

The Attainment of Happiness

*Originally published in the November
1916 edition of Vanity Fair.*

A RESTATEMENT OF THE PURPOSE OF MYSTICAL TEACHINGS

The best and wisest of men are always seeking a solution of the problem of human sorrow. There is one which the wandering ascetics of the world have always known. Whoever said "The kingdom of heaven is within you" certainly knew the best solution of the problem. Man is, in reality, only a very little lower than the angels. He is far more independent of circumstance than most people are aware. Happiness is not so utterly beyond his reach as those who do not climb spiritual mountains suppose.

But there are remedies nearer than the mighty pyramid of Chogo Ri, and the tented pavilion of the massif of Kanchenjunga.

You can woo the butterfly—the poppy bud. You can float, like a butterfly in the enchanted air. You have only to draw a little of the hydrochloride of cocaine into your nostrils, and you become full of intense virility and energy, a devourer of obstacles. To smoke a few pipes of opium, and you rise to the cloudless and passionless bliss of the philosopher. To swallow a little hashish and you behold all the fantastic glories of fable, and those a thousandfold; or to woo a flask of ether—breathing it as if it were the very soul of your Beloved—and you will perceive the heart of Beauty in every vulgar and familiar thing.

Every one of these drugs gives absolute forgetfulness of all misfortune; nay, you may contemplate the most appalling catastrophes imminent or

already fallen upon you; and you care no more for them than does Nature herself.

The only drawback to the use of drugs is that the phenomenon of *toleration* is so soon set up, and the effect diminished; while for weaklings there is always the danger of the formation of a habit, when the treacherous servant becomes master, and takes toll for the boon of his ephemeral heavens by the bane of an abiding hell.

These remarks have only been introduced to emphasize the fact that happiness is an interior state; for every one of these drugs gives happiness supreme and unalloyed, entirely irrespective of the external circumstances of the individual. It would be folly to fill the apartment of an opium-smoker with the masterpieces of Rembrandt or Sotatsu, when a dirty towel or a broken chair suffices to flood his soul with more glories than it can bear; when he realizes that light itself is beautiful, no matter on what object it may fall, and when, if you asked him what he would do if he were blind, he would condescend, from Heaven, to reply that darkness was more lovely still, that light was but a disturbance of the serenity of the soul, a siren to seduce it from the bliss of the contemplation of its own ineffable holiness.

But why should we talk of drugs? They are only the counterfeit notes, or at best the fiat notes of a discredited government, while we are asking for purest gold. This gold can be ours for the asking.

We may begin by reassuring ourselves. The gold is really in the vaults of every man's treasury. The mystic quest is not a chimaera. The drugs assure us of that. They have not put anything supernatural into us; they have found nothing in us that was not already there. They have merely stimulated us. All the peace, the joy, the love, the beauty, the comprehension that they gave us; all these things were in us, bone of our bone, flesh of our

flesh, and soul of our soul. They are in our treasury, safe enough; and the chief reason why we should not burglariously use such skeleton keys as morphia is that by so doing we are likely to hamper our locks.

We seen, then, that we are but so little lower than the angels that the most trifling stimulus raises us to a plane where we enjoy—without consideration even of what it is that we enjoy! Our trouble is due entirely to the law that action and reaction are equal and opposite. We have to pay for the pleasure with pain. We sat up all night, last night, and so tonight we must go to bed early; we drank too much champagne at supper, and now, in the morning, it is the turn of Vichy. The question then has always been whether we can overcome this law of duality, whether we can reach—one step—to that higher plane where all will be ours.

Mysticism supplies the answer. The mystic attainment may be defined as the Union of the Soul with God, or as the soul's realization of Itself, or but there are fifty phrases to define the attainment. Whether you are a Christian or a Buddhist, a Theist or an Atheist, the attainment of this state is as open to you as is nightmare, or madness, or intoxication. Religious folk have buried this fact under mountains of dogma; but the study of comparative religion has made it clear. One has merely to print parallel passages from the mystics of all ages and religions to see that they were talking of the same thing. One even gets verbal identities, such as the "That tao which is tao is not tao" of the Chinese, the "Not That, not That" of the Hindu, the "Head which is above all Heads, the Head which is not a Head" of the Qabalist, and the "That is not, which is" of a modern atheistic or pantheistic mystic.

Mysticism, unless it be a mere barren intellectual doctrine, always involves some personal reli-

gious experience of this kind; and the real strength of every religion lies, consequently, in its mystics. The conviction of truth given by any important spiritual experience is so great that although it may have lasted for a few seconds only, it does not hesitate to pit itself against the experience of a lifetime, in respect of reality. The mystic doubts whether he, the man, exists at all, because he is so certain of the existence of him, the God; and the two beings are difficult to conceive intellectually as co-existent!

Now the extreme state of Being, Knowledge and Bliss, which characterizes the intermediate stages of mystic experience, is a thousandfold more intense than any other kind of happiness. It is totally independent of circumstance. We could bring a cloud of witnesses—to swear to this truth—from the ends of all the earth; but one, the Persian bard El Qahar, whose masterpiece is the Bagh-i-Muattar, must suffice.

"Whether Allah be or be not is little odds so long as His devotees enjoy the mystic rapture—Whether He exist or no, whether He love him or no, El Qahar will love Him and sing His praises. The perfect lover is calm and equable; storms of thunder, quakings of the earth, losses of goods, punishment from great men, none of these things cause him to rise from his divan, or to remove the silken tube of the rose-perfumed huqqa from his mouth."

It is, therefore, unnecessary to fret over earthly problems and all the trials of a merely earthly experience. The root of the cause is duality, the anti-thesis of the Ego and the Non-Ego; and the cure is Realization of the Unity. Socialism, and religion, and love, and art, are all fantastic things, good to lull the ills of life: dreams pitted against dreams. But the only real way of going about the problem of happiness is to attack the cause of all our troubles, the illusion in us of a duality of being.

Every great mystic has taught us that a singleness with God is the prime desideratum.

The Saviour's instructions to his disciples to "take no thought for the morrow," to "abandon father and mother and all other things," "not to have two cloaks," "not to resist evil," are merely the ordinary rules of every eastern and western mystic. The disciple must have nothing whatever to turn his mind to duality, or to divert his mind from concentration. The whole secret of "Yoga" is given in Matthew 6:22. "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." This is a perfectly simple statement of the virtue of what the Hindus call "one-pointedness." The gospel of John, too, is full of praises of mystic practice. "I and my Father are one." "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"; "I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." Kappa tau lambda.

The Evangelists have been very stupidly accused of copying such passages from Chinese and Indian classics, on the grounds of absolute identity of idea, and even close verbal parallelism. It might be difficult to rebut such a charge if the passages were illustrative of remote, abstruse or even non-sensical doctrines.

For instance, if I happen to begin a poem by saying that: "The purple pigs lament the music of Madrid; They cook the nightingale with limping eyes of kid" it is fair to assume that I am plagiarizing the classic lines: "*Les cochons rouges pleurent un musique espagnol; leurs yeux de suede boitent a cuire le rossignol,*" because it is highly unlikely that two such complex pieces of pure nonsense should occur to any two independent thinkers—unless indeed they were German metaphysicians. But fifty men may observe independently that still water reflects images and record the fact with all due solemnity. No question of copying arises from the

restatement of any great truth. There is, it is true, a universal tradition as to the means and of the end of mysticism, and we may perhaps think that Jesus had His teacher; but there is no necessity for any such supposition.

During an experiment made by me with a certain drug in an English midland hospital, the matron, who was one of my subjects, had not even a smattering of the history or even of the terminology of mysticism; yet she passed through trance after trance in the traditional order, and described her experiences in almost the same language as Lao-tzu and Boehme, and Sri Sabhapaty Swami, and all the rest, of whom she had never so much as heard the names. One remedy for the ills of life is to make the subjective mind—by training— independent of all the senses. To cleanse the soul of the contamination of illusion; of the belief in duality; of the fear of even earthly misery.

Let us, by meditation and by all the true mystical practices, learn that the light of the body is the spiritual eye, and that the eye must be single, devoid of every thought of duality, to the end that the body and mind and soul shall be full of light. That is certainly a wise way to go about the attainment of happiness but, whether we think this is the best way, or the only way, there can be no reasonable doubt in the mind of any student of comparative religion that this is the way pointed out by at least one of the authors of the Gospel.