

What is Happiness ?

by Sam Menahem Ph.D.

“Happiness is a warm gun.” John Lennon

“Happiness is a warm puppy.” Charlie Brown

Let us analyze these apocryphal quotes, noting any similarities and differences.

When I was in the U.S. army (1969-70), John Lennon was enormously popular. The former Beatle had just chosen Yoko Ono over our beloved Beatles-We Beatle fans were not too enamored over his choice, but his shift from the Beatles to Yoko was to prove fertile ground for some of his best work. Let us begin with my personal experience with the above quote. A fellow GI had just returned from Viet Nam and was stationed with my unit in Germany. He liked the Beatles too, especially the line quoted above. He assured the peace-niks in our medical/dental unit that indeed, it made him happy to have a warm gun in his hands. We all hooted him down, called him a war mongering idiot and told him that Lennon was referring either to sex or drugs. Both of these things we assured him, that Lennon was much more familiar with than an actual gun.

A few months after my discharge, I was happy to catch Dick Cavett interviewing John. Cavett asked him what that line meant. He replied that it meant exactly what it said. A warm gun gave him a feeling of power. The warm gun wasn't a metaphor at all. I was shocked, dismayed, wanted to look up my GI friend and apologize. Now, I think Lennon was just being flippant and kidding with Cavett. I still think he wrote that line as a metaphor of sorts. John was talking about sex within a loving relationship. He sang, “When I put my finger on your trigger....” He felt most loving while making love to his beloved Yoko. He later wrote, “Oh Yoko...I love to turn you on...” Lennon had been abandoned by his mother when he was a baby. Later he was abandoned by his aunt Mimi. He felt very unloved and sought happiness through fame and fortune. He got both of these things (as well as a lot of sex and drugs) as a Beatle...but he was not happy...until he met Yoko. No matter that the press called her the “dragon lady. “ He felt loved by her and expressed it. His solo work in the 1970s reflects this change in attitude. He extended his love from Yoko to humanity with his classic song “Imagine.” He sang, “Imagine all the people, living lives in peace... You may say I'm a dreamer...but I'm not the only one, I hope some day you'll join us and the world will live as One.” Now he went beyond just loving his wife. He was visualizing a world that was warm, peaceful, loving...joined as One, in the spirit of God (though he never uses such a religious word). In his later years, living in New York with Yoko and son Sean, he was much happier than he was as a famous Beatle. Happiness is a warm feeling called love. Our society worships romantic love. But Lennon realized that romance was just the beginning. We must connect in peace and live as One.

Charles Shultz is the author of the Peanuts quote. He created an enormously popular fantasy world, the comic strip, "Peanuts." These "Peanuts" were adult children, looking for love and often not finding it. Charlie was always lusting after the little red haired girl (his yearning for a special, romantic relationship) and getting no satisfaction. He was also always scolded by mean old Lucy (his vicious superego?). But there was one thing that Charlie loved, a warm puppy. What was so great about a puppy? Well the answer is simple. It is warm, cuddly, non-judgmental and not demanding of anything in particular. Puppies want what we people want, someone to love them. If we love them, they love us. How simple. Is it too much of a cliché to say that the kind of love we can feel with a warm puppy is what humanity needs? I think not. The reason Peanuts was so popular and is still running is that it taps into the obvious in all of us. We just need to love ourselves in a non-judgmental way. We are already good enough. With our own self approval, we can then spread love to others. Carl Rogers, with his "client centered" therapy, told us the qualities in an ideal psychotherapist; warm, genuine, spontaneous and exuding unconditional positive regard. Yes, just accepting and appreciating another has a healing function.

Thus, two widely different individuals, John Lennon and Charles Shultz taught us the same basic lesson. If you want to be happy, love and accept yourself and others. Learn to sincerely and spontaneously make the inevitable lemons of life into lemonade. Don't judge or criticize yourself or others. Then, happiness, without being pursued, will land softly on your shoulders, like a butterfly. No "mind games" are necessary for happiness sings Lennon. There is no need to project any particular images on anyone. As Ghandi said, "be the love you want to see" and you will be happy.