

The Good Life

by Rosemary Wilkie

Rosemary has been a supporter of The Hamblin Trust for many years and is a gifted writer of mostly non-fiction. However she has also written two children's books and is working on a third. She is also an enthusiastic storyteller. You can find out more by logging onto her website: www.rosemarywilkie.co.uk

Why, when I had been looking forward to eating out with some old friends, did I come home feeling rather despondent? None of us currently had major problems in our lives, the food was good and the conversation lively as we shared news of families and mutual friends. Then one of us spoke – amusingly – about the difficulty of finding a plumber on a Friday evening, and for the rest of the evening we shared tales of woe about minor frustrations and people who had behaved badly towards us.

We had completely lost sight of our good fortune in being among the best fed, healthiest and wealthiest people in history, with the wisdom of the world's greatest teachers freely available to us. We had good friends, delicious food on our plates, enough money to pay for it, cars outside and warm houses to go home to. We should have been full of gratitude and joy.

Grumpy's replies

When we say, 'Hello, how are you?' the reply is usually 'Fine,' in a tone of voice that belies the word, or 'Not too bad,' or 'Could be worse.' Are our lives so miserable that we can never say, 'Great!' 'Wonderful!' or 'Happy?' Perhaps a superstitious fear is lurking in our minds – of incurring the displeasure of ancient gods. Or of becoming a target for a sad person intent on dragging down the king of the castle. Or maybe in this consumer oriented society that sells "happiness" to anyone who can pay for it, we feel we have fallen short in some way and look for all the unfair reasons that we haven't achieved it.

When we look outside for the source of our problems, we are looking in the wrong place! As Henry Thomas Hamblin says, what we are within ourselves is reflected

in our outward circumstances. Our inner dissatisfaction arises from accepting false values as valid. Thinking back over that disappointing dinner, many of our complaints concerned people who had lied to us, kept us waiting, misinformed us, failed to return something. 'How could he/she do that to me?' 'To me!' That was what hurt! Taking it personally.

Don't take it personally

When I first heard someone say, 'Everyone is doing the best they can, all the time,' I argued loudly, with examples that seemed convincing to me at the time. But over the years I understood better. We all cope as best we can, meeting a challenge, fighting it, running away from it, responding to situations with tears, anger, fear, violence or unwilling acceptance. The man with a failing business

shortchanges his customers, the addict steals to feed his habit, the abandoned girl-friend telephones for human comfort in the middle of the night. That is how they cope. Nothing to do with you or me on the receiving end.

Once we understand and accept that, all the steam goes out of the situation. Freed from self-concern, we can show compassion and wisdom in dealing with the situation.



Freedom from self concern is liberating!

Freedom from attachment

We often read advice to be detached, but this can be misunderstood as coolness. Non-attachment is a more helpful term. Loving our families and not interfering as they decide what is the best career, marriage, house for them. Appreciating our job, house, garden and treating these as temporary blessings to be enjoyed. Accepting whatever comes into our lives as the next step in our growth, and not as karma or a totally undeserved and unfair attack by blind fate!

Freedom from self-concern created a very different atmosphere at another gathering with different friends, all open-minded, growing, learning. It was a sharing of information about books, workshops, achievements by people we knew or had read about, plans for the future, aspirations for extending our work into new areas. There was a buzz of excitement and creativity, a feeling of oneness with each other and all humanity.

And I don't even know what some of them do for a living! ☒