

Contentment

Contentment is best described as 'peace of mind' but to achieve contentment in your life it can prove very difficult. The more responsibility you take on during your lifetime, the less likely you are to find contentment. Responsibility can lay a heavy burden upon you and it takes a person of very strong character to overcome the baggage of adversity that responsibility brings with it.

Let's examine the function of the brain as the first step to finding contentment. Of course, in certain religions I might be directed to the soul rather than the brain. The Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle agreed that the soul must have a logical purpose, the exercise of which was the most divine of human actions. Does the soul exist, is it part of the heart, part of the mind or is it built into the cellular design of the human body? These are questions to which there are no logical conclusions; only a belief. I believe that there is an inner and subconscious purity in everyone that seeks to countermand any impure thoughts in the mind. This inner purity can be smothered and destroyed if the mind is so corrupted and becomes evil in its intent. If there is a soul, then it is part of the beating heart; for when there is intense grief, it is the heart that suffers severe and almost unbearable pain, not the mind. Only when the heart stops, do we die.

However, I digress, it is the brain that I will concentrate on. The brain is like a computer and it can become infected. The computer is intentionally infected by viruses which are placed on the internet by unscrupulous individuals and are downloaded to your computer through material you are researching, such as articles, reviews and videos; even social media websites. These viruses corrupt your computer and if left alone can eventually cause the operating system to fail and likewise the computer. The brain can be infected in a similar way by the constant bombardment of negative waves. For instance: hourly political debates on all the news channels, social media websites, the constant news regarding the proxy wars being carried out around the globe, and of course the reporting of common law crimes, such as murder and rape. Wall to wall news on climate change which is reputed to destroy the world in a couple of generations, the threat of meteor strikes and of course the favourite news, the threat of nuclear war. It can reach such a level of negative bombardment that any good news becomes unwelcome and the brain seeks only bad news. The television becomes addictive, including social media and the use of the smartphone. Perhaps the worst of all is the mental impact on the young through the constant bombardment of adverts promoting online gambling which leads to debt and computer games, which invariably promote violence.

Of course, you can switch off your brain to all of the above and the poet Thomas Gray, describes it well, *"thought would destroy their paradise. No more; where ignorance is bliss; it is folly to be wise."* However, the famous philosopher, Socrates stated, *"there is only one good, knowledge; and only one evil, ignorance."* It is a wise person who can find a balance between knowledge and ignorance and find contentment. The human being will find the greatest contentment through being creative. It may be through sweeping the street to operating on a patient and saving their life in a hospital. In your lifetime, there has to be something at your

very core of being which brings contentment, and to which all other interests in your life are secondary. It could even be a hobby. Although the film actors Henry Fonda and Jimmy Stewart enjoyed making films, they found great contentment in model making together at their homes. They only fell out once because they clashed over their political views – Fonda was an ardent democrat and Stewart a republican. Afterwards they both vowed never to discuss politics again and they remained firm friends for the rest of their lives. Road racers race their motorbikes on the Isle of Man knowing full well that they could be killed and nearly every year, someone is killed. They know the risks, yet it is the core of their being, everything else in their lives is circuited around racing. Likewise, the same applies to Formula 1 drivers, mountain climbers, astronauts, deep sea explorers and those with other dangerous occupations.

Contentment can be achieved through your job, perhaps marriage and the enjoyment of watching your children grow up and take flight to new horizons. However, and as the divorce statistics in the UK show, by marrying, and having children, it may seem an idyllic choice but is often fraught with verbal and very often physical disagreements which bring the baggage of discontentment.

Your choice of friends and any social interaction are all important. The Greek Stoic Philosopher Epictetus stated, *“in public avoid talking often and excessively about your accomplishments and dangers, for however much you enjoy recounting your dangers, it’s not pleasant for others to hear about your affairs.”* Now, in older age, I can see the wisdom in those words. Politeness, for the sake of the feelings, can eventually strain relationships. Everything in moderation and least said, sooner mended, but heed the words of the philosophers –

- *“The key is to keep company only with people who uplift you and whose presence calls forth your best.”* – Epictetus.
- *“People are like dirt. They can either nourish you and help you grow as a person or they can stunt your growth and make you wilt and die.”* – Plato.
- *“Misfortune shows those who are not really friends.”* – Aristotle

In old age and retirement, contentment can be realised. Once again, the core for your existence must be found. The inability to get around can be tempered by exercise and getting out, even for a walk to a local park and enjoy interacting with nature; even simply feeding the squirrels or birds in a lake is mind soothing. To avoid loneliness, it could be a dog to walk every day, a little pooch that displays all the innocence of a child and one you look after and love. Perhaps a hobby, like model building, or simply remaining fit through regular hill walks. Don’t have your food delivered to your home by Tesco or Asda, get out and purchase it locally and interact socially with the human race. Despite all the doom and gloom in the news, and on social media, there are actually millions of kind and decent people out there in the world. Getting out and about is better than vegetating in a room of the house which is overheated and lacks oxygen, whereby illnesses set in.

If you are very old, disabled or infirm; perhaps unable to get out and about and you cannot overcome loneliness, there are very few solutions available to find contentment and a purpose in living, especially if you have no family to care to your needs and comfort. Most very old people and those suffering from dementia, end up in a care home. I have not reached that stage, so to offer a solution is difficult. I made up my mind, this year (2023) at the age of 75-years-old, that once I reached the stage (hopefully late 80s) when I cannot ride fast motorbikes, or get around, I will get my food delivered, get an old dog from the pound that no-one wants and sit outside in my garden in the sunshine and take to smoking a pipe and enjoying a regular brandy. I will enjoy interacting with all the wildlife and my photography, which by the way, I already enjoy.

Death is a natural process; it is part of life. There is no point in worrying about it. When you are young and healthy, death is very rarely considered as it is considered a long way away, and you are too busy living life to worry about it. When you are old and especially infirm or disabled, the days, weeks and years grow short as death nears. In old age, you will never find contentment if you do not embrace the inevitability of death. Some people find religion to ease their mind, in the knowledge that when they die, they will go to heaven if they accept Jesus into their lives. I approach death very much like Socrates, *“death is either a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or there is a change and the soul migrates to another world; indeed, death is welcomed if I can then converse with my family and friends who have passed before me, but if it is anything like a sleep in which there is no disturbances by dreams; anyone would agree that it is a pleasant state of being.”*

Interaction with nature all the year around, brings contentment. We live in such a beautiful world with an abundance of wildlife to enjoy. If you take the time to stop and look around, every day of every year, you will see nature at play. As Henry David Thoreau, the famous poet and philosopher stated, *“It is the marriage of the soul with nature that makes the intellect fruitful, and gives birth to imagination.”*

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