

THE GLASS HALF FULL

Rev. Amy Carol Webb

River of Grass Unitarian Universalist Congregation

January 19, 2014

[sung]

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.

If you're happy and you know it then you're life will surely show it

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.]

... stomp your feet

... say "oh yeah!"

Oh *yeah!!* Which, by the way, is what "amen!" means.

If you're happy – and you know it.

Sometimes a seemingly super-simple children's song actually carries a meaning much deeper than we might expect. Some of you might even have felt silly singing it. But consider this: The word "silly" comes from an old English word "seilig" which means, literally, "to be blessed, happy and healthy." If that's the case, then please let us be silly all day every day!

If you're happy – and you know it.

The first half of the phrase is a conditional a state of being – "if you're happy." The second half is a state of *consciousness* – "and you know it."

The first – "if you're happy" – Now that's a *big "if"* – and very often we make it even bigger that it needs to be, when we put all kinds of conditions on our happiness. We pile up "ifs" and "whens" like –

I'd be happy if ... my kids behaved better.

I'll be happy when ... I find the perfect mate.

Or I'd be happy if ... the mate I found would cooperate.

If I just had a little more time ...

If I had this car or this house or that job or lived in this town ...

And, of course, the big one – and a genuinely serious one at this moment in our shared history – if I just had more money.

We put so many conditions on happiness that happiness sometimes just gives up and goes looking for someone who's really *ready* to happy.

Now, on the matter of money and happiness, I particularly enjoy this passage from author Douglas Adams' "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" series, where he says,

[Planet Earth's problem] was this: -- (notice that Adams writes of a speculated future and speaks of our Earth in the past tense) – Planet Earth's problem was this: most of the people living on it were unhappy for pretty much most of the time. Many solutions were suggested for this problem, but *most* of these were largely concerned with the *movements of small green pieces of paper*, which is odd because on the whole it was *not* the small pieces of paper that were unhappy.

In our innermost selves, we know that small green pieces of paper don't really make happiness, but that's hard to remember when you sincerely don't have enough. And I can speak from experience on this, as my own life has enjoyed times of plenty – and not. Like the time I was a teenager, and stood in my family's front yard watching the repossessioner's trucks haul away my family's belongings, with the tow truck right behind pulling my precious little 1964 Ford Fairlane I'd paid \$350 for.

What happened next was key in shaping my young heart's perspective. That night, when the ordeal was over, my parents gathered us up on lawn chairs on the bare living room floor -- because even the carpeting had been rolled up and taken away – and my father read from the Psalms and we prayed and sang together until the my littlest brothers finally fell asleep. What a lesson in the wisdom that *stuff* does not constitute *happiness*.

So then ... what *does* constitute happiness? If not stuff or money or ifs or whens or people or circumstances or even time, what *is* it and how do we *get* it?

Our United States Declaration of Independence guarantees us the right to life, liberty, and the *pursuit* of happiness. NOT the right *to* happiness, but the right to the *pursuit* of it. But then folks, I think even the phrase "the pursuit of happiness" is one of the most dangerous ever uttered by humankind.

Our forebears meant well by it, having wrenched themselves loose of an historical tyranny of heart and mind, but lauding "the pursuit of happiness" as a human right has given rise to two particular troubles in the world.

First, it made "happiness" – a largely undefinable and illusive ideal -- the holy grail *to be attained by any means*, resulting all too often in one person's pursuit of it injuring another.

And second, it set this undefinable, illusive and ethereal ideal as *the measure of life's and people's worth*.

When in truth, happiness cannot be chased down and caught. And cannot be gotten at the expense of others.

At the heart of it, happiness is not something we *find* – it's something that *finds us* as we live lives worthy of it.

It's not the *goal* of life, but a by-product of *how* we live. And so, ironically, the pursuit of happiness is in reality a chief source of UN-happiness in our world. Because happiness, when pursued, very often leads us on wild goose chases -- because happiness is the journey – not the destination.

Think about it like Winnie the Pooh – who says the only thing he likes as much as eating honey is being *just about* to eat honey!

So how do we live so that we realize that feeling of being *just about* to eat honey?

Well, to start with, we realize that happiness is not a matter of circumstance, but a state of mind. The human experience is full of people in awful circumstances who are somehow yet living toward happiness. Anne Frank comes to mind, and Nelson Mandela, and so many others. How did they do that? How do we do that?

In his article in the New York Times this past December, Arthur C. Brooks cites a body of new research that concludes that about fifty percent of our happiness is hard-wired in our genes.

So as it turns out, where happiness is concerned, we really *do* start from seeing the glass as half empty or half full.

Well then, we might ask, does this having a brain wired for happiness render Anne Frank's and Nelson Mandela's triumphs less authentic, less powerful, less remarkable? Or worse, give those who suspect they might be wired toward a glass half empty an excuse to just throw up their hands and quit? I think not.

For there's still that *other* 50% of our outlook to contend with. For those tending toward happiness that 50% is a challenge to maintain. For those not so happily inclined, that 50% is prime opportunity to *attain!*

If you're happy ... *and you know it.*

There's a book published in 1931 by a psychologist named W. Beran Wolfe with a title I particularly like -- "*How to be Happy Though Human.*" In it Mr. Wolfe says – here adapted to more gender-inclusive language –

If you observe really happy people, you will find them building a boat, writing a symphony, educating their children, growing double dahlias in their gardens, or

looking for dinosaur eggs in the Gobi desert. They will not be searching for happiness as if it were a collar button that has rolled under the radiator. They will not be striving for it as a goal in itself. They will have become aware that they are happy in the course of living.

They will have become aware that they are happy in the course of living.

Abraham Lincoln said *most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.*

But my dear ones, I think rather – *that most people are only as happy as they make up their HEARTS to be.*

The pursuit of happiness is about making up our hearts -- to seek loving relations, to make justice, to grow compassion, to plant seeds of peace. In this we don't *find* happiness, we *create* it!

We Unitarian Universalists are built for this. Our very principles are rooted in what it takes to go about creating happiness. We live in affirmation of the worth and dignity of every person, with justice equity and compassion, in acceptance of one another, for our free and responsible search for truth and meaning, exercising our right of conscience in our stubborn insistence on democratic process for ourselves and all the world, with which we yearn to be in community, as part of the interconnected web of all being that both forms and sustains us.

And so here's where we come to the last part – and in my estimation the most important part of -- the sweet and simple but oh-so-hard-to-live-by wisdom of our child's song – when it says "If you're happy" – "and you know it" -- "*then your life will surely show it.*"

*We are **called** to be happy.*

The Dalai Lama says the very purpose of our lives is to be happy – not by seeking to make ourselves happy, but by making happiness in and for our confused and chaotic world.

It is no accident that the happiest people I know are those who make a conscious and concerted effort -- not to be happy, but to be *useful!* We're not talking about happiness as pleasure or party or even the rush of exhilaration that comes with at-tainment or enter-tainment. Thought these surely have their place in our lives, they are fleeting. The kind of happiness we are talking about here is that deep sense of peace and contentment that comes of believing in our inmost selves that *our lives have meaning.* That our lives somehow somehow make this life in this place and this time better.

Philosophers, prophets and poets of every age have tried to teach us this, from the ancient oral traditions to sacred texts of every religion, including the Humanist Manifesto that says, "Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness." For though

some have cast Humanism as ultimately selfish, we see this just isn't so. *"Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness."*

What does this mean for us as Unitarian Universalists in the 21st century?

To me it means we need to be about the purpose of spreading the happiness we have found in Unitarian Universalism!

And like Winnie the Pooh's honey -- we can't go around sharing it with without getting it on ourselves!

Why are we so shy about telling our friends and neighbors who we are in this faith? I know, I know, we don't believe in knocking other people upside the head with our beliefs -- and if we did I for one wouldn't be here. But we *do* believe in *reaching for others' hearts*. At least we say we do.

Martin Luther King, Jr., who's life and legacy we celebrate tomorrow *said*, "Those who are not looking for happiness are the most likely to find it, because those who are searching forget that the surest way to be happy is to seek happiness for others."

If you're happy -- and you know it -- then your life will surely show it!

Our beloved forefather Hosea Ballou -- a Universalist evangelist who rode town to town in early New England preaching the good news of Universalism -- said, "Real happiness is cheap enough, but how dearly we pay for its counterfeit." Our happiness is *real*. And our world is paying *dearly* for its counterfeit. Our happiness costs nothing to share, and the beauty is when we give it way, we make *more* -- as we build the world we dream of *together*, taking what we have found in *here* out *there* -- living our faith *out loud* -- because we are *happy* -- and we *know* it -- and our lives can surely *show* it!

If you're happy and you know it shout UU!
If you're happy and you know it shout UU!
If you're happy and you know it -- then your life will surely show it
If you're happy and you know it shout UU!

In the coming days and weeks and months of 2014, may we get happiness all over yourself by making it for others!

Amen, Amain, Aho, Ashe, Namaste, Blessed Be, May It Be So ... and Oh Yeah!

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