

Manifesto for Creative Living and Life-Long Learning:

Happiness and Meaning

Happiness as an objective for living is an absurd pursuit. Passive happiness, contentment, is often achieved intentionally, but sustained satisfaction is usually impossible in the face of volatile, intractable environments and, consequently, ever-changing sets of perceptions that keep the mind in a state of transformation. Despite the best efforts, time itself makes static forms of contentment fleeting, and the role of contentment in our evolution is certainly contentious. The kinetic versions of happiness, joy and ecstasy, carry with them an inherent surpassing of expectations and such complex amalgams of internal and external factors that planning specifically for them can abandon all other elements of life to atrophy.

Chasing happiness can also, with its elusive nature and dependency on uncontrollable factors, lead to depression. To create an expectation of happiness is to set oneself up for the ultimate disappointment, and linking one's own efficacy to any disappointment feels a lot like failure.

For these reasons, happiness is best achieved in two ways: creating it for other people and gleaning any residuals that might result, and living a life that opens as many doors as possible for happiness to walk into. The former requires little thought. Simply ask people what they need and provide it to the best extent possible. This is a manifesto on the latter: a posture of living that invites happiness, a fickle lover, inside for snacks and chats as often as possible. A darker approach also acknowledges a primary failure of life: death, and encourages as much distraction from that reality as possible. This manifesto will address one robust distraction, which creates an inviting atmosphere for happiness and mandates learning and creativity throughout life.

Meaning is not found at the end of an epic search. Ironically, the meaning of a set of actions can only be fully comprehended in hindsight, but there are ways to keep it out front. The reality of life is that there is no meaning. Only humans would be so egomaniacal as to assume the universe has a grand plan for every individual, and our history is emphatic in rebuking that notion. If life is empty, the only rational thing to do is to fill it up, with meaning. Meaning is created, not discovered. It's not "out there," it's inside every one of us, waiting to make us and others happy, to fill life with flourish, success and accomplishment.

If the purpose of life is to create meaning in the spiraling vortex of human experience, it should not be bound to long term definitions, taking up more of our limited time than necessary. The pursuit of short-term meaning, short-term goals, is preferential, allowing the meaning of one's life to change as knowledge piles up through learning and observation. It's not that short-term goals are inherently better than long-term ones; it's that shorter perspectives allow for a broader input of options and a change in direction towards something worthwhile in our periphery. Few people are lucky enough to have one hobby or one career that gives them that slippery sense of meaning throughout their entire life, and focusing on one bright star in the distance can obfuscate all the beautiful distractions and interesting side paths revealing themselves along the way. It is also obvious that even long-term goals are made up of many short-term ones, revealing micro-ambition as a benefactor in all pursuits.

As meaning is created and done so in a fluid way, leaving it open to change, there is one factor that can hamstring the readiness to make our meaning adjust to current situations and the potential flavors happiness might take. That factor is the application of principles. Principles are too often applied broadly, as things to be taken into account before the specifics of a given circumstance. Rather, principles should emerge from successful combinations of practices and ideas and then be applied only to situations identical to the context within which they spawned. Principles can lean too close to universal statements, laws or rules, making them obsolete in the face of exceptions or brutish in the face of nuance. Principles are best applied as initial constraints to a given objective and then dismissed as soon as they impede the process in any way. Even creative living and life-long learning can see their scope as principles narrow drastically when applied to someone with certain disabilities or the individual who experiences a content and simple life. The only principles that apply, or should apply, universally in scope are the minimization of human suffering and the pursuit of human flourishing. All else is held in subjection to these.

Enthusiasm corroborates the creation of meaning in one's life, being pro-things instead of anti-things. While meaning can be created by opposing things, happiness struggles to find footholds in a life defined by opposition. In the face of enough support of something, the things that inhibit it naturally crumble or wither, or they can be circumvented and left to limited contexts that don't interrupt other pursuits. Zeal in promoting one

thing after another, as meaning moves around our life experience, mandates creative living; and promoting something new in an effective way makes life-long learning necessary.

Meaning and happiness, to search for them throughout one's life is an approach that clouds the reality of these phenomena. Meaning is already within each of us. Traveling the world should not be done in a search for meaning, but to support an already-established meaning that involves being in different places and experiencing various cultures. As meanings are recruited into our experience, which brings to life creative living, life-long learning is necessary to make any meaning as robust and potent as possible. Happiness, a near-illusionary concept of which speaking too loudly of can scare away, can enter our lives in many different forms. Applying principles for their own sake and living in opposition to things are exercises in limiting potentials for happiness and meaning. Creative living and life-long learning go hand-in-hand with actively filling the emptiness of life with meaning and making oneself available to all the versions of happiness that could come about.

Finally, should the need to create a flexible and intrepid version of oneself be too daunting, should the implementation of creative living and life-long learning in order to mold meaning and establish a verdant space for happiness be more than one can wrap their mind around, we have already mentioned another option. Pursuing happiness and success in the lives of others is a fantastic meaning for maximizing the opportunity that is life. If you don't know what to do, help others; and the most straight-forward and accessible way to do that is to be a teacher.