mean is that the music of the studio lifts my spirit.

How?

In the studio, I listen to my most beloved sounds, and I experiment with all manner of instrumentation, mixing and merging as I choose. The experience is always, for me, exhilarating.

So from your experience what would you be recommending to my audience as recipe for happiness?

That is a rather difficult question. I cannot really give a recipe for happiness as such, but what I would whole-heartedly recommend is that people should take music seriously. Just like people have perfume hang over them throughout their activities, I would recommend exactly the same with music. Let music always keep you company.

You are saying that people should always listen to music?

Yes. People should take the benefit of music. They should seek and listen to music that steers their hearts, that fills them with joy, music that their inner atoms respond to. They should earnestly seek it, listen to it and enjoy it, wherever they may be.

Even at work?

Why not! I said, wherever. Go with your walk-man. Plug it into your ears and chatter away on your keyboard.

Why are you so certain this works?

I do not see why it should not work for you, because it works for me and all who love music. Music is my best recommendation for anyone who wants a happy high, any time. It is bound to take you high because it comes from the higher regions. And the higher you go, the happier it gets.

Really?

Certainly. Music is vibration. When you hear sweet sensational vibration, it bombards you painlessly and so profoundly that your heart begins to vibrate in sympathy with the sound. If it happens to be happy, harmonious music, you begin to feel the same Happy and harmonious.

So music is that powerful?

It is. I need not place any emphasis. Indeed adepts would tell you that the inner planes of God could be distinguished by the nature of sound, or more appropriately music, that you hear as you ascend. Music is like a ladder up to greater and greater joy. It is a stream of happiness upon which you can float away to feasts of joy.

All kinds of music?

Not quite. But then it is difficult to dictate for others what music takes them to the heights of happiness. Each person must find his or hers. And it may well be that the gravity of the mood might dictate which music factor would best lighten the heart of the listener. This is quite intricate. The listener has to feel out for himself what kind of music excites him out of his moodiness.

What you are saying is that there can never be one music solution for all?

That's right. Generically, music lifts. But how quickly or what kind of music lifts what individual depends on the mood and bent of the individual in question. But what is certain is that music is a joy maker. This is why music generally accompanies any merry making. Music is an effect of joy or happiness, but it is also a cause of happiness and joy. Interesting dialectics, but the result is joy ever more abundant.

Could this explain why musicians appear to be so happy especially on stage?

Now you are beginning to understand why the studio is home to me. It is a place where I get high on music. The more I enjoy the music the higher I get. Sometimes the joy that music brings can fill your heart with so much love that some of it overflows like tears down your cheeks. You must know what I am talking about, being yourself a music lover.

I must confess that I feel the truth in what you say. Your explanation helps me better appreciate what happens to me when I listen to music that I truly love.

I would add that nothing penetrates the heart centre as deeply and as effortlessly as music. No wonder it is described as the food of love. Music is what love eats in order to get finer and better.

So music and love have a close knit relationship?

Yes! That is how I would put it and then add a third relative Happiness. Music, Love and Happiness appear to me to be siblings, children of the same parents, look-alikes, members of one team, elements of a blood group. Find one and the others are only a heartbeat away.

Which would be the easier to start with if I wanted all three for myself?

Music I would say. It is something within your objective control. You can turn it on or turn it off, as you will. You can choose what sounds you like and those to emphasise. Music is more within your objective environment. Ever wondered why music is such a common factor in almost all religions?

It is beginning to make sense.

You may not approve of all the kinds of music that religions employ, but you cannot deny the efficacy of music in bringing good cheer to the congregation, and opening the heart to the Word. You cannot deny the effect of music in preparing the altar for the flowers that follow. You cannot deny the effectiveness of music as a knock on the temple within.

I see.

I am glad you see. Religions understand the power of music. But so should you as an individual. Use it to open your heart centre to joy.

Chapter Twenty-Two

SAY “I LOVE YOU”

You look a shy person.

Why do you say that?

Just your looks. It may be deceptive. But that is my perception.

You may be right or wrong, who am I to say?

So that puts it squarely back in my court. I should not have judged in the first place.

But I do not mind at all. I personally find it difficult to categorise myself either as an extrovert or an introvert. It all depends on what the situation calls for.

Interesting. Tell me more.

Now you want to turn the table. I am here to interview you. So you should do the talking and I the listening.

Not quite right. It is for both of us to talk even in that case. What you could say is that you could do more asking while I do more explaining. But talk we both should.

Agreed, sir. If I may begin, I have come to ask you to please share with us some tips for happiness. What in particular has been your own happiness trigger?

That should be private.

Perhaps, sir. But what we seek is so others can benefit from your wisdom.

You put it in a way that I cannot resist. First you flatter me that I am wise. And then you tell me it is for others, giving the intention a noble and altruistic aura.

Thank you for your kindness, sir....

“Thank you” when you have not even heard what I have to offer? But more seriously, I have been reading your column and I know what it is all about, and I am glad to contribute.

Thank you, sir.

My contribution is to urge people to be more open in speaking about love, or more precisely in confessing their love to their loved ones. If you really love someone, tell him or her. Tell them, openly, warmly.

Sir, in our society it is not very common. It is not something we are used to. Some may consider it even “sissy.”

Listen. To improve, we must change. Anything or anyone that puts himself forward for improvements has automatically embraced change. What you seek is information that would improve us - make people to live happier lives, bring more joy into their hearts. That means change for the better. Now if we are ossified in our ways, why bother with improvement.

No, I do not mean it that way.

I do not know how else you would have meant it. What you are saying simply is that certain habits, traditional or not, inhibit people from using this easy facility for joy. Now, that is a challenge requiring change.

I see. But I still find it difficult, given the tradition we have grown up in. It is a tradition in which love is felt as a bond between persons. Or just assumed, but not spoken.

But what is wrong with speaking it? What is wrong with confessing it?

I do not know, it is just not our way. Maybe it makes one look weak to say such a thing?

I see the problem is deep.

I am glad you see it, sir. But you are also one of us. How do you do it? Why do you do it?

Do what?

Say, say... I mean, say... I mean say "I love you."

How else would I do it but just say it. I must confess that I had inhibitions once I started out with this habit. But the freedom in my heart that came with it, the rush of sweet that filled my heart as I said it, even the sense of care that the confession gave was so much that the habit stuck. And more; the effect it had on my loved ones, the encouragement it gave them, the goodness it conferred on them, the confidence that it grew in them sealed it for me.

Really?

These days, I miss something when I leave home too early in the morning before my children wake up. I miss my hug around them and the feel of their little hands on my back. I miss the look of comfort, security and joy on their faces when I tell them that I love them, one by one. That single act is packed with so much joy, enough to see me beaming throughout the day. And I believe enough to see them through the day as well.

Let me confess that experiences I have read and heard have helped me to hold on to this habit. Once I read of a girl, a teenager, who was scorned by her peers, because she was poor, and was raised only by her mother. She was miserable, and often wished that she could meet her father. Mum told her nothing at all about him.

One day, in another emotional nadir, she made up her mind to end her own life. And just as she walked out of school determined not to return the next day, a teacher called her back. She had a telephone call from a stranger, who explained how her mum had done everything including death threats to keep him away from her.

The stranger said he was her father, and that he had decided to make this call in desperation because he was terminally ill, and it may be a matter of days before he died. He said he had this burden that he must discharge, the burden of love he felt for her, his offspring. He said he had nothing really to offer her, but to let her know that he loved her. The phone cut, and that was the first and last she heard from her father.

But you know what. His three words, "I love you", saved her life. Today she works as an influential parliamentarian in her country.

As a linguist, I have searched for and used words in many languages. But nowhere have I found three words more powerful than "I love you!" Those words inspire the love and happiness in both the speaker and listener. I know you may have your pride as priority. I do not judge you. But I would recommend strongly to you, that you drop some of the tough act, and confess your vulnerability to love. You

may discover that you emerge stronger in spirit, emotion and body than you have ever been.

Above all, you would certainly be a happier man. Try it out on your wife, your sisters, your brothers, your children, your mother, father or any one you love. If you are too shy at first, write it for them to read. You may suddenly find that you live in a new, more rarefied, lovelier and joyous world.

Chapter Twenty-Three

TAKE SPIRITUAL RETREATS

I tried to reach you all of last weekend, without success. It appeared that your mobile phone was switched off. I had been persistent because I thought the weekend would have been a good time to hold this interview so I don't interrupt your work today.

You are right. I would really have preferred having the interview at the weekend but I was away. I travelled to Accra.

Business?

No, not business. I went for a spiritual seminar of my religion. It rotates annually amongst countries. This time it was in Ghana.

Oh, I see. I did not realise you were that religious?

Why do you say that?

Well, you know religious people appear a certain way usually. They dress a certain way. If women, they tie their hair a certain way. They do not mix freely as you do. They usually confront people with efforts to convert them. They carry their Holy Books around conspicuously. I mean they make you know that they are religious, sometimes through what they wear around their necks, their rings and so on. But you just appear to me to be a happy, ordinary guy.

I like that.

Sincerely, I did not imagine that you were the type that would travel internationally just to attend a purely religious or spiritual retreat.

Interesting. So what would you recommend? Should I change and behave in a more religious manner as you have described.

Not at all. I like you better as you are. Your universal disposition and acceptance of people of all faith is part of what I like about you. Your friends are of different ethnic groups. Even your dressing does not quite tell me where you are from because you appear quite comfortable and happy in all manner of attires from different parts of

the country. Your charm, and the happiness, in particular, which you exude all the time I have met you is really the reason for this interview. That is why I am attracted.

You are so kind.

I mean it.

Thank you very much. I appreciate your comments. I believe you must have more of these good qualities that you ascribe to me; otherwise you would not even notice them in me.

I do not agree. I come to you to learn, and hopefully have my readers benefit from you as well. As I had told you before, the reason for this interview is to extract clues to happiness from happy people like you. Happy people have the secret that the whole world is looking for. My job is to try to extract as many of the keys as possible. How many interviews have you done on this subject?

Over twenty.

In that case, whatever you get from me would only be a repetition, I think.

I do not think so, because from experience I have always discovered from each subject a new way or nuance, which makes a difference and adds to the repertoire of ways to happiness.

So you believe I have something new to add?

Very much so, sir.

Well I guess fresh from a spiritual retreat, that is what I would recommend to you and your readers as a means to refreshing your heart and maintaining the happy habit.

Why do you recommend spiritual retreats?

For many reasons and I speak from my personal experience.

Just perfect, that is what we usually wish to hear. Your practical tools for happiness are what we seek.

You see, in my religion there are usually many seminars in the year. We have continental seminars, like the type I just attended which was for all of Africa. We have worldwide seminars. We also have country seminars, often referred to as regional seminars. We have area seminars of contiguous states and even zonal seminars, which are more local. They all do not happen at the same time. Spaced all through the year, there is enough to attend.

But why take the trouble to attend? That is my question. What does one benefit? And how does that impinge on happiness?

As I said, many reasons. But let me take a few.

Yes, sir.

The preparation for a seminar is itself, a spiritual exercise. It is an opening of the heart to undertake a journey or a mission, which is not for material gains. To that extent it is a bit purgative, and disciplinary. As you may have experienced, anything that takes your consciousness away from the selfish and material, and places it on the spiritual and selfless tends to bring more joy to the heart.

As in fasting?

You get the idea. Another benefit of attending seminars is that they help to remind you of sacred spiritual truths and practices, which recharge your heart for more love. So again your heart opens with greater capacity to give and receive love. You must know by now that love is the gateway to happiness. You could almost say that the more love you have, the happier you become. The seminar opens your heart to more love.

How does it do this?

Throughout the seminar, the talks, workshops, roundtable discussions, music and other creative arts focus your attention on the spiritual. And the heart of any true spiritual teaching is love. So for the whole weekend your heart and mind are tuned to love.

I see.

This is why you often experience so much love from friends and co-attendees at a truly spiritual seminar. There is just so much love flowing amongst the people in a true spiritual retreat. You see so many smiling faces, beaming and shining. You feel so many hugs.

You have so many warm and friendly handshakes because there is more and more love flowing from the hearts of the people.

I'm listening.

It is usually not a surprise that at meetings like this, people receive miraculous healing just quietly on their own. An explanation is that the seminar has helped to open their hearts to a greater level of surrender to the Holy Spirit, which penetrates to make the healing possible. And healing can take place at all levels from the spiritual, mental or psychic, down to pure physical healing.

Please carry on.

Perhaps I should add that spiritual seminars help people to develop closer ties and more personal relationships with God, because at the seminar the talks and the teachings provide more and more insights into situations which were earlier not understood. The seminar also supplies rich experiences from other people, which help you to find your own way to deal with similar issues. The shared experiences reinforce people's conviction in the efficacy of their faith. And so everyone who attends literally leaves a richer and better person.

Everyone who attends benefits?

Sure. And this includes newcomers and visitors to the seminar. Indeed, people who attend a truly spiritual seminar never go back the same. There is always an added value to their spiritual life. There is usually a glow of happiness around them, which stays with them for quite sometime even after returning home. One feels a sense of joy and higher enlightenment.

Really, the benefits are far more than I can describe. You just have to experience it yourself. Open your heart and go for a truly spiritual retreat for no other reason than that you love God and see for yourself how rich the harvest of happiness can be.

Chapter Twenty-Four

FREE YOUR HEART

What cut you?

A knife.

How did it happen?

It was in my attempt to cut some oranges after dinner, the knife slipped and cut me.

Sorry. But that sounds quite unusual for one as careful as you.

Accidents happen.

Yes, I know. Sorry.

Thanks but the cut is quite minor. I just decided to use a plaster to avoid rubbing it against anything and cursing more bleeding.

I hope it is not an inconvenience at work.

Not at all.

Glad to know. On a lighter note, what caused the accident? After all, you always preach that accidents are caused and do not just happen.

Even in this case it was caused.

How? Don't tell me the knife caused it.

No, no. It was as usual a human error that was the root cause. I was the cause of the accident.

How? By allowing the knife to slip off your fingers?

Yes, but the real reason why the knife slipped was because I was not concentrating on what I was doing - cutting the orange.

Why?

I was not concentrating because I was angry.

You angry? What could have made you angry?

Occasionally I do get angry like everybody else. Although often it is just a mock up, just to give the impression of anger in order to knock a certain lesson or the other home to someone.

What do you mean by mock up?

By mocking up anger I mean pretending to be angry. Like an actor. But not letting the anger into your heart.

Why do you have to do that?

As I said, to teach a certain lesson or give a certain necessary impression without having to carry the burden of anger itself, which is a major impediment to spiritual communication.

What do you mean?

Anger blinds and deafens us for as long as it lasts. For as long as we are angry, it is difficult to communicate with our inner-selves or with God. It is for this reason that we are often advised to make up with those we are angry with before approaching the alter of God for worship of any kind.

I really do not know where you tap all these wisdom. But truth is simple enough for any sincere person to admit and accept.

I am happy you see it that way.

But let us return to the story of you and the orange, and your cut.

Yes, where did we deviate?

At the point of tracing the injury to anger.

Oh, yes. Anger it was. I was angry with some of our little ones for not listening to their elder. Many times I have tried to teach them in very subtle ways how important it is to listen and obey elders like teachers, parents, or very close relatives for these usually mean well for them.

In this particular case, an uncle had instructed them not to climb a stool lest they fall. They refused to heed the warning and one of them

fell, injuring herself. She then ran to me for sympathy, which instinctively I gave; but I proceeded to castigate her for refusing to listen. I recounted several earlier experiences, which would have caused injury just for same reason. It was in trying to knock the lesson into her that I unwittingly crossed from mocked up anger into anger itself.

Hmmm...

It was in that angry state that I went to cut my orange and instead cut myself. I knew intuitively that the accident was simply a lesson for me stop loosing your temper.

Did you accept the correction?

Yes, with due humility. Thus I did not blame anyone for the cut. I realised within me that it was my fault, and hopefully have learnt the lesson. In addition to silently admitting my fault, early this morning I made it a point of duty to reconcile with the little ones.

I reached out and hugged them, professing my love to them, but reiterating albeit more kindly the sense in listening to their elders. I explained why I lost my temper last night, and apologised. In no time we were friends again. I regained my full happiness and set out for work, whistling happy tunes.

There is a lot I have to learn from you.

There is a lot we all have to learn from one another.

I don't know how many people would have calmly accepted their wrong-doing as you did; corrected themselves, and proceeded to make peace with little ones over whom they have a seemingly unquestionable control? There is really a lot I have to learn from you.

I repeat, there is a lot we all have to learn from one another. There is a lot we have to learn from the little ones, too. And, conversely, there is also a lot that they have to learn from adults as well.

Is this why you always seem so happy with life?

It is part of it, I must confess. I take seriously the injunction from the Holy Scriptures of keeping the heart free of anger and animosity. I try not to allow hatred or anger stay with me. I usually find a way to wash my heart clean with love as quickly as possible

To be sure, it is not an easy habit. But for me it has paid off richly. That habit ensures the heartiness of my laughter. You know I love to laugh. That habit ensures and insures my gladness everyday of my life.

Truly blessed are the pure in heart...

For they are happy people.

Chapter Twenty-Five

BE LIKE A CHILD

It was a minute past one p.m. when I arrived at the restaurant for a lunch meeting. Traffic had caused me to be a minute late, but I was almost sure that I was nevertheless going to be the first at the venue. Traffic can be quite a ready excuse for lateness at meetings.

As it turned out, I was right. I was the first so I had to wait for the others. But in the meantime what do I do? I thought. Stare at the unfamiliar game on the television, or order a soft drink while allowing my thoughts roam?

I chose the latter. But it was not long before my ears and mind rested on a conversation taking place at the table next to mine. They were a couple, probably new acquaintances; from the kind of questions they asked each other.

The man was dressed in an all white *jumper* and *sokoto*, while the lady was clad in a dark grey western-style suit. She could have been a banker. She had a serious, business-like mien, while the man seemed relaxed, albeit very focussed on the lady. He did most of the questioning. This is an approximation of what transpired; at least the much I picked up:

“Did you read the article on happiness in today’s newspaper?”

Yes, I did.

What did you think of it?

I thought it was good. But I wonder why anyone would want to tackle such an issue so elusive in life.

But that is the more reason why he should. It is a good challenge.

What I mean is that the topic is too broad.

I do not understand.

Different things make different people happy. So it would be virtually impossible to know what makes people happy in a generic sense.

I see what you mean. But I disagree.

Are you saying that one person can capture what makes all people happy?

I do not think the author depends on one source for his articles. He must be talking to a lot of people and therefore getting to know the various ways people employ to be happy and stay so. But the point I am really getting at is that although there are many ways to be happy, there is really only one gate to happiness. At least, that is my own understanding.

What gate are you talking about?

I am talking about the gate of love. I think love and happiness are a married couple. Love is the masculine one who goes after the feminine happiness. It is impossible to have happiness, except you go for it by using love as the bait. Happiness will only go to love, and nothing else. Indeed, I can put it to you that without love there can never be true happiness.

I think you people just waste your time talking about these things. Who is ever really happy in this world of ours with so much evil around?

That many people are not happy does not mean that some are not.

I think you are just being idealistic.

C'mon, have you always been like this? Pessimistic?

I am not pessimistic. I am just being an adult. As an adult you just have to be realistic.

What does it mean to be realistic?

In this particular case, just what I have said; that you grow up to know that some things are just not possible - like being truly happy.

I cannot believe this. But were you happy as a child?

Yes, but that was as a child. As you grow up you begin to realise that life is not a bed of roses.

But roses have thorns too interspersed in the stalk sometimes. Does that make them any less beautiful? Without the challenges of life,

wouldn't it be such a humdrum boring existence? Without the opportunity to serve, tolerate others and grow, I doubt that anyone can experience happiness.

What are you implying?

What I am saying is that in spite of all the difficulties, it is still a very beautiful world.

Well that is your opinion.

I agree it is my opinion. But beyond my opinion it is my perspective, for love is a matter of perception and action. First, you have to see with the eyes of love before you can act with love. I tell you a very short experience with my friend, a man and his little son, Imoh. Let us call the man Akpan.

Calabar people?

Whatever. I had visited them, and we had gone for a ride. As we came back to their home, unknown to us, their dog had been unleashed, and the servant had been chasing it around to put back the leash. We drove in, oblivious, bounced out of the car, only to see an excited wet dog dashing to us.

It jumped on Akpan with its dirty limbs and wet body, soiling his white shirt. Akpan was livid. He took it out on the servant and the dog. I supported my friend. Little Imoh watched in silence.

Much later when we had all forgotten about the incident, settled in front of the television to watch a football match, the 4-year-old approached his father. He said, "Daddy why were you mad at Bingo, for coming to welcome us?"

Akpan and I turned to look at the child. I felt a sense of shame, and I wondered if my friend felt the same way. At that instant our eyes met. Why didn't we see the incident from the viewpoint of this little lad? There would have been no need for all the anger and venom. Why did we see the same event so differently?

The more I thought about that incident the more I realized that love was the difference. The child saw the world with an eye of love, and interpreted the actions as such. We saw the world with the eyes of aggressors, and interpreted the world in those terms. It is not a wonder that beauty is always in the eyes of the beholder.

And all so often children see beauty everywhere because of the love in their hearts. They see beauty even in the faces of beggars on the roadside.

I see the point you are making, but it is just impossible for adults to be children again.

Maybe you are right. But even then it is a matter of choice. There is none who has ever achieved anything truly great, who did not look upon the world with the eyes of a child. Where the adult eyes see impossibilities, eyes of love see possibilities.

Where the adult eye sees limitations, the child sees boundlessness. The child lives in all of us. It is a matter of a simple twist of the heart. While some may see happiness as impossibility, those amongst us who, irrespective of physical age, retain the wonder and magical love like children will always find happiness.

Is that what you believe?

It is what I know”.

Chapter Twenty-Six

WARRI'S WORRIES

Professor Moi?

Yes. Who are you?

I am sorry. I just assumed that you would recognize me.

I am sorry, no.

I am a patient of yours. Or should I say a former patient.

I see.

I saw you for a couple of hours, four years ago at the psychiatric hospital, where I had come for counselling.

Quite honestly I do not remember, because there were quite a lot of such patients then. And today they are more than I could have ever imagined. Anyway, it's good to see you. You are travelling out of the country?

Yes.

Business?

No, still medical. Or more precisely still some psychiatric problems. I just can't seem to get over my worries. Now they are eating my life away. I have now developed all manners of complicated ailments. Please do not let me dampen your spirit with my woes.

I am so sorry. Just to help my recollection, what is your name again, please?

Mister Warri.

Pardon me.

Warri, I said. Mister Warri.

Spell please.

W-A-R-R-I. Mister Warri.

I see. Forgive me, is that why you worry so much, because your name is Warri?

They are not spelt the same way.

Of course! Only joking.

My problem is however not a joking matter. I was considering reverting to your hospital again. You are obviously travelling, meeting you here at the International Airport.

Yes, I am. I am off for some few weeks' vacation.

When will you get back?

In a few weeks, maybe three weeks.

I will make an appointment.

That suits me. But, Mister Warri, are you sure there is no easier way to handle your problems.

Well, that is why I have proposed coming to see you. Maybe you are the one to really help me. I must confess to you, I have tried everything. Sometimes I believe I am even haunted. I am ashamed to say it but I have stood naked in front of numerous shrines to find a solution. In cases, I appear to have some psychological relief, but not for long. Even with all my wealth, I am a thoroughly unhappy man.

Not many of your countrymen would believe you.

Well, let them come and wear my shoes, and they would believe.

Mister Warri, it would of course pay me professionally and financially to encourage you to come to my clinic, and indeed do come still if you find it necessary, but I was going to introduce you to a better psychiatrist and psychologist.

Who, please?

ITS name is Love. Some people call IT God.

Prof, I am a serious believer.

Just relax and listen a bit.

This Love that I introduce you to is your maker. It is the source of your energy. It is your life. I know you would have read and memorized lots of Holy Scriptures. But forget those for now. Just think about Love.

How?

Think about the Love that made all the earth, all the seas and oceans, all the vegetation, all the animals, birds and fishes, all the people, in their billions. Think about the Love that made them and sustains them all. Think of the Love that knows their every cell, every DNA, every history, every future, every circumstance, every situation.

Think about the Love that made all the stars innumerable as they are. Think of the Love that made and controls the Milky Way in all its boundlessness, yet it all works with a precision better than that of the seconds watch. Think of the almightiness of this Love.

Then recognize that it is the same Love that made you, and is with you and is in you. It loves you personally and dearly. Think of this Love as Spirit - Holy Spirit.

The name you call it does not really matter much. Just recognise its nature as Love; boundless Love. And then accept IT as your leader, teacher, psychiatrist and psychologist. Imagine this Love in the form that best suits you - as a mighty man, as a mighty ocean, as pure light or whatever else.

A lot of very experienced spiritual beings know this Love as pure light and wondrous music. In true humility, sincerity and solitude try to find this Love in your imagination. And then surrender all your worries to IT, totally. Be glad to accept whatever IT chooses to do with the worries. But just let them go. Let them all dissolve in the sound and light of Love.

Regularly refill your being with this fluid of Love and spread IT willingly and happily, the best way you know how. Devote your life to loving and all will be well.

I am dumbfounded.

Sorry Mister Warri, that's my flight being announced. I must go now. Enjoy your trip.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

WEAR THEIR GLASSES

You are wearing new glasses. It is pretty.

It is not new. Just new frames but old glasses.

I see, but it really looks good on you.

Thank you.

Is anything wrong with Nkem, your sister?

What do you mean?

I mean is she ill or something of the sort?

No. Why do you ask?

I was with her at lunch on Monday.

That sounds perfectly normal to me. I guess the whole idea of having staffs go to lunch at break is partly to have people mix. Or is there something else?

Not really. It is just that the way she behaved that day was a bit unusual. I was surprised at the brashness.

Again what do you mean?

We all know Nkem to be a very soft spoken, quiet and considerate person. But on Monday at lunch she surprised me. We got talking and she just seemed impatient to leave, cutting me short in many ways. She eventually left me at the table. I would say almost rudely.

That is surprising. It does not sound like Nkem at all. I wonder what could have happened.

I was embarrassed. I wondered how many people noticed.

I see. That is really unusual. Oh now, I think I know what happened.

You know what happened?

Yes, I know what happened on Monday.

What?

You know Nkem is very shy.

Yes, I know.

She is shy to a fault.

Yes, I know.

What happened was this she was having a stomach trouble, what people call running stomach. Throughout that day, and even into the night, she kept purging. Now I remember, she told me about the incident with you.

Oh, was that it?

Yes, that was it. She was too shy to tell you that she had to run to the toilet. Instead she was being ladylike, hoping you would finish your meal quickly so she could make the dash. But, unaware, you went on leisurely with your story until she could no longer contain herself and had to leave abruptly.

Did she tell you this?

Yes, she did. She told me that she was not sure how you viewed her behaviour that day, and that she does not even know how to apologize.

Oh, I am so sorry I complained at all. Now I understand.

No, it is okay. I mean it happens. It is just a question of misunderstanding. Or, maybe, a question of communication.

You know people could actually begrudge others based on such misunderstanding?

Sure. Most quarrels or even enmity result like this.

You are right.

That is why I often insist that people should never rush into judgments over anything. It always pays to give the benefit of doubt. More importantly, try to see things from the others' perspective. When you imagine wearing another's shoes, it is easier to feel the pain that he feels.

You are right. Now putting myself in her shoes, I can fully understand why she behaved the way she did.

That is precisely what I mean. Rather than destroy our joy through bitterness, and anger, it is better always to try to put ourselves in the other person's shoes, and see what it might feel like. My favorite way of putting it is by asking people to try to wear others' glasses, for we all see differently - depending on our situations, circumstances, history, experience or even geography. These conditions shape and color our glasses and therefore our worldview.

I think what you have just touched upon is the issue of perspectives.

Yes, as a communication officer, I know you would understand it. Perspective is usually the basis for agreements or otherwise in relationships amongst people.

Is that why love is said to be a matter of perspective, as well?

Precisely. Love sees it from the others' point of view, and so finds it easy to be more tolerant, more forgiving, and more giving. The ability to see from the other person's point of view is an ability of love.

I see you are an advocate of all-round perspective?

Certainly, that is love in action. It spares groups unnecessary fights, quarrels and disagreements and maintains harmony and happiness amongst them. So don't just be content to wear your own glasses. At least, before you pass judgments see how the other person views the world with his own unique glasses. That will help you to love more and live a happy life.

You are so wise.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

HAPPY MESSENGER

What was the argument about?

Did you hear us?

Of course, I heard you people arguing away over lunch. I could not tell what it was about but you sure were having a very animated discussion.

Don't mind Kunle, he always wants to bamboozle and intimidate people with his religion. He has a tendency to look down and belittle every other religion. Instead of just sharing ideas of what his faith is and what works for him, he always wants to lord it over others.

But did you have to argue with him?

Of course, I had to call him to order. He has to understand that religion is a private affair, and the best we should do for each other is respect one another's faith.

Did he understand and appreciate your point?

How would he? I say he is too swollen headed about his beliefs.
So was there a profit in the end in arguing with him?

Looking back now, really, the answer is no. It was not worth it.

Do you know that at a time in our village, many years ago, if you ever told anyone that there were beings like us in other parts of the world who were white, no one would believe?

Sure.

That is the right word, but why so?

Simple. It is because as far as they knew at that time, no such person existed within their scope of awareness, knowledge or consciousness.

Well said. How does what you have said now apply to Kunle's case?

Come to think of it, they are actually analogous. In the end the limit is awareness, consciousness.

Correct. If you tell people truth beyond what they know or consider possible, you meet a brick wall of ignorance. And believe me there is nothing as impervious as ignorance. It is very difficult to enlighten ignorance, especially one that is worn like a crown.

You throw me, what do you mean wear ignorance like a crown?

C'mon, I am sure you know what I mean. You know there was a time when people thought the world was flat? That was then the final truth. The indisputable. Any who told people otherwise was then courting trouble. And if I recall right, at least one person was executed because he said the world was round. Simply the arrogance of the ignorant of the time was so queenly that it sentenced truth to death. Now, that is how much of a crown ignorance can be.

I get it.

You see, when I confront people like Kunle, I watch myself. At such times I always recall something a man taught me years ago. It is a quotation, which I have by my bedside. It simply states "A spiritual path ought to transform you into a spiritual being who is filled with love. That should be the test of your religion."

So when one like Kunle bombarded me with his gospel, I should rather have looked for love.

And looked for it silently. Love is the measure of a spiritual path or, more precisely, the measure of that individual on his religious or spiritual path.

That makes a lot of sense.

I am glad you see it that way. But before we got on with this discourse, I was about telling you of a very happy and beautiful lady I saw today.

Where?

In the bus. In the midst of all the banter and noise, her eyes were glued to her handset. And she held this most enchanting smile throughout. You could see that the smile was only a reflection of the

happiness that shone within her. I stole as many glances as I discreetly could in search of her eyes, but her head remained bowed, focused on her handset. Her fingers were nimble and I knew she was busy with text messages.

Did you get introduced? Get to the meat of the matter.

The way your mind runs. But I did ask her how she managed to exude such happiness. And you know, she was genuinely unaware of the effect she had on people around. But she did share what she was doing that made her so happy.

What was it?

She was sending sweet messages of love and joy to her friends and siblings. She knew the messages would brighten the day of each one of the recipients. And as it often happens to those who uplift others, effortlessly they themselves are uplifted. By sending happy messages to people, she herself glowed inside and her face shone with beauty that only happiness bestows.

I think I'll try it.

Sure bet. Me, too!

Chapter Twenty-Nine

PROTECT YOUR HAPPINESS

I can't believe this? What changed your mood just now? Were you not the one I saw moments ago, so chirpy and happy? What happened? Someone annoyed you?

It is nothing really. It is just my wife, Theresa.

What happened?

For no reason she has been carrying a long face since yesterday.

Did you approach her to find out what was wrong?

I did, but she claims there is nothing wrong.

What do you think could have gone wrong?

I think lately the strain of work has come down on her. She closes late from the office and still has to attend to the children, and to the house. And I am not so sure the maids are doing as well as she expects.

What about you? Have you done anything wrong to her?

Nothing. The relationship has been super.

So what could have happened?

I don't know. The only thing I can think of is that there seems to be a pattern. Anytime her sister visits, Theresa tends to go into these inexplicable moods. Suddenly, you find her yelling at everybody at the slightest provocation.

Why?

I don't know. I believe her sister has obviously made choices in her life, which makes her full of woeful stories.

About what?

I don't know. But my perception is that her husband is one of those in our country who do anything for money except an honest job. Of course, that kind of lifestyle generates its own culture and contradictions. Generally, I do not like to hear of her or her woes. Her choices were deliberately made. I therefore never see why we should be bothered with it. But my wife...

Oh yes, of course it is difficult for her to disengage emotionally. She is her sister.

But we cannot carry on like this. We have a happy home of our own, why should we allow someone else to continuously badge in and ruin the harmony.

I sympathize very much with you. Surely, this appears like a tough nut to crack.

I know you counsel people on how to gain happiness and live joyful lives. I have never sorted your assistance. But I should consciously do that now, because I am getting fed-up with this routine. It dampens the spirit of my home.

I know how you feel. Let me confess that I have not quite thought about this kind of scenario. And none of the people I have counselled have put the problem this way.

Well, it is your field. I will appreciate any assistance.

I don't believe anyone is an expert here, but perhaps together we may come up with something. First, let's agree on something - that happiness is a priced possession like health.

Sure, that is a good comparison besides the fact that they are related.

Now, whose responsibility is your health?

It is my personal responsibility.

Why?

As an adult nobody can take care of me but me. I determine what I eat or don't eat to stay healthy. I decide whether to exercise or not to stay healthy. I decide how to behave to stay healthy.

Fantastic answer. I have little to add. But let me ask you one more question if your wife or wife's sister had a serious contagious disease, which you all knew very well about, what would you do, expose yourself to it, or protect yourself from it?

Obviously, I would be sympathetic and do whatever I can to help, but I would of course protect myself so I can be of better help, by staying healthy.

No more questions. Sadness is contagious, just like happiness. There are people who are habitually sad. And there are people who make obvious choices that lead to sadness. And there are people who are generally oblivious of the goodness around them to be grateful and happy. That is just the way it is. There is little you can do to change them. All you can do is to take responsibility for yourself.

How?

Protect your happiness. Realize it is a personal responsibility to be happy or not to be happy. It is a conscious choice. No one owes it to you. Not even your mother. You owe it to yourself absolutely. And so does everybody else. Living in a society, you of course, have to mix; but never forget that happiness is a personal choice. Even if everybody around you is sad you can choose to be happy. You can choose to genuinely open your heart in gratitude to love and happiness.

True?

True. It is tough to do; because you must then subjugate and control your thoughts to continuously impart the happy feeling. It takes the practice of emotional detachment. You can show sympathy and still maintain your inner sense of gratitude and happiness. Know this, and perhaps let your wife know this as well.

Chapter Thirty

AN ACT A DAY

Darling, what is this on your to-do list today?

What?

I read something here about a visit?

What visit? You have been reading my private book again.

No, I was not peering; my eyes just happened to have caught something unusual.

Where?

Ok, I admit I was peering into your book. But it was not deliberate. I saw it because the book was open.

Yes, it was open. But if I had seen your diary open would I have read it?

No, you wouldn't. But you know we are different.

Sure, we are different.

And that is why we are an excellent couple. We complement each other. You do not poke your nose in other people's affairs, I do. You do not peer into other people's private notebooks, I do. You do not like to eavesdrop on other people's conversation, I do. To that extent we are different.

But we had agreed that you would stop the habits.

Yes, I recall that and I think I have done well. Lately, I have been minding my business very much, and not engaging in gossips or peering at other people's things.

So, what were you doing then looking into my diary?

It is different with you, don't you understand? You are my husband. We are one. I should know everything you do.

So being married means to be stripped completely of privacy of even thought?

Please don't wax philosophical with me now. I simply wanted to know about the visit slated for execution in your today's to-do list.

Visit to where? Spell it out. You have already read it, so be clear.

Visit to the Motherless Babies Home. What are you going to do there? I never heard you discuss anything of the sort before. That was really why I bothered to ask.

Well, I am glad you asked because it just reaffirms that you are still very much in the habit.

C'mon darling. You know I don't mean any harm.

I know, but please respect the private space of others, even that of your spouse. Isn't that what love entails?

I do not know. Are you going to tell me about the visit or not?

Well, there is more than that to tell, actually.

I am glad to hear.

Since last month, I decided to start implementing something our spiritual leader has always taught.

Yeah?

Yeah. He had always taught that we should try performing one true and conscious act of kindness everyday.

Yeah, I remember that. But I confess I have never really dwelt on it.

Well, I have. And I have been trying to practise since last month.

I see. Any effect?

Sure. In a very practical way, it is a very edifying experience. But beyond that it fills me with joy, and lightens my own personal burdens. I guess an explanation could be that the act puts my attention on somebody else, and thus reduces my personal anxieties. But what I cannot explain is the amount of joy these simple acts of kindness bring to my heart.

Oh, is that it. This must explain your newfound zest for life. Lately, you have been almost as enthusiastic as you were when we first met 17 years ago.

So you noticed. It is funny but it just fills you with gladness – a simple act of kindness.

Is that why you had that visit slated?

Sure. That is the one conscious act of kindness I want to perform today. Everyday I try to figure out one thing I could do purely for love; not expecting any rewards whatsoever. Not even for public relations purposes. Just for love.

What do you actually intend doing there?

Just to visit anonymously. See the children, play with some, if the opportunity exists, brighten their day and give a gift or two.

How sweet.

The intention is not to get any commendation from even you. It is an act that I do purely for love. Purely for God.

I see. That is truly noble. I am sorry if I spoilt anything.

It is okay. At least now you understand why some things should be private even amongst couples.

I understand. But I am also glad that I probed, because now I, too, will try to follow your footsteps and see if my experience would be the same.

Trust me, you will enjoy it. Just make up your mind to do it. Do one truly kind act everyday and the harvest of joy will surprise you.

Chapter Thirty-One

LET TIME HEAL

Who was that on the line?

Why do you ask?

It was an unusually long phone call. It is very uncommon of you to interrupt a meeting for an unusually long phone call.

Well, because it was an unusual phone call.

Where from?

From Ngozi.

Which Ngozi?

The one who just lost her husband.

It must have hit her really badly. Poor woman.

Yes indeed, poor sweet lady. She is one of my sweetest cousins. Unfortunately, I could not be there by her side in her most depressed moment.

Yeah, I know how much in high esteem she holds you. I know she likes you and trusts you a lot. She must have felt really bad that you did not attend the burial of her husband.

She felt bad. She felt hurt. She felt almost betrayed.

You must be right. But why didn't you attend?

Sadly, I heard about the demise of her husband after I had committed myself fully to an assignment outside the country. It was a major dilemma for me, I must confess. But all considered, I just had to travel.

So why didn't you explain to her before leaving?

I couldn't. When I attempted to speak with her, she broke down while we spoke, crying. She was in deep emotional pain, not a time for me to begin to give her excuses for not attending the burial. And as if she knew, in-between her sobs she implored me to attend. It was no time for me to be contrary. All I could do was implore her in return to take heart.

When you returned from your trip why didn't you make contact, to explain why she did not see you at the burial? I can tell you that she must have consciously looked for you in the midst of the crowd. She must have been sorely disappointed that you did not show.

I knew that and that was why I thought calling her on phone would not do. I rather went to see her physically. But I met her children, not her. She had been so depressed that some relatives abroad took her along, to recover.

So you did not get to see her?

Yes. So for months she has been sore, utterly disappointed in me. Then how come she is still the one that called you?

That is precisely the point. She had allowed the weeks in-between to tamper her disappointment and cool her temper. She did not call me when she was hot and hurt. She allowed the steam some time to evaporate until her coolness was restored.

What wisdom!

Wisdom indeed. Even in sorrow she has taught me yet another very useful lesson; a lesson to help me keep my cool and maintain a state of happiness.

What do you mean?

I am applying her lesson and it is yielding results. Only this morning I received some annoying texts from two of my siblings abroad. My initial impulse was to immediately react, but then I remembered Ngozi's lesson and allowed the steam to evaporate for sometime while maintaining my calm and happiness.

Did you totally ignore the texts?

I did for a while. This allowed me time to slowly chew the import of their message and to find a kind way of responding without hurting them and accepting the annoyance that lurked in their message.

Were you successful?

I am glad to say yes. I gave some hours, and then returned to the text messages and replied sweetly. Believe it or not, they quickly responded with a correspondingly sweet message; and my happiness, rather than diminish, multiplied.

So would you share this in your next column?

You bet! Allowing time to pass in-between what could otherwise be provocative circumstances or messages can help people maintain their equanimity, their peace and happiness.

Chapter Thirty-Two

SAY “NO” SOMETIMES

I was thinking...

What are you thinking again, Mister Thinker?

Nothing much, mum; just something about good people.

What about good people? You mean our church people?

Oh, mum, there you go again. There are many good people out there in the world who are not our church people.

But our church people are generally good, and I would say they are the real good people.

Look, mum, I am sorry but I do not want any arguments about our church people now. I just want to tell you about something else altogether.

It is my job, as your mother, to make sure that you recognize our church people as the good people of the world.

Mum, honestly I have doubts about that, but let it be, for now. What I know is that there are good people everywhere, from every religion. There are always the stars and the dregs of every religion. The stars are the shining examples, the shining lights, and the models of Divine Love. They do not have to even appear religious but from the actions of their heart you know them.

Where are you driving?

You are looking at me suspiciously. Just please listen.

I am listening.

Ok. I see a friend in class, Morenike, as one such shining lights of her religion. She is full of love. She is always there to help, and she is full of compassion. She has a nice word for everyone. And she never

mocks or jeers or gossips about anyone. She seems to wish everyone well and does not complain about anything.

I see. She must be a really sweet girl. Has she always been in your class?

Oh, yes, she joined when we were in JS 3. At least three years now.

Interesting.

You know, mum, lately she got into real trouble and had to be suspended from school indefinitely.

How?

Now that is why I brought up this issue of good people.

What happened?

Some classmates, who had prior knowledge that a search party was coming to the class to look for some stolen items, had pleaded with Morenike to help them keep an envelope. Morenike was naturally wary, because the lads were not going anywhere. They were in class with her but just wanted her to take custody of their treasure.

Why didn't she just say "No"?

Mum, that is the main point. I find that good people have great difficulty in saying "No". This is not the first time I have seen good people suffer so much because of their desire to help.

But what happened in the case of Morenike? Did they find something on her?

Of course, mum!

Money? Stolen money?

No, it happened that the parcel was not of the stolen money that they were looking for?

Really? What was it then?

The envelope was only a means of concealing wrapped weeds.

Weeds?

Yes, weeds. Some called it cigar. Some called it tobacco; I don't really know.

Oh, my God!

They found it on her, and all her attempts to convince the authorities that the packet was not hers and that the owners gave it to her that afternoon for safe keeping did not save her.

Why?

Because the boys denied her. They strongly denied her. They agreed that they gave her an envelope, but one containing money!

God!

So Morenike found herself in double trouble. She had weeds in her possession. And then there was the case of money, which the boys swore they must recover.

Are you sure Morenike did not...

Never, mum. The word is never! Morenike is very innocent. She is a good person, a very good person. Today she is at home paying painfully for something she knew nothing about; just because she could not say "No". She has lost her happiness, just because she could not say "No". Those who go to visit her say she just sobs all day.

Such a pity!

Indeed, mum, such a pity. But it has taught me a great lesson. I will try to do all the good things you and dad teach us. I will try to do all the good things that we learn from the church and the scriptures. I will try to always be a shining light for my religion, just like all good people. But mum, I have promised myself that I will never suffer like Morenike. All my life, I will say "NO", when I have to. Nobody will hide under my good nature to steal my happiness away.

Chapter Thirty-Three

TO ALL, BE FAIR

Theresa, can you believe that this was my classmate at St. Bora? You look so good, so young. Timeless, I would say. How do you do it?

Good afternoon, Madam, do not mind your husband. From when we were in school he had always been prone to hyperboles, to exaggerations.

No, Tony, I am not kidding you. You look fantastic. You could pass for my youngest brother.

Well, thank you. It is the grace of God.

Listen, I know it is the grace of God, but you must be doing something additional. Seriously, I will like you to share some of your youth secrets with me. Or should I pay you for it? I know money has never been a prime issue for you so I'd be surprised if you are selling your arcane knowledge.

Money? No, Timi. I have not changed in that sense. Money remains where it belongs in my life - as a servant, never a master. If there were indeed any secrets I would of course be glad to share them with you.

But you are not sharing the details now. I am asking you clearly to share the tips.

You are serious?

Yes, I am serious. You do not know how you look, simply incredible.

Oh my God! You are just amazing.

No, tell me.

Okay, let's sit. You know, the truth is that there is really no secret to share except that I follow the precepts of my religion.

Oooh, you have not changed. You now want to attribute everything to God? Tony, so you have not changed?

I believe I have changed. I am deeper in God now than I was in school.

Alright. I understand your stuff about God, giving you peace of mind as result, which in turn affects your state of mind, and body. Right?

Correct!

As I said, I agree; but aren't there some real practical tips?

You are incredible. I do not want to say incorrigible. So what do you want me to say?

How you have managed to retain such glowing youthfulness and, I must say, happiness. You seem to have retained your incredible zest for life. Age and time appear not to have dampened you at all.

Thanks for the compliments. You do not look bad yourself, as Madam here will testify.

Tony, stop parrying the question. Address the matter!

Well, what I do to keep my health, which probably reflects as youthfulness, is what everybody else does - pray, eat well, sleep well, exercise well, and treat others well. Simple.

Typical Tony. Listen, I can understand the role of prayer, food, sleep, exercise, but what's this stuff about treating others well. What is it got to do with it?

A lot.

How?

Listen, I would say that it is a prime factor on the state of your health, and happiness. When you treat others wrong, with disdain, lack of respect, and especially unfairly, it has its own direct effect on your state of mind and body. Also, it has indirect effects on whether you sleep well or not. It has effect on your general outlook on life. One who treats others fairly always tends to be happier in life. He tends to be fearless. He tends to harbour fewer misgivings. These in turn have good effects on his body and mind.

Give me scientific proof.

Interesting. You have not changed. If you like, keep waiting for science before you do what is right for you. I would rather go for experience than science. If it works, why not try it. Besides, if you ask medical doctors, they could come up with explanations of the effect of wrong treatment of others on the body that may astound you.

You mean that?

I can almost say for certain that there is a direct causative relationship between your health and how you treat others.

I will investigate it.

I suggest you do. Fairness is a great medicine. It is a greater booster of love in any place, body or environment. And love is probably the greatest and best tonic for the mind and for the body. When you treat others right, especially fairly, you go to bed with your two eyes closed, in a manner of speaking, and sleep like a baby. And if that happens continuously I would not be surprised if you begin to look more and more like a baby.

Now I am totally confused.

No need to be, my friend. Being fair to others is being fair to yourself, to your mind, to your body. This is true, at least by my experience. And I imagine the converse is also true.