

The Zen in the Modern Everyday Life

No matter how hackneyed, the phrase “a life of happiness” still remains an object of interest and somehow eludes our understanding.

A lot of researchers, thinkers and philosophers have spoken of how one can lead a happy life. Although these ideas come from a noble perspective, some of them, written thousands of years ago or derived from an Eastern philosophy, seem to be losing ground in the modern day. Our everyday lives are busy and full of complexities as we try to integrate technology more and more with the fabric of practicality. There’s so much to do – bills to be paid, kids to take care of, a family to attend to, jobs to be finished and bosses to be kept happy. In the hustle and bustle, there is a calling for a modern solution which can perhaps replace a need for hours of meditating in the mountains to gain calmness.

Joseph Law is one such modern day philosopher who has lived on both sides of the fence. Having lived a life of a busy and successful corporate executive while still in his twenties, and taken a leap on the other side by founding Living Greatness, a social organisation dedicated to implementing strategies for creating an extraordinary life in the modern day, Joseph is perhaps a perfect teacher and a follower. He recently wrote *Living Greatness*, a book about happiness, success and living on purpose which features interviews with some of the most inspiring thinkers of the world. Today, Living Greatness Group trains and consults Fortune 500 companies like Optus, L’Oreal and JP Morgan on leadership and performance.

Joseph reignited his passion for his spiritual journey when he first visited South India in 2007. There is something mystical about this country, amidst all the chaos and population, poverty and extreme riches, which attracts so many philosophers at one point in their life. The country throws different spiritual ideas your way. Buddhism and Hinduism are two examples.

“When it comes to Buddhism for example, they don’t believe in a creator God and do not talk about the existence of soul. Hinduism on the other hand, believes in a greater God, in the form of holy trinity, called Brahma, Siva and Vishnu. However, followers of both sects chant, pray and meditate. What’s interesting about Hinduism is that it parallels the Christianity philosophy of Holy Trinity in the form of

Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. There are also fundamental and mystic aspects to both of these religions,” Joseph explains.

Joseph believes that whichever sect you follow, ultimately we're all headed towards the same destination in the course of our evolution, which is the peak state of consciousness.

Different people explain this “peak state” or “connection to the divine” differently. Tony Robbins, the motivational guru, refers to it as a very emotional or resourceful mental state in which a person can do almost anything and conquer obstacles external to him or her. Joseph adds, “In the spiritual tradition, it is most often referred to an inner state of consciousness called “Samadhi”. There are other terms like Nirvana, Satori and Christ consciousness but the underlying feeling can be describe as a sense of ‘ever new bliss’ according to Paramahansa Yoganada and saints of different spiritual traditions.”

Another motivational speaker, Dr Wayne Dyer, says that the question is not whether we are connected to the divine but how corroded is our link. For Joseph, reaching that peak is getting closer to nature or the Universe itself. “We are all essentially, one way or another, evolving towards the nature of who we really are. But what’s really interesting is that we’re already there without trying.”

Speaking of the Universe, Joseph adds that everything is energy and there is an underlying oneness in all things. “I think what is really deluding us is our senses and our inner perception based on our limited experience or senses, and if you were to look at something we call solid object for example, it is composed of particles and atoms. The interesting thing is an atom is 99% space, but if you look at a chair or a table, it appears solid to us, but in actuality, it is not. The question is what is real? Is everything a game of inner perception?”

Perhaps it is all about this inner perception after all. Some teachers believe this perception or the link with oneness can be “cleansed” by being present. Eckhart Tolle is one prominent believer of remaining present in the moment. For Joseph, it is by practice that we can access our essence.

“Obviously, the ego would like to think that’s how we can achieve things faster, better or bigger. All the great souls who ever walked on the planet, be it a Buddha, Jesus, Lao Tzu, Mother Teresa or a Saint

Francis, never claimed that the power is directly from them. I think the power flows to us, not from us. It is a very important distinction. It was Jesus who said it was through his Father that he accomplishes everything, not through himself. And I remember even Mother Teresa said, 'I'm just a little pencil in the hands of God.' This also ties into the idea of what many modern spiritual teachers say about surrendering. Letting go, letting God."

Whether you call it remaining present in the moment, getting closer to nature or accessing the essence of who we are, meditation is one of the most quoted ways to reach "there". The question, as per Joseph, is not "what is the best form of meditation?" but "what is the purpose of meditation?" Everyone has a different purpose. The more precisely we answer this question, the closer to clarity we get.

Most people get it wrong when they say they "do meditation". A subtle difference between "doing" and "being" is that doing may not seem a natural state of your existence, whereas being is more so.

"The moment you perceive it as an activity, your mind gets busy and restless and you lose the whole point of meditation. Meditation is about letting go, becoming aware and gradually transcending your thoughts and mind." He recommends Vipassana for beginners as taught by the Buddha or studying the work of Eckhart Tolle or great Zen masters like Thich Nhat Hanh..

Meditation is not controlling the thoughts either. As we think we have to control something, the harder it gets. The mind gets active, and there is a heavy flow of thoughts, which defeats the whole purpose. Rather than playing controller, play witnesser – witnessing the breath as it flows in and moves out.

"The mind and the body go hand in hand, and the breathing and witnessing of the breathing is actually how you cultivate a greater sense of awareness."

A lot of it actually has to do with surrendering ourselves to the present moment. Surrendering, as per Joseph, is not bad as most people would think. Neither is it a sign of giving up and being a loser. It simply is a detachment from the outcome. "Do not attach to the fruits of the labour," he quotes the Bhagavad Gita, which brings us back to the non-controlling state of a witnesser.

However, this does not mean we quit as if nothing is under our control. Surrendering is one thing, sitting and waiting for things to happen magically is another. We are still to have aspirations and dreams. It is what makes us human. There are many who have a great spiritual intent, yet lack the presence of mind to manage their basic finances. On the other hand, it is seen that exceptionally rich people lack the fruits of spirituality. Why is this so? What makes us tilt toward the extreme sides of the scale of life where on one end is spirituality and on the other are materialistic goals? Are these two mutually exclusive?

“Not at all,” Joseph is certain. There are those few in between who’ve decoded the balancing act and are both “spiritual” and enjoying all the material goodness that life can offer.

“I think money is just money. There’s no meaning to it other than what you give it . . . it depends on what you use it for. You can use it for altruistic reasons, you can use it to elevate your ego or for selfish reasons. To manifest money, you need to change your perception around money, because our belief around money will either restrict or allow the flow, as it is just another form of energy.”

So there is no folly in wanting more, to be rich or to own a mansion. It is perfectly okay to be a successful business person and try to reach the Samadhi at the same time. There needs to be a greater integration between spiritual and material aspects of life. It is the inner state of consciousness that makes the difference.

“A friend of mine, Tony Hsieh, who ran one of the most successful companies in America called Zappos.com, is a billionaire and an enlightened thinker. He said, ‘If you were to have never made a dime within the next ten years, what would you be doing?’

“I think you have to write it down on a piece of paper, do some brainstorming and some soul-searching, and once you identify that, you know that this is your innermost passion, your innermost drive, and for me, when I was writing my book. It wasn’t an easy process for me, because I had a hectic job at the time, running a financial service company, having a lot of demands from my Board of

Directors, managing staff, meeting my KPIs etc. So, after work, I would work till midnight and on the weekend on my book, doing a lot of research, designing the questions, approaching people for interviews.

“You need to dig deeper kind of what your innermost passion is. Entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs, Donald Trump or a Richard Branson talk about doing what you love as the key to success. Because I can tell you, if you were to do anything inspiring, it’s not going to be easy. Inevitably, it’s going to be a lot of challenges, obstacles along the path which can dishearten you. So following your passion will give you the fuel you need to keep you going. You also need to take a transitional approach and work gradually towards your goals. There is no such thing as an overnight success.”

Passion is a door to a life of greatness. And then there’s something else which precedes passion. Joseph explains the top law to living such a life lies in clarity about oneself.

“The first ideal is to develop clarity of mind by understanding the innermost motivation and who you are as a person, your strength and weaknesses, and in the business world. This is called a SWOT analysis. It stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. So, once you have developed a greater sense of who you are and where you’re going, you need to develop for yourself an inspiring vision to get yourself motivated.

Joseph suggests having short-term goals of twelve months so as to practise focus. He advises against focusing on everything at once and being a jack-of-all-trades. It is also pertinent that the goals be achievable. A way to measure this is setting goals where one has at least a 50% chance of succeeding. Ask questions like what resources would be required, how will you execute the strategy and within what timeframes.

“With every rise comes a fall.

With every beginning, there is an ending.

Life is transient. Nothing stays the same.

Only the changing nature of life is unchanged.”

We catch this beautifully written piece on Joseph's website. Although it reflects traditional Eastern philosophy, we can't help notice how some modern spiritual writers, like Bronte Baxter, the author of *Blowing the Whistle on Enlightenment*, are challenging this traditional philosophy. "Why must life begin and end?" they ask. "Why must there be sickness and death? Why must the infinite be the only thing that is perfect and unchanging, when we, its expressions, are made of the same stuff? Why can't life, even in our physical form, last forever? Why can't earth become a paradise?" The questions are no doubt unconventional, but seem valid.

But Joseph believes in the polarity of life as Yin and Yang in the Taoist tradition "I accept the moment as it is, but it doesn't stop me from envisioning a different reality in the future for the betterment of mankind. Sometimes, there is a need to be neither an optimist nor pessimist but a realist, just as I'm aware of the impermanence of life and everything is subject to the universal law of change."

Let's extend the concept of right and wrong to the modern day. There is a lot of friction at workplaces, for example, where people are disheartened everyday by the conflicts between them and their superiors or peers. Edward De Bono once said, 'It's not so much that a problem exists, but how you look at a problem. Joseph likes to change the perception rather than the person, since "everything is perception".

"If you change the way you look at a problem, everything changes," he adds.

Indeed, ask a different question and you have a different answer. So what are the most important questions which lead us through the smooth sailing in everyday life? We are told of two.

What can I learn from this experience? Joseph advises to focus on the learning side of the experience, which automatically turns our attention on the positive in the situation. If something can be learnt from a situation, well, it must be good, right?

How can I become a better person as a result of this experience? We are becoming this or becoming that at each moment. Why not become a better person? When life throws a toughie, Joseph suggests soul-searching the answer to the second question. The answers may surprise you.

With this, we approach the “happy ending” of the interview. Happiness is a very subjective experience, and what may work for you may not work for your spouse or your mom. And it is perfectly alright to disagree on what makes you happy, or what your definition of happiness entails. According to the Buddha, “Happiness is the cessation of suffering.”

On a final note, when it comes to our happiness, there are two types in general. “There’s temporal happiness, and there is permanent happiness, and I think, really, permanent happiness can only come from by understanding the essence of who we are, and you may have heard this hundreds of times and it’s almost like a cliché, but in essence, we are spiritual beings having a human experience, not a human being having an occasional spiritual experience,” Joseph signs off.**Call to Evolution**

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