

PURSUING HAPPINESS IN LIFE

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

We hold these truths to be self evident. So proclaims the American Declaration of Independence as it vouchsafes unalienable rights, including the right to life, liberty, “and the pursuit of happiness.” What about the word “pursuit”? These days it might evoke images of chasing after an elusive entity. For example, some people strive to amass possessions in the hope that eventually such things will produce happiness.

My advice is against chasing after happiness. And yet I would emphasize the importance of happiness and the legitimacy of our craving it. Happiness has a great deal to do with what religion is all about.

The longest book in the Bible begins with the word “happy.” This is the beautiful book of Psalms which commences with the Hebrew word *ashere*, a word sometimes translated “blessed” and sometimes “happy.” “Blessed is the people who know the joyful sound” (Psalm 89). “When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy” (Psalm 128).

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with the word “happy.” This is the Greek *makarios*, which is also sometimes “blessed” and sometimes “happy.” “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5). “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.” (John 13). It seems we can always gain new insight into the subject of happiness.

In the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church the longest chapter in the book *Heaven and Hell* is the one on happiness. It says that the Divine Love is a longing for the happiness of all. It is God’s will that all people might be “most profoundly and fully happy.” Another volume, *True Christian Religion*, says that God’s love consists of three things: to love others outside of Himself, to desire to be one with them, and from Himself to render them blessed (or happy.) Another volume, *Love in Marriage*, says there is an inner happiness within external joys which keeps them from becoming cheap and jaded.

So what of *pursuing* happiness? We turn to a teaching in the book *Heavenly Secrets*. There we read that when an angel does good to someone the angel receives a delightful inflow of blessedness. In fact that angel gets more happiness than the person who he served! But what if the angel were to act for the *purpose* of obtaining that inflow of happiness for himself? If the angel thought in that way then the influx of happiness would be dissipated.

The reason is that the action would then be self-interested, while happiness is an unselfish thing. For external happiness is a byproduct of inner blessedness. You can’t get it by grasping for it. Think of it as something God adds to us when we are seeking unselfish goals. You might call it the icing on the cake.

In the Sermon on the Mount we are urged not to seek after external things the Lord tells us. “For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the

kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you,” including true happiness.

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