

# Live Today Whilst Working For a Better Tomorrow

By  
Stuart Goldsmith

In this article I am going to give you the secret of happiness.

Yes, that Holy Grail which has eluded wise men throughout the ages, is yours, free right here!

You might like to know that the secret of happiness can be explained in just eight words and is, in fact, quite mundane. It does not involve meditation, drugs or self-flagellation. Each of the eight words is worth one million pounds, but here they are, free:

**Tomorrow, today, live for better working a whilst.**

What? You can't make sense of that? I gave you the words for free, but the correct *order* is going to cost you plenty...

Pause, whilst the sad anagram-freaks try to work it out for themselves....

Got it? No? Okay you'll have to read on...

Now the price for my arranging the words for you is about ten minutes of your time to read this article carefully, because it has important implications for your happiness.

But first I want to tell you a little true story which might, at first, seem irrelevant.

It is not common knowledge, but in the fifties if a woman went into hospital to have a baby, her existing children were often taken into care for the duration - typically about ten days. To clarify, I'm talking about some single-parent mothers, and those with absent husbands (e.g. perhaps the husband was away at sea) - people without a support structure. Obviously in these cases there was nobody to look after the existing children whilst the mother went into hospital. There was no stigma attached to this - it was just the 'done thing.' Nowadays children run riot through the maternity ward (and a good thing, too). In those days, Matron would have beaten the little treasures away with a stiff broom.

The children who were taken into care were put into a typical children's home, with one nurse to every twenty children or so. They were fed and watered and their basic needs attended to. There were a few toys and the odd book. I'm sure you have an image of a "children's home in the fifties" - well, that was it. Little abuse or cruelty, but also no time to do a lot more than basic care.

The nurses were kind, but overworked...

Are you wondering what this has to do with your happiness? Patience....

Okay, so these children were taken into care for typically ten days. No big deal, right? During that time they didn't see their mothers at all, even for five minutes.

What was the result?

There is, in existence, a unique film sequence from that time. This film is not on general release (because it is too disturbing) but is made available to psychiatrists and psychologists interested in doing research. The film is a 'fly on the wall' documentary taken over a period of a few weeks at one particular children's home. It was meant, I believe, to show the wonderful work they were doing. It documents the arrival, stay and discharge of one group of children. It is the only film evidence from those times and this makes it unique - and very upsetting.

The ages of the children taken into the home ranged from babies up to teenagers. I'm going to talk about the toddlers in the group - aged from 6 months to 3 years. In fact I will concentrate on one three year old boy who reacted *typically* to his stay at the home. In other words, many of the children in the film exhibited the same symptoms.

Let's call him Sam.

When Sam arrived at the home, he was a happy, smiling, outgoing toddler. He was lively and active. The film shows him being handed over to a kindly looking nurse who immediately deposited him with a group of two dozen other toddlers.

There he was left to 'play.'

Sam tried to join in, but several of the other kids stole his toys and one hit him. Sam was puzzled, confused and upset. He wandered around looking for comfort, but remember the ratio of staff to children was in excess of twenty to one, and the nurses simply could not spare the individual one-to-one time. Sam resorted to sitting in a corner, sucking his thumb. This was within a few hours of arrival.

The film then documented Sam's harrowing decline from a lively normal toddler into a repressed, miserable and confused child bordering on psychosis. Within *three days* of arrival, Sam is walking around the ward clutching pitifully at a stuffed bunny and sucking his thumb. He looks shocked and dazed. He tries to cling on to one nurse who (not unkindly) firmly rejects him because she is so busy.

I won't subject you to the entire horror of this film. By the time the mother turns up ten days later, complete with new baby, Sam is exhibiting all the symptoms of full-scale autism. He is totally withdrawn, almost catatonic. When the mother finally does try to pick him up, Sam strikes out in anger at her. Clearly, here is a traumatised, deeply angry and resentful child who has no understanding whatsoever of what has happened to him, or why. He is not alone. The other children all exhibited similar symptoms to a greater or lesser extent.

I want you to be clear about three things before I continue:

1. These children were not abused, either sexually or physically during their time in care. The opposite, in fact. They were looked after by skilled, caring but overworked nurses who gave them everything *except*... love, cuddles, physical contact and comfort. This was not neglect on their part. They simply did not have the time or resources. Neither did they have the understanding we now have of how important these things are, particularly in the early years.

2. The children came from normal loving homes, stayed for ten days and then went back to normal loving homes.

3. The duration of their stay was between five and fourteen days. We're not talking months or years here - just a week or so.

Now you might be thinking: "*Okay so poor ickle Samikins had a rough time for a week, but within a few weeks of being home, he was back to normal, right? All forgotten, and no need to mention it again...*"

Well...

Doubtless many of the children made a full recovery and forgot about or repressed their nightmare, but a small number of the children *were* followed up, and the results are depressing. One man committed suicide, aged forty, another had serious depression problems. I am not sure of the statistical significance of that. Maybe they would have suffered these mental health problems anyway.

But the point is this. The human psyche - YOUR psyche - is a very, very delicate thing indeed - and can be badly damaged, particularly during your early years, by what would outwardly seem to be 'not very much.' I feel certain you know this from your own experience.

Put another way, your mind is an incredibly delicate and subtle mechanism - a finely tuned and highly sensitive instrument. So delicate is this wonderful apparatus, that it is (and here's the point) flat-out impossible to grow up without some damage to its mechanism.

Moderate damage is *normal* and severe damage is *common*.

Please read that last sentence again.

I would say that 100% of people - that's *everyone* - has moderate damage to their psyche, and about one in three have severe damage.

If taking a child away from its mother for just ten days (without abuse or violence) can result in psychotic behaviour and maybe even long term depression/suicide then one can only imagine what happens to someone who is routinely abused throughout childhood. Thankfully such abuse is not the norm, but more importantly, the psyche - YOUR psyche - is damaged by numerous small incidents throughout your childhood where you didn't get exactly *what* you needed, exactly *when* you needed it. I'm talking mainly emotional needs of course.

Parents are, after all, people. They are neither omniscient nor telepathic. They do their absolute best, working from the basis of their own damaged psyches and incomplete knowledge.

And so the cycle continues...

Now the point here is that because everyone is damaged, that means that everyone exhibits symptoms of 'mental disturbance' during, and often throughout, their lives. I'm talking 100% of people here. Such symptoms include:

1. Anxiety.
2. Depression.
3. Sleeplessness.
4. Irrational fear/panic attacks.
5. Feelings of worthlessness, insecurity, pointlessness.
6. Suicidal thoughts.
7. Substance abuse (particularly alcohol which is a wonderful anaesthetic for the harshness of life).
8. Irrational anger/impatience/irritation.
9. Worry.
10. Believing that the big, black nightmare-bunny is hiding in the wardrobe and is going to get you one night... (okay, so perhaps that one's unique to me....)

Next important point:

Because we are fearful of mental health problems such as those listed above, everyone pretends that they don't experience these things and we all play this ridiculous game in which we pretend it's just other people who have problems, not us.

Trust me on this one. I have talked to hundreds of people from paupers to billionaires. Scratch the surface and what do you get? The same old human-being we all are. The damaged psyche resulting in some/all of the poor mental health symptoms I have listed.

So what?

Well, I find this immensely comforting. The double-whammy associated with feeling down on life is when you think it's only *you* who feels like this, and that everyone else is having a great time, laying chicks, swilling Bud and counting their loot. If you can really take on board what I am telling you here, that everyone is a seething mass of insecurity, angst, unfinished business and emotional turmoil, then I think that helps - and I mean A LOT.

It's called 'the human condition' and comes about as a result of us all having such an immensely delicate psychology. We're about as equipped psychologically to handle the 'slings and arrows' of life as a butterfly is to handle a force ten storm.

Every human on the planet is brave beyond measure. Forget 'bravery in the face of enemy fire.' Most soldiers didn't have a lot of choice about going over the top. I'm talking *real* bravery which is what you do every morning. You get up and face the world again. You against the world. And it's as much a battle today as it ever was. Labour-saving devices make little difference. Do *you* have lots of leisure time because you own a fridge, a washing machine and a dishwasher? I thought not. It's the same old struggle by the same old human beings.

Us.

I have never met a person of any age, who, deep down inside, didn't want Mummy to make it all better, to tuck them into beddy-byes with Quacky the stuffed duck and to tell them everything would be all right in the morning. And I'm talking serious kick-ass directors and millionaires here. Half of them have still GOT Quacky the duck hidden in a locked desk

drawer. Nothing wrong with that, either. I mean... it's not as though it takes up a lot of space, and anyway, I...erm.. *they* could easily throw it away if they *really* wanted to....

As you can see, I'm using the device of humour to protect us both from the full impact of such a sensitive and delicate subject. But the more humour I use, the closer I'm getting to something important.

And I'm telling you this for another reason.

There is a danger in writing (and reading) a motivational, go-get-'em, kick-ass newsletter or book (and I've written a few in my time) because it can encourage the sort of polarisation I was talking about earlier. You can easily think "Yeah, it's as I suspected, everyone *else* is happy, successful and making loadsa dosh, it's only me who can't achieve anything of note. I'm all alone. Everyone else is so happy, successful, well adjusted and rich..."

I'm telling you here, in as plain a way as I can say, that everyone on the whole goddamned planet is more or less screwed-up because of the way we are, and the way the world is. *You just cannot avoid the damage.*

You have to accept it, patch up what you can and learn to live with the rest.

Aha! Now here we go, this is something we need. The first part of the key to happiness is to... **LIVE TODAY.**

That means you must try to live in the present moment, experiencing what is happening *right now* to you, good or bad.

This is it. This IS your life. This is NOT a dress-rehearsal. But the twist here is to set this in the context of everything I have just said. Recognise that angst and upset *are part of the human condition, experienced by everyone.* This is just what it is to be a human. We are all like this.

Why? Because from baby to teenager there were tens of thousands of times when we had needs, most of which were met, many of which were not. Each time a need was not met (particularly from early childhood) it caused psychological damage, sometimes mild, sometimes serious. Think of the children's home story.

The brain is highly adaptive and most damage can be routed-around in order to allow the organism to continue functioning, albeit at a slightly reduced capacity. We develop 'coping strategies' the most time-worn and effective of which is just good old-fashioned, plain avoidance.

We simply avoid the people and situations which cause the emotional pain.

"GOLDSMITH TO READER, GOLDSMITH TO READER, THIS IS HOW WE ALL ARE." It is crazy to feel alone in this. It just doesn't make sense. It's as insane as if you were bemoaning the fact that you have a bellybutton because:

1. Everyone wears clothes to cover their bellybuttons and so you only see the occasional one.

2. Nobody ever mentions 'bellybuttons' in polite company.

Therefore, you assume that only *you* have one...

Bonkers!

So, when you experience some/all of the symptoms I describe earlier (anxiety etc.) you assume you are all alone because:

1. Everyone has perfected a hard shell or mask behind which they can hide their sensitivity and neediness.
2. Nobody talks about such problems in polite company or wants to 'burden' their friends, family and loved-ones with their needs.

Therefore you assume that only YOU have such feelings and that everyone else is perfectly okay and well-adjusted.

Dream on!

So when I say 'LIVE TODAY' I'm not talking about some blissed-out, tree-hugging Zen monk who tries to empty his mind in order to contact the 'now.' That's good stuff in small doses, but we have a real life to live. I'm talking about experiencing *today* with all of its upsets, angers, joys and sorrows. Just riding the wild bronco of life and not letting that sucker kick you off.

And when (as I often do) you experience a moment of intense pleasure, I want you to think to yourself: "This is as good as it gets." And it's true.

Life is hard. Just as hard today, in its own way, as it ever was. Perhaps not as hard on us physically, but a lot harder on us mentally. That's why we're not a lot happier now than in 1402 - to pick a year at random.

So I want you to *snatch* happiness when it comes to you, like a drowning woman or man seizing the proverbial straw. This is what it means to 'live today.'

The alternative is to ignore the minor day-to-day happiness and always be thinking some version of: "*I'll be happy tomorrow, when...*" (I have money, I get a boyfriend, I move from this scummy area, I get myself some wheels...)

You won't.

Or to think: "*How can I possibly be happy now when...*" - and then insert your own 'unique' story about your current misery, angst, depression, anxiety, panic, fear. The error here is to think that one day you'll be totally free of these things, and then you can be happy.

You won't. It's how we all are. Riddled with this stuff. It's what makes us all human. It's what it *means* to be human. I'd go so far as to say that a person without a smattering of these things would be a flat, lifeless and intensely boring automaton. It is the degree of your angst which is important.

**Zero** makes you dull as ditch water.

**A sprinkling** makes you human and still allows for a lot of happiness.

**A moderate level** makes you interesting, quirky and able to cope *mostly* with life, but like a semi-active volcano, these side-shoots of lava keep erupting and causing turmoil in your life - you need to spend some time fixing the damage, otherwise you may erupt big-time one day.

**A lot**, and you are mostly immobilised in life and unable to function. Happiness is denied to you and all of your efforts should be expended in *correct* therapy to repair the worst of the damage, before you can go on. (As an aside, most therapies are ineffective, particularly those based on a psychodynamic model. So you need to do some research here. Bottom line advice? If a therapist can't sort you in under 6 sessions they'll never sort you.)

Analogy:

A football team in immaculate, Persil-white strip, nancing around the field avoiding getting grass-stains on their clean white socks, are a bit of a disappointment, really. They don't want to get too involved in the game in case they get mud on their shorts or a bruise from that big, nasty old ball. Who wants to watch them? Who cares?

A football team whose players are muddied, bruised and riled are an altogether more interesting spectacle. They'll be fighting with passion and determination, taking daring risks, sometimes winning some ground, sometimes losing some ground, but always, always entirely absorbed in the game and playing for - right now.

But a team who are battered, bruised, cold, totally humiliated and wet need to do one thing – to retire from the field, get some serious rest, bandage their cuts and recuperate. There's no point in their playing any longer. In fact, they *can't* play. Their minds are not on the game, but fully absorbed with their pain and humiliation.

If that football analogy doesn't work for you, substitute 'boxer.'

So, you see, the trick is to grab the happiness, now, *in spite of* any current misery from your 'worry list.'

Now I can honestly say that I've never heard anyone else say that and I sincerely hope that it helps you.

The final part of the key to happiness is: "Whilst working for a better tomorrow." So the whole secret is:

**"Live Today Whilst Working For A Better Tomorrow."**

Why not write this out on a 3" x 5" card and put it somewhere you will see it each day? It's not a bad idea.

"Yesterday's dreams are today's realities." Let's take a look at that for a moment.

First, you grab every single morsel of happiness which comes your way, *despite* your perfectly normal negative feelings which you now know are part of the human condition and which *everyone* experiences.

Next, you must realise that everything you are today and everything you own today is a direct result of your past decisions. Decisions which you took, either consciously, or by default. Nobody else is to blame here. You're the captain of the ship. Okay, you took a decision to stay in your cabin and let the wind drive the ship wherever it wanted? That's still an executive decision – with consequences. But once again I find this immensely *comforting*, because the power is in your hands to change the future, you don't have to wait for someone else to change it for you. You can toss the grog bottle over the side, stagger to the wheel and lash yourself too it if you decide to take command once again.

If your present life is a result of your past decisions, then the future is created by your present decisions, and boy is that true! With you back at the helm right now, at least the ship has a fighting chance of fetching up on the shore you are now heading towards. And a fighting chance, my friend, is all we get in life. The universe doesn't do certainty.

So you should be investing a little time working and scheming so that your future (which will come around soon enough) will be even better than your present. And you do this *in spite of* any angst and turmoil you might be feeling, just as you do it *in spite of* the fact that you have to breathe air and sleep seven hours each night.

Now if you recognise yourself in the 'moderate' or 'severe' category of emotional turmoil, then part of the process of planning for a better tomorrow involves working on yourself, perhaps through therapy, counselling or talking to trusted friends. By the way, you cannot do this alone or through introspection. When you are severely emotionally distressed, your rational brain is not working (actually, it's been hijacked by the 'fight or flight' mechanism of primitive brain). So you need to borrow someone else's brain for a while and have them try and sort you out.

Think of this as urgent repairs to the ship's hull, without which the boat is in danger of going down. Only a fool would try to sail in such a boat without spending some time in dock to patch things up. Perhaps you've been in denial about the condition of this leaky old tub? Hmmm... Have you been bailing like a demon for the last few years whilst battling on through stormy seas, just about keeping afloat? This is a judgement only you can make.

But apart from the psychological work, there remains the real down and dirty work required right now, today, to make your future better for you and your family. I guess this is what separates the winners from the losers. Winners know they have to work *now* in order to get 'lucky' several years down the line and reap the rewards. Losers want the rewards right now and cannot make the link between now and the future. They have what I describe as a 'Bunteresque' view of life (from Billy Bunter), hoping that 'something will turn up.'

You can't live like that and be successful. You have to live your life on purpose, not by random chance. I cannot stress enough the importance of working for a better tomorrow *despite* any strong reasons why you feel you can't, such as:

1. The terrible state of the world.
2. Your deep emotional scars.
3. Your age (you feel it's too late).

The final thing in Pandora's box was... hope. And when you are working for a better tomorrow, you are reaching into that box for that last, most precious gift.

Work gives direction, meaning and engages the brain. Idleness rots you from deep within.

Stuart Goldsmith