

The True Nature of Happiness

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An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB. “Letter Twelve” in COMMON GROUND (New York: Continuum, 1999), p. 132.

Our consumerist and materialist conditioning preaches to us that we have a right to be happy. We make ourselves and half the world miserable in claiming that right at the expense of others when we see the race for happiness as a competition. The desires of our heart, as Diadochus taught, are formed into images, and those images begin to exist in a half-light of reality. By acting to make those images more substantial, we release the power of illusion into the world through those same egotistical desires. Human beings, who are not naturally evil, can then plant bombs on shopping streets, exploit the poor, deceive the credulous, corrupt the young betray the beloved. A small but tragic error lies at the core of this unhappy human drama. More than possessing the right to be happy, we are born with a duty to be happy which we fulfill only by discovering the true nature of happiness.

After meditation: "December Morning" by W.S. Merwin in GARDEN TIME (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2016), p. 66.

DECEMBER MORNING

How did I come to this late happiness
as I wake into my remaining days
another morning in my life with Paula
taking me by surprise like the first one
I know it's rash to speak about happiness
with the Fates so near that I can hear them
but this morning even the old regrets
seem to have lost their rancor
and to harbor shy hopes like the first grass
of spring appearing between the paving stones
when I was a small child and I see
that each step has been leading me
to the present morning that I recognize
before daylight and I forget that
I am almost blind and I see the piles
of books I was going to read next
there they wait like statues of sitting dogs
faithful to someone they used to know
but happiness has a shape made of air
it was never owned by anyone
it comes when it will in its own time

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