

## Highway to Happiness

### Introduction

No man is an island, as they say. We all need support and care at some point in our lives and this is when those around us can help. But sometimes this support and care does not materialise. This is something that happened to me; I had no one to help me and I went through a divorce and depression pretty much alone. So I turned to some books for comfort. That eventually led to my interest in self-development and then my quest to find happiness. And it is my ardent belief that happiness is what all of us want, no matter what background we are from. But, unfortunately, we are not taught that we can learn to be happy and that happiness is within our grasp should we seek it and work towards it.

I have read quite a few books on personal development and happiness, so I now feel I can help others who are looking for what I was looking for some years ago. This journey of life sometimes needs to be studied and understood. As the famous statement goes:

***'The unexamined life is not worth living.'*** Plato

I have always wanted to help people in any way I can, but I believe now that I can help them through my writing of articles and books. You see, I believe reading is such an easy and convenient way of gathering knowledge and developing oneself, that it is a no-brainer. I believe in the great benefits of volunteering your services for a worthwhile cause. This can, for example, take the form of helping an organisation whose aims you support. For myself, I volunteer at a library because of my love for books and, to tell you the truth, it makes me feel wonderful. They say that the hand that gives is better than the hand that receives. So, let's become those with the hand that gives.

Volunteer, and help people or an organisation. It has to be said that if you are kind enough to help someone, you will feel good about it; it will add to your happiness.

There is a vast amount of knowledge out there on every subject you can think of and, for me, libraries are an inexpensive way of gaining access to that wealth of knowledge. Membership is free and, if any book you want is not in stock, you can order it for a minimal fee.

I believe that your happiness can be boosted when you're out there meeting people, helping out and generally socialising, rather than being stuck at home in front of the TV.

My main forte, if you like, is ideologies and civilisations. But my interests do not stop there; I have a number of hobbies: project management, learning the Bengali and

English languages, and personal development. Now, that's enough for me to be getting along with. And all this came about because of my love of books. Never stop learning; successful people are life-long learners.

I hope you can also develop a number of subjects or areas of expertise to broaden your horizons and gain success in your life. This will give you more of a chance to experience happiness. Learn to play snooker, football or badminton, learn bird watching; the list is endless. Make these activities into hobbies for greater appreciation and a better chance of hitting that happy spot.

Make sure you think about what success means for you, so that you are not just chasing other people's dreams. We all have different ideas of what 'success' means to us. So, invest some time in brainstorming 'success' – what it means and how to get there. I am hopeful that this booklet will help you get there.

In the following texts I have put forward some important ways we can tackle some of the problems we face with regard to happiness and its acquisition, as I see it. I hope that it will be of some use. I have tried to stay away from waffle and to hit the subject of happiness and how to acquire it head-on. For this reason, you may find sections of this booklet short and concise.

### **So where do we start?**

Why do we become unhappy? Well, I believe part of the answer lies with the fact that when reality does not conform to our expectations, when our needs (physical or emotional) are not met, we become unhappy. It may seem dull, but do we need to lower our bars of expectation in each of these areas?

Personally, I like to have control over my expectations, hopes and needs so I don't need to rely heavily on other people for them. In this way, I don't have a fear of being let down by people because, from my experience, being let down by others happens far too easily and far too often.

I think that one has to make the conscious decision to try to be happier. This is the starting point for those who want to be happy.

It sounds a bit strange, doesn't it? Try to be happy? Especially when all our lives we have had the mistaken belief that happiness is something out of our control.

But it can be in our control when we are in full charge of how we view the world, what type of environment we expose ourselves to, what we read, which friends we choose to spend our time with, how we behave at work, what we do for leisure, and how we interact with our family members. We must look for and appreciate all the good and positive things in our lives – if we analyse these areas we can take ourselves closer to happiness. And after all this, we have the potential to make ourselves happy.

Nurture your friendships, as they are a key indicator of happiness. But this is not for everyone because some people like solitude and enjoy their own company. You should do whatever makes you happier. I, for one, do not want to make my happiness conditional on having contact or interactions with others. I like being with people, but I don't want to give control over my happiness to others.

Choose your friends carefully and remember that some human beings are very fickle. They change their minds suddenly and often. If you do them a favour, expect no gratitude from them. They cannot be relied on to be stable and sincere friends.

Be dedicated to happiness. Identify the areas that are most likely to bring you joy, and focus on making those areas work for your happiness. Make happiness your priority. Assess your life and its different constituents and make happiness your area of concern.

It doesn't mean you have to throw money at the identified areas (although sometimes this helps) but you may need to invest some time and effort in them.

Let's say, for example, you would be ecstatic if your children did well in school. So, maybe you want to help them with their homework or buy them some books that will assist them.

### **Problem analysis in light of happiness**

Before we attempt to solve problems and find happiness, let's start by doing some problem analysis. Let's understand what is meant by happiness and what is meant by sadness.

We have to accept that what is a problem for one person may not be so for another. Furthermore, one person's solutions may not work for someone else. So the upshot of all this is that we have to find a personal solution – one that works for us, although it may not necessarily work for others.

What, then, is happiness and what is sadness? Without going into semantics, I think you will agree with me that the following values are meant when we talk about happiness: contentment, pleasure, gladness, cheerfulness, joy, glee, bliss and delight. And by sadness we also mean: grief, sorrow, melancholy, gloom and despondency. We want more of the former and less of the latter.

Whenever you encounter a problem, make sure you take a step back and place the issue in perspective. Ask yourself: is it really a problem? Much of the time, people who tend to worry a lot make mountains out of molehills and see things as colossal problems when in actual fact they are not problems at all.

I don't know about you, but I love brainstorming. Whenever I have an issue or a problem, I try to brainstorm the issue (write down whatever comes to mind) and then

place the points I have written in order of importance. That way, I know which areas I need to focus on and which can wait. This is how I've been working for years and it has served me well.

Why not try it out with happiness and sadness? The objective should be to bring to light what contributes to your happiness and what makes you unhappy. Come up with as many words as possible, whatever comes to mind, and write them down. Then go through each word one by one and see if it is something relevant or something that can be ignored. Then, for those that are relevant, place them in order of importance in a table. You can then decide on how you retain and improve on the things that make you happy and make a plan on how you can eliminate each and every thing that makes you unhappy.

Having prioritised the issues which came up, you can now decide what to do according to the most relevant elements having done the brainstorm. I guarantee you that you will find it an enlightening experience.

***'The successful person makes a habit of doing what the failing person doesn't like doing.'*** Thomas Edison

Simplify your life and aim for quality and not quantity when considering the aims and objectives in your life. Remain focused on those areas which you have identified will bring you the most happiness and those that are most important to you. I cannot stress this enough – focus, focus, focus! If you concentrate and focus your energy into one particular area of life, you are sure to get positive results. Focus on one area (or a few areas if you can manage it), work out what you need to do to develop those areas and then go for it. Don't be sidetracked by things which seek to throw you off course.

### **Are you happy by yourself or with others?**

Can you be happy by yourself, or do you need others for your happiness to be complete? Some people can be happy by themselves, but most people would say that they need others in order to be happy.

My view on this is that it is better to be able to be happy by yourself, simply because then you don't have to rely on others for your happiness. I do believe it's desirable for us to share our happiness with others, but essentially we need to be happy by ourselves.

However, I would like to clarify that there is a difference between accomplishments and happiness. Can you accomplish everything on your own? Clearly not. You require the assistance of others to achieve and nobody can say that they have accomplished anything without the help of others.

Being alone and lonely is not the same as solitude. Some who are alone, and who do not really need the company of others, can have solitude – this helps their

independence, and this is sufficient for them. So, if your aim is to be emotionally independent, aim for solitude and not loneliness, and the world will be happy with you.

### **Can love make you happy?**

What do we mean by love? It can be the feeling of affection and closeness between two people; lots of people experience this and they feel really happy.

The problem I see with this is that the state of being in love does not always last. So, it is a temporary high (although there are certainly couples out there who have been together for decades and are still very much in love with each other).

So, love can go a long way towards making you happy. You have a partner; a companion whom you can rely on and share your problems with, and who is a great source of happiness and stability.

And it has been said that married people tend to be happier than unmarried or single people, so maybe you want to give it a try. But be careful, and choose your partner carefully.

So, what's required to make and sustain relationships?

- patience
- understanding
- sympathy
- empathy
- perseverance
- determination
- focus
- the right attitude
- humbleness

These characteristics will help you form and maintain relationships. Because human beings are all unique there will always be disagreements. So, it's essential that you acknowledge that – but be willing to embody these characteristics in order to deal with disagreements effectively.

### **Be mindful**

Be mindful – 'If everything you do, goes into everything you do, you will get results.' How is this achieved? Well, if one builds on the skills and achievements one has already gained or achieved, one's time and effort will be doubly rewarded.

For example, I am an English language tutor and I am also a writer. What I do is, I use the skills I have as a tutor to aid my aims as a writer. And I use my skills as a writer to

aid my aims as a tutor. In this way I ensure my achievements have a double-edged force to them.

I don't mind sharing with you that one of the most important areas for me to focus on is my writing. This is my number one priority, and thus I am careful to make sure I put the hours into my writing and make time for it.

It is not that I ignore everything else in my life – just that I make time for my writing every day and I have ring-fenced the time that I invest in it.

I think, for me, it's about time management. I manage my time productively and get the right things done. I plan my days and make use of management aids such as my diary and phone to plan the things that need doing. I usually look one week ahead of me so that I have time to implement my ideas. But for longer strategies and plans I usually look a couple of months ahead. You will never find an undisciplined happy and productive person. We all need to be disciplined if we are to succeed.

### **Talk to someone / share your problem**

Watch out for loneliness. As time goes by (especially in the later years of life) loneliness can creep up on you. Sometimes it can help to discuss our problems with someone. You know what they say: 'A problem shared is a problem halved'. This can be done with a close friend or, if you have the resources, a therapist or a counsellor. You can also search on the Internet for free counselling or advice, but I would place a word of caution with the Internet method, simply because you can't be sure who you are talking to. But it would work if you hunt down a therapist then meet up with them, and after that you can liaise with them using the Internet. It's much safer that way.

Books are another way of trying to bring some light to the discussion of happiness. Some people (me included) hold the opinion that reading books on a subject gives us an understanding of that subject which we would not have if we did not read up on it. It can have a positively therapeutic effect. I believe this is called 'bibliotherapy'.

### **Compare yourself to those who are less fortunate than you**

***'It's not how much we have but how much we enjoy that makes us happy.'***  
Charles Spurgeon

We can all sometimes forget to be grateful for what we have; if we fail to count our blessings, we should look to those who are less fortunate than us. Maybe they are blind whereas we have sight; maybe they have no arms whereas we have all our limbs; maybe they have a terminal illness like cancer, whereas we enjoy perfect health.

***'It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver.'*** Mohandas K. Gandhi

Sometimes, going to a hospital and seeing for ourselves the unfortunate people who have been taken there by a cruel twist of fate can be a real eye-opener, and we become less ungrateful and more appreciative.

They say that with every cloud there is a silver lining, meaning that each misfortune which can affect us can have something positive that comes with it. I know someone who was for one reason or another separated from his children. This having happened, his sister and his nieces took control of the situation and wanted greater access to their maternal cousins. The upshot of all this was that his side of the family got to know his children better and they became a pleasant unit, meeting and gathering together regularly and functioning as an extended family.

While growing up, we spend a lot of time with our family members – father, mother brothers, sisters, wife or husband and children – and we should be in a position where we can benefit from their company and mutual interaction. The key to any relationship is your attitude and perception. So, take a step forward and make a success of your relationships.

But we should remember that some fathers are not allowed to see their children at all and can miss out on the growing up of their children, something that no one can get back for them.

However, if you are someone who continually looks at those who are seemingly more fortunate, you are digging a hole which can get deeper the more you compare.

***‘When you are content to be simply yourself and don’t compare or compete, everybody will respect you.’ Laozi***

It is most likely that you have the basics in life – food, shelter and clothing. If this is the case, then you really have very little to worry about. Okay, you may not have the very latest car or the latest phone, or the latest laptop, but do you really need these things to be happy? I think not. So, identify the positives in your situation and focus on what you already have; not on what you don’t have. Pay attention, you may already be happy – you just haven’t appreciated it.

You may see the ‘rich’ and wish that you had what they have; you may look and see those who have children when you have none; you may see those who have fame and wish you had some. This mindset is a recipe for disaster because if you continually do this you will never be happy, because you will always want more and greed will overwhelm you. You may never be happy, just because your next door neighbour has a Ferrari when you don’t even have a car!

There is another way of doing a comparison which is both healthy and helpful: to compare your current self to your full potential. Are you using all your capability to the maximum? If not, you can do something about it. And the first step is to acknowledge that you can do better. You have achieved a little but you can achieve much more. You

have written one book but you know that you can write loads more. So get down to it, and reach your potential!

### **Be an optimist and not a pessimist**

You know, I often wonder why some people always seem to look at things in a pessimistic way. It is because they have got into the habit of looking at things in a pessimistic way, and they have done this for so long that it comes to them almost naturally. This is an excellent example of how we can condition the human mind to look at things in a particular way. This is the power of time and repetition. However, you will be profoundly happy if you achieve some good habits. Replace a bad habit with a good one. This is a better way of breaking an old habit and gives you something positive to concentrate on.

### **Eat your way to happiness**

You know what they say – ‘You are what you eat.’ So, if we are careful about what we eat, if we eat pure, wholesome and healthy food, this will definitely boost our potential for happiness.

Be careful about what you eat. This message can’t have missed you as there is a great deal of information given out by the government, the media and health organisations such as the NHS about the importance of wholesome, organic and healthy foods.

Aim for the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. If you don’t cook for yourself, maybe now’s the time to start. Luckily, I have my wife to cook for me, and I try to guide her on what to cook (particularly as I am diabetic and I need to be careful on my food intake).

But, if you’re not so lucky, you may want to take up cooking and cook yourself good, healthy foods instead of those unhealthy and expensive takeaways. I think you’ll then find better health and happiness.

So, if you’re trying to change your diet to a much healthier one – from one that is oily to one which has plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables – the best way to do that is to replace the bad oily dishes with ones which are healthier, rather than simply just stopping oily dishes without replacing them.

Be wary about going on one of these diets which promise everything but deliver nothing. Take serious advice from your dietician. If your local GP does not have a dietician, ask to be referred to one. Remember, we are what we eat, so only choose the good and wholesome foods.

### **Looking at things negatively**

We have possibly picked up this bad habit (of looking at things in a pessimistic way) from a very early age and have practised it throughout our formative years. Maybe it's been a teacher (a bad one) who has been telling you that things in life are very negative; maybe it's been a parent or guardian who has convinced you that you need to protect yourself from being disappointed – all encouraging a pessimistic attitude, so that you don't get hurt or are not disappointed by a bad result where you were hoping for a good outcome.

I am not advocating that you find a positive when there is not one to be found in a situation. What I am advocating is that you look at things in a more realistic way, coupled with a tinge of optimism. Maintain a positive mental attitude and learn to look for the best in everything. This may be difficult at first, but keep at it and you will see results.

We should plan ahead and be in control of our difficulties – this is what is meant by being proactive. We should never let a problem creep up on us and have us always reacting to a situation.

Be centred in your outlook; not too optimistic nor too pessimistic. All the time we hear 'Think positive' but there is an error in this type of thinking because if we become positive thinkers just for the sake of being positive thinkers, we may ignore the fact that the situation is, in actual fact, a bad situation which needs to be dealt with. And while positive thinking has a certain context to it, we should not bury our heads in the sand and just label everything as a by-product of negative thinking.

Therefore, aim for the middle: not overly optimistic and not overly pessimistic.

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From my life experience I have found that rarely are things as bad as our imagination would have us believe. I can tell you from personal experience that it is very easy to fall into the trap of looking at things pessimistically. I was not aware that I was subconsciously looking at my life problems in an all-pervasive negative way. This was when I was suffering from depression. I began by reading a book on depression and it was only then that I realised that I was suffering from pessimism.

Everyone has self-talk. It's what your mind is constantly feeding you second by second. The trick is to become aware of this self-talk and, just as you would adjust the radio, change the self-talk radio channel a little towards more realistic thinking coupled with a hint of positive thinking.

I would say that to have goals and vision in your life is part of being an optimist. So, have some goals and vision. What do you want to achieve in your life? Would you like to help the poor? Maybe you want to be part of a charity that helps in the less

developed world? Have an aim and purpose in your life. And remember: you only get what you aim for in this life.

One other way to become an optimist is to create a positive environment at home and at work. This is because you will be surrounding yourself with positive behaviour and energy and you will appreciate literally what it means to be optimistic.

### **Time at work**

Many of us spend more time at work than we do having quality time with our families. So, it makes good sense to try to create a healthy and positive environment at work.

- Try to have an understanding relationship with your line manager. If you want to spend more time with your family, take your line manager aside and say so. You would be surprised at how understanding some places of work are when it comes to spending quality time with family.
- Do not overwork yourself. If work is overwhelming you and you are always struggling to meet deadlines, then now is the time to speak out and come to some agreement with your management. You will not be seen as weak if you speak out. On the contrary, your employer will see that you are a strong personality willing to stand up for yourself.
- Your employer will also be happy if you're happy. And it goes without saying that if you're happy you will most likely be more productive. So, a happy you means win, win, win all around.

Liz Goddard, in her book *How to be Happy*, makes a number of very interesting points regarding points to consider when at work. I have noted them below (they are quite self-explanatory).

- You are more likely to be happy at work if you:
  - can get things done;
  - have a variety of tasks;
  - have some control over your job;
  - feel valued by your peers and management;
  - are using your skills and strengths to do your job well;
  - know what is expected of you;
  - understand what you do is important and why;
  - have friends at work;
  - learn new things and skills;
  - have a good boss or line manager.

Having considered all of this, we now know which areas need to be targeted and it is now up to us to work towards a more welcoming and sociable environment at work. But there are further steps we can take to improve our lot when it comes to work and happiness:

- where possible live close to work. I know this may seem almost out of our control, but if we look for jobs near our residence it will be a step towards happiness;
- work for a large company. Large companies tend to have more facilities and choices for employees. You can also ask for transfers or different kinds of job and take advantage of internal recruiting opportunities;
- choose a profession you will enjoy;
- identify and work to your strengths;
- if they are not already, persuade your employer to be flexible;
- if you feel you need one, ask your employer for a career break;
- try a different job within the same company. Working for large companies can facilitate this;
- if it is viable, become self-employed and work for yourself.

### **Modern technology**

Modern technology can wear away at the family unit. Children are always on their iPads or on social media, while mother and father are always on their mobile phones or in front of the TV. This can seriously affect the family communication and dynamic. While at home, do some very positive and optimistic things:

- Help your children do their homework. Or, if they are young enough, read them a bedtime story. These two ways are great ways of bonding with your children;
- Have a reading hour, where everyone in the family reads a book or magazine for an hour or 45 minutes and then discusses what they read with the rest of the family. This can be a great way of communicating with your children and for the children to communicate with their siblings;
- Eat together as a family. This can be a great way for family members to bond with each other and discuss affairs;
- Have conversations with your family members;
- Husbands and wives should make time for each other and have some 'couple time';
- Plan for happiness. This is after you have taken steps to secure your 'happy' events or situation. After much thought, you may have decided that it would be great to have a family get-together to aid your happiness. Now go ahead – arrange and plan for the happy moment. You may decide that you want this gathering to be a moment of harmony and unity amongst family members. You may also decide to steer away from any sensitive family matters (and every family has them) so that there is no discord amongst your family guests. Set aside some time when you are alone and can think straight and get it down on paper and plan away.

### **Tolerate some uncertainty**

Life is full of uncertainties: will the train arrive on time? Will I wake up in time? Will I get the job I want? Will I do well at work? How will my children turn out?

I am aware that certainties have different degrees and levels, but to make something absolutely certain is almost impossible and many people waste their valuable time trying to get that absolute certainty. Especially those who are obsessive.

Have inner self-belief. What I mean by this is be confident about yourself and the direction that your life is heading in. This is, of course, after having deeply thought about your life and the path it's taking you down. This will help to counteract any niggling doubts that may occur. Listen to your intuition – this will also help you make decisions.

The trick is to do the best you can and then rely on your good fortune. And to do this until it becomes a habit. The experts say that to make something into a habit it takes about six months' worth of practice. So, why not make a start and taste the sweetness of a more realistic level of certainty?

### **Tolerate some worry**

Human suffering and worry is a fact of life in this world. Accept it. To have a worry-free life is impossible, and if, like the obsessive, you are chasing after a worry-free life, it is futile and a waste of time. What is much more productive is to accept that you will face some worry but to also realise that you can take steps to minimise the effect worry will have on your life.

It is also noteworthy that to have some worry is healthy and it can have a positive effect on our lives. This is because a small amount of worry can spur us on to solve problems – something which we may not have done if we did not worry about it. So, it can act as a catalyst for problem-solving. You should take the radical step and accept some worry as a positive factor in your life.

When we have bodily pain, it is the body's way of grabbing our attention and asking us to take action. Pain is a very efficient way of grabbing our attention. Ditto with worry. Worry is to the mind what pain is to the body.

You could take steps such as:

- ✓ Having a worry period – setting aside a part of the day (maybe in the evening) where you indulge in worry and set aside some action points you will act on at a later time. This process allows your worry to be heard and have its say and to be solved immediately or at an appointed date later on. Once that worry period is over, however, you do not allow your mind to worry, saying or stipulating that future worries will have to be dealt with during the 'worry period'. This method, I find, does not ignore worries, allowing them to fester, but puts some control on worry.

You should know that it is impossible for man to be free of worries and anxiety. You will not come across a single person in the world who has been in the past, is presently, or will be in the future, free from problems or anxiety. It has been said:

***'Indeed, man has been created in toil.'***

In these days of high anxiety pursuits, high flying jobs, success at any cost, greed for money and recognition, stress plays an integral part. We live in an era which inextricably links stress to success and happiness. It is said:

***'In order to be successful, you must suffer stress,'*** and  
***'No gain without pain.'***

But how wrong we are! Stress and happiness are two separate entities and there exists no link between them, but the culture we live in makes it so.

You can be highly successful, but you need not be affected by stress. So, if we accept that one does not have to follow the other, i.e. stress doesn't have to be a precursor to success, we free ourselves from such notions. And we can look for real happiness in its entirety and we will be happy souls.

- ✓ Get it down on paper. Having the problem written down allows you to see what the problem is, in a literal sense, and it is easier to deal with than when the worry goes round and round in your head.
- ✓ Sometimes, there is a problem which is nagging but we are not clear why we feel the way we feel. The problem is not clear to us. In this situation, challenge the worry and get to the root of the matter.

Ask yourself what would happen if the worry were to come true, if it were to turn out the way the imagination is suggesting; what would be so terrible about it? Once you have that answer, go through the process again; what would be so horrible if that were to happen? As you carry out this process you unfold the layers and layers of worry. Do this until you get to the main worry and root fear.

Again, I would recommend that you do this through writing down the different levels and layers of your worry, so you can look in the eye of the main root cause. After you have done this you will have an idea of the root cause to that particular worry and can take steps to challenge the worry or to take actions to change the situation.

- ✓ Try to control your thoughts. If you can control your thoughts, then you can think positive and happy thoughts and you will be a profoundly happy person.

I am the first person to say that it is difficult to control one's thoughts, but if you can manage to do it, you will indeed gain a very valuable skill.

One of the ways you can control your thoughts is to engage your mind in something useful or positive on a regular basis or when you feel you are having a negative moment – do a crossword, write an article, read the newspaper, etc. There is a plethora of things you could do. And I think you'll find that slowly, slowly your negative thoughts come under your control and you have control over your mind.

### **Things are rarely perfect, so learn to accept the imperfect**

***'Life is hard. Then you die. Then they throw dirt in your face. Then the worms eat you. Be grateful it happens in that order.'*** David Gerrold

Everything and everyone can be improved upon; there will always be room for improvement. I am a father, a writer, a teacher and a political commentator, and I am in no way perfect at these roles. I have my weaknesses. But instead of focusing on my weaknesses and beating myself up for not being 'perfect', I accept that I am imperfect. Who in their right mind would say that they are perfect? No one... that's who.

They say it is human to err and to make no mistakes, angelic. We are no angels, so we don't have to be perfect.

In our quest for excellence in all that we do, there are two areas we will need to focus on: *process* and *outcome*. *Process* is where you analyse and focus on what you are doing; the method or procedure. And *outcome* is the result we want to see or want to achieve.

Let's say that you are a counselling therapist and you have a patient who is deeply depressed. Now, with this patient you want to apply the *process* and *outcome* technique.

So, as part of the *process*, you would be thinking about having some talking therapy sessions; you will want to plan how long the sessions will be, what you will discuss in the sessions, who will be present, etc.

And *outcome* is where you focus on result – what's the end result you want to achieve? So, as a therapist you may want to say that within one week of therapy you want your client to be thinking rationally and off medication. That is the aim or *outcome* you are seeking.

Be well aware that you are not in control of *outcome*, you are only in control of *process*. So, don't beat yourself up if you don't get the desired *outcome*; simply examine the

*outcome* and go back to your *process* to see if there is anything that needs to be tweaked or altered.

With the example of the client who is still depressed after one week of therapy, you will want to go back to *process* and see if anything needs changing. Perhaps some input from family members or friends is required; or some discussion on the client's history and childhood events may shed some light on the client's current situation. The client might benefit from some 'homework' away from the therapy sessions that they either do on their own or with someone else. All these matters are matters of *process* and, therefore, we have control over them.

By being mindful of and understanding well that we are not in control of *outcome* and we are in control of *process*, we will be in a good position to focus on the key elements in this equation of *process* and *outcome*. We will be much more effective in our endeavours and we will be conscious that we are certainly not perfect. So, we learn to focus on both *process* and *outcome* to get the best results.

Besides, is there any person, product or service out there in the commercial or public world who is, or which is, perfect? The answer is no, there isn't. Even the most professional, innovative and creative companies produce imperfect products and provide imperfect services.

So, give yourself a break and accept the imperfect. You will feel much better for it. Most productive and successful people out there are in tune with this, because if they were to be afraid of being imperfect they would not get anything done. So, don't be such a perfectionist and power ahead in your life knowing and expecting to make mistakes along the way like the rest of humanity.

Excellence is a journey and not a destination. Yes, we can all improve, so let's take those small steps to become more excellent in every area of our lives – a tweak here and a tweak there, and we carry on tweaking.

This subject of *process* and *outcome* is linked to the issue of what you are in control of and what you are not in control of.

Having observed reality, one can see that there are some actions that we are in control of and some spheres that we are not in control of. So, we are in control of our walking, talking, shouting, being still, sitting down, etc. However, we are not in control of the weather, whether the sun rises from the east or the west, the size of our bodies, or the families we are born into. We are not in control of life or death.

So, it is clear that there exist two domains: one in which we are in control and one in which we do not have any control whatsoever. Regarding the actions of man, in short, we are in control of our intentions and actions, but we are not in control of the result of our actions and the environment around us.

So, *process* then is something within our domain of control, but *outcome* is something outside of our control. We have a saying among Muslims: 'Whatever has befallen you was not meant to escape you and whatever has escaped you, was not meant to befall you.'

I am a great believer in fate and in things beyond my control. So, do not worry yourself about the things which befall you; take them in your stride and focus on the things in your control to change any situation.

### **Don't fall into the black or white thinking trap**

Some people fall into the 'either everything is right or everything is wrong' frame of mind; for them, things are either black or they are white and there is nothing in between. There are no shades of grey.

This type of mentality does not reflect reality though. Things are rarely all right and things are rarely all wrong; life is somewhere in between. If we do not accept this reality, we will always be struggling with reality and never really have peace of mind. We will be cut off from the pleasures of this world and will forever be looking for the faults of others while we adopt a strict and austere position. This is while others are enjoying life to the maximum.

From my experience, it is religious people who tend to adopt this basis. They go around lecturing to those who are less religious and tend to have a 'holier than thou' attitude. People tend to run a mile when they come across these people. And with good reason.

There are some religious people, though, who tend to be very positive and have a more realistic view of life and are willing to accept that life does have its shades of grey. But again, in my experience they are few in number.

Instead of thinking that you have 'failed', which seems a very final and absolute judgement every time there is a setback in your life, think of it as just a temporary setback, and remember that setbacks do not have to be permanent. You can still learn from your mistakes and try again without it being a permanent 'failure'. Never let it hold you back; try to find the silver lining in every situation.

An example would be driving tests: if everyone saw their first test setback as a complete and permanent failure, they would not go past the first 'failure', but people don't. They continue, and some people take nine, ten tests to finally pass. For them they experience a setback which urges them to try and try again until finally they achieve their aim. They see the test 'failures' as setbacks.

This mindset can be applied to other areas of life – if you 'fail' your academic exam, learn from your mistakes and try again. If you 'fail' in getting that well-paid job, keep on trying with a different firm or even with the same firm! Remember, real failure is not falling down, but it is not getting back up.

I know someone who applied for a head teacher post in a school based in the East End of London. He got to the interview stage but unfortunately he was not successful. The school re-advertised the post because they could not find any suitable candidates. So, this friend of mine applied again for the same post, and the second time around he was successful. So, don't think in absolutes, but think in shades of grey.

### **Your negative thoughts are inevitably exaggerated**

Have you ever experienced being gripped by fear? Adrenalin flows through your body; your mouth goes dry; your heart beats faster; your face goes all pale; you almost panic; your thoughts become muddled and exaggerated. These are classic symptoms of fear.

Some people experience this more than others. Those who experience this tend to be obsessive personalities and their thoughts make mountains out of molehills on a daily basis. They are consumed by worry and they can't seem to help it. Many receive treatment in the form of cognitive behavioural therapy, or CBT. This is where therapists try to encourage the client to get a grip of their negative thoughts and really shine a light on their negative thinking, showing them that much of their negative thinking is illusionary and imaginary. They are shown that if they let things carry on and let the fears continue, they will see that the fears never materialise.

When you experience these types of thoughts, try to be a bit more rational. Say to yourself that the disaster your thoughts are painting is highly unlikely. The human mind can truly be tricked and these images that are generated within your mind are a form of mind trick whose origins can probably be traced back to when you were a child and were afraid of punishment if you did something wrong.

Try to write down what the negative thoughts are and what they are saying will happen if you do not take drastic action. Once you have written them down, you will see more clearly what the problem is. You can then challenge these negative thoughts as false and highly unlikely to happen. I personally find writing my thoughts down really takes away half of the worry, because you can tackle what you see in front of you rather than something vague and confusing going round and round in your mind.

You should see it for what it is – emotion playing with your fears and propelling your thoughts into disaster mode.

These negative thoughts can go unchallenged throughout a person's lifetime until or unless it is brought to their attention. Basically you fall into the bad habit of catastrophizing, with the fear that things will go haywire if you do not take drastic action. Much like a child who has torn his latest pair of trousers and fears that his parents will chastise him for it. Or that his parents will be displeased if he does not get good grades at school.

Of course, you may not be a sufferer of that extreme, but all of us have a bit of a worrier inside us, which, if it is not nipped in the bud, could develop into a real problem.

We should take real steps (as explained above) to reduce the impact negative thoughts can have on our lives, sooner rather than later. The more quickly we tackle this, the better.

### **Continuously focus on things going well**

Focus on course until successful (FOCUS). Make sure your focus remains realistic with a tinge of optimism and your attention is on things that really matter to you, not on what matters to other people. If you take positive steps you are more likely to get positive results.

Why is it important to focus on things going well? Well, they say that positive breeds positive. If you are in the bad habit of automatically thinking about things in a negative way, you are more likely to take negative decisions and have negative results.

If you ask self-made millionaires what was one of the key strategies for their success, they will tell you that they took a positive stance in making decisions and had a positive outlook in relation to their business. Many of them would earn money from their business and then plough it back into the business, accruing higher and higher yields because they were confident that the decisions they were making not only made business sense but were also positive in nature.

You can achieve this positive focus by using your self-talk, your inner voice, to your advantage. If, for example, you tell your inner voice to focus on things to build your business, your subconscious will work in the background, and when you come across what you stated you need, your subconscious will immediately recognise it.

Let's say, for example, you are looking to sell a new range of clothing in your clothing store and you are in the cash and carry and you see something that might fit the bill – your subconscious will encourage you to take the chance. Meaning the focus that you worked on will kick in. Whereas, if you did not take the steps to think about what you need to run a new line of clothing, your subconscious would not bring it to your attention and you'd miss that opportunity. Try it out... you've got nothing to lose.

### **Set yourself some goals**

The good thing about aims, objectives and goals is that, even if you don't fulfil them comprehensively, ultimately you are likely to be in a better state from trying.

Let's take the example of an athlete: he or she may not have won the races or physical events but he/she will be fitter physically and mentally than any normal member of society. This is due to the fact that they go through an enormous amount of physical

and mental training. And even if they may not have won this time, they will be trained mentally to prepare themselves for the next time that they will get the chance to compete. So, it is always a productive idea to set yourself some goals to keep your focus and use your time productively.

Now, you may not be a professional athlete, but you are someone with time on your hands. This gives you the opportunity to set yourself up to achieve some goals. These goals need to be set as soon as possible, but make sure that you put some thought behind each one so as not to waste your precious time. Everybody gets allocated the same time (24 hours in a day) but it is in how we utilise it that we differ. Time is something that is to be invested, and not to be squandered.

Is each goal specific? Is it clear? Is it achievable? Does it fit in with the other goals you have in life? Is it measurable? These are the sort of questions you need to ask yourself when setting goals.

You will be glad to know that it is not just enough to set yourself goals; you have to take the practical steps to implement them. Don't let laziness or procrastination set in; promise yourself that your goals will be worked towards.

Do not be idle; fill your time with work or productive endeavours. Get busy doing something productive – listen to a talk, read a book, write a book, meet up with friends and start a new project for social good: the list is endless.

### **Slow down in life**

Don't rush. You're in life for the long haul. In today's fast-paced environment, we want things done yesterday. But there is wisdom in slowly achieving what you want.

Did you hear about the turtle who won the race? One day, the turtle and the hare both received a letter from the king. He set them a challenge: whoever wins a cross-country race of three miles will get sustenance and food for the rest of his life. On reading this challenge and in finding out his opponent was the turtle, the hare jumped for joy as he was sure he was going to win. 'How fast can the turtle run?' he thought.

They both received a map of the track. It was quite detailed and thorough and it required some thought. The hare skimmed through it and was confident he would be successful. His overconfidence was in actual fact to be his downfall.

The turtle, on the other hand, studied the map carefully and jotted down all the indicators and signposts and planned his route carefully.

It turned out that although the hare raced ahead, he soon lost his way and was in confusion and tried to make sense of the map. He ran this way and that way, but still could not get to the end of the route.

The turtle, on the other hand, was slowly but surely making good progress and had arrived at the end of the route in time and way ahead of the hare. On receiving the news that the turtle had won the race, the hare cursed his fate and vowed never to be complacent again.

The turtle was victorious and received his entitlement for the rest of his life from the surprised king. He also, like everyone else, expected the hare to win the race. He asked the turtle 'How did you manage to beat the hare?'

The turtle replied 'I slowed down and planned my race'. With that the turtle accepted his prize with pleasure from the king.

### **It's about perspective**

Sometimes, we suffer from not having the right perspective. Some problems are simply problems because of the wrong perspective. Let's take an example:

A shoe company once sent off two of their best salespersons to a far-off land to see if they could drum up some new business for the company. On reaching the land they both observed that no one was wearing any shoes. So, one of the salespersons wired back to the company that there was no business to be had as no one around there wore any shoes.

The other salesperson, however, looked at the situation differently and wired back to the company that they should send shoes over as nobody wore shoes and that there was a great market to fill.

So, it is essential to have the right perspective in order to assess whether a 'problem' really is a problem. One way of doing this is to talk to someone about the problem you are facing; someone close and trusted. They may be able to give a different view of the problem you face. If you don't have anyone close to discuss it with, maybe a health professional or a therapist could help.

### **Here's to happiness**

***'Happiness is not a brilliant climax to years of grim struggle and anxiety. It is a long succession of little decisions simply to be happy in the moment.'*** J Donald Walters

***'I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive.'*** Henry Miller

People say that it is external things which affect your happiness. You may have had feelings similar to these: 'If only my husband was a bit more understanding, I would be happier', 'I wish my manager was not such a jerk, I would be a bit more comfortable in my job', 'If only my children listened to me, I would feel empowered as a parent'.

All these ideas have one common mistake to them: they imply that our happiness and contentment rest in the hands of others. This is a mistaken belief. The truth is that it is not the external events or situation that has any weight or causes us to feel the way we do; it is how we think about it or how we put a meaning to it that matters and affects our happiness. It is how we perceive things that matter.

Take, for example, the issue of abortion. This is indeed a hot issue and has been so since the practice of abortion has been around. The situation is that the mother is pregnant, but decides to terminate the pregnancy for one reason or another.

This is a case where there is one reality – that of a mother terminating her pregnancy – but the reactions of others to this reality are far apart. One side of the argument judges this mother as a killer, and another side sees it as a woman's right to do with her body as she sees fit. She is practising her freedom.

So it is how we opine towards a situation that makes things right or wrong, and not the events themselves. So happiness or a joyful view towards matters and our life occurrences is what matters. And if we can master being encouraging and positive to our life occurrences then we are on our way to happiness.

Make sure that you have a clear picture of what happiness means for you because you may not hold dear things which others do. If you are in a relationship, you may want to discuss this with your partner and get their views on it. In any case, you may want to list down all the things that truly make you happy, and then make a plan on how you can achieve them. This can be done in quite a methodical way so that you will be sure that you haven't left anything out.

And remember, if you don't have a clear picture of what happiness means to you, you may be drifting through life without really achieving the happiness that you really deserve. You may also want to have this list posted somewhere really prominent in your house so that you are reminded of it every single day. Remember, a happier you will mean a happier family and happier friends, and this happiness will be contagious.

You may want to get this idea of pinning down what happiness is for you and having a clear picture of it in your mind as soon as possible. Don't let things hold you up and don't procrastinate. Get on to it straightaway. Happiness does not have to be one or two moments of ecstasy, but rather small, regular moments of joy. This way you remain happier for a longer period of time – which is the aim of targeted happiness.

If you list down all the things that would make you happy, but there is a chance that you will not achieve everything on your list, you will at least know that it wasn't for a lack of effort that you didn't achieve it. I would place one word of caution with this method, and that is 'realistic'. Keep happiness goals and objectives realistic. Let's face it, there's a very slim chance of you becoming an astronaut and travelling to Mars as

part of a NASA space mission. So, keep things real and within the bounds of achievability.

What you are aiming for is an increase in your baseline happiness. We all have pleasant moments when we feel good about particular events, but these moments of happiness are temporary and fleeting. After the transient happiness we return back to our 'baseline' happiness, and it is this that we are seeking to change permanently.

You can divide happiness into four areas of wellbeing:

- mental wellbeing;
- physical wellbeing;
- emotional wellbeing;
- spiritual wellbeing.

Having identified the areas we need to target, it becomes easier to develop plans for each type of wellbeing and happiness. So we can learn to target the above areas and train ourselves to be more in tune with each level and type of wellbeing.

So, for example, you might say, 'In order for me to develop my mental wellbeing I'm going to get out more and meet new people and seek out avenues to achieve this', or 'I'm going to enrol at my local college and learn a new language'.

Now, let me tell you that nothing is better for mental wellbeing than travelling around this world of ours. If you have the means, travel abroad. See for yourself more of this wonderful world that we live in. If you can't manage a holiday abroad, then look to nearer places. Every country has its beauty spots and the country you live in will surely have them. The change in environment will do you the world of good. When you travel, you experience a change in culture; this is particularly true if you travel abroad. A change in culture is like a breath of fresh air.

You may also say, 'For my physical wellbeing I'm going to join my local gym and I will start by going there once a week'.

For your emotional wellbeing you might want to meet the members of your family – not just your immediate family, but the extended members – and spend some quality time together.

You may want to get involved with your local community. Get involved with local activities, whether it's your local library, luncheon clubs, cricket team, football team, chess club or readers' club. Ask in your local library about local projects, look at the community notice boards in the library. I think you'll find there's a lot happening in your community. If it's not already happening, make it happen!

For your spiritual wellbeing, you might want to read some books on religion and spirituality and seek answers for what puzzles you about spirituality.

The scope for improvement and discovery in these areas is immense – you will have to find your own feet on what works best for you.

Here's something that I discovered – and when I did, it astounded me – you can learn to be happy. It is absolutely possible. And there I was waiting for happiness to find me like Cupid shooting an arrow through my heart.

### **Where your thoughts take you**

Try to think happy and productive thoughts and you will become a profoundly happy person. Remember, happiness starts with your thoughts. And we have the capability of controlling our thoughts; we can think about whatever we want!

I am not saying that we don't sometimes get intrusive thoughts which are beyond our control. I am saying that firstly, we are in control of how we react to thoughts which enter our heads, and secondly, for the most part, we can make a conscious effort to control what we think about.

Think about what really makes you happy and simply do more of it. It can be just small things – even things that seem silly to others – but that does not matter. What matters is that it makes **you** happy. It can be the simplest of things – going out for a meal with close friends; mountain climbing; kayaking; paintballing; cycling with friends. It can be anything... and the world's your oyster. Only your self-limiting beliefs can stop you doing what you want to achieve; change these beliefs and anything is possible. Think big... achieve big!

I used to criticise one of my relatives for talking big and achieving small. But now that I think about it, he was right to think big. It's only in our minds that we either make it big or settle for small. As a property tycoon once put it, ***'If you're going to think, you might as well think big.'***

***'People don't fail because they aim too high and miss, but because they aim too low and hit.'*** Les Brown

Why not try this? – Whenever you come across a problem or some sort of obstruction, try thinking how the person you aspire to be would solve this obstruction. Try to 'act as if' you are the end result in your efforts to be who you want to be. To prove a point, I have taken on the role of a writer, and whenever I come across a dilemma I ask myself, 'What would Gulam Akbar, the writer, do in this situation?' I think you'll find it works and you get to try out the new you – and you will feel exhilarated because you will be taking on the role you've wanted for so long.

Actions first take shape in your mind. You are today where your thoughts led you, and you will be tomorrow where today's thoughts take you. So the starting point is with your thoughts. The better the thought or thought process, the better your actions will be. Think first, then act – and don't let it be the other way round.

Change any bad thinking habits at the earliest opportunity. Sometimes you may have got into a bad thinking habit and not even be aware of it.

### **The cognitive errors**

To understand happiness, we also need to have some understanding of what happiness is not – its antithesis. The main culprit in this regard is depression. When people are depressed, they are in the opposite state to happiness. Having done some quite amazing research, professionals in the psychiatric field have identified some key areas of interest in an attempt to treat depression and make patients happy again.

It seems nowadays that treatment of depression can take the form of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Now, this is a relatively new form of treatment, but it has some very promising results. One key area of research involves the cognitive errors typically made by people who are depressed. In his book *Feeling Good: the New Mood Therapy*, Dr David D. Burns explains these in some detail. Here is an overview of them:

- **All or nothing thinking.** This is where the individual thinks only in black and white terms. Everything is either right or it is wrong; there are no in-betweens or grey areas. People who make this error deny themselves the richness of life by thinking like this – life is rarely this way. This world is full of a variety of values and views, most of which fall in the grey areas.

The way to avoid this error is to open up your mind and think, ‘Okay, maybe I’m looking at this problem in the wrong, limited way. Maybe I need to rethink or re-evaluate my absolute values.’

- **Jumping to unjustified conclusions.** Individuals who do this often jump to the wrong conclusions without any basis or evidence. A person may think that their neighbour is not being courteous or does not like them simply because the neighbour did not acknowledge them in the driveway. They will not consider the possibility that maybe their neighbour did not see or notice them.

They may think that their boss is going to sack them simply because their boss wants a private chat.

- **Mental filter.** This is where a person looks at a situation, but only focuses on a selected area without looking at the whole picture. They are thereby applying a mental filter; usually looking at the negatives of a situation and ignoring the whole, which, if noticed, would give a completely different meaning to the circumstances. Let us take an example:

A wife believes that she is a particularly bad wife and that she does not deserve to be with her husband. So when one night she finds out that her husband does not want his dinner because he had dinner working late with some workmates,

she reaches for the mental filter that her husband does not like her cooking and that it is typical of herself to let her husband down.

She ignores all of the times that her husband has come home and had his dinner and, in fact, on many occasions has complimented her on her cooking. She also ignores all the times her husband has told her that he loves her and that she is a magnificent mother and wife. But all the wife can focus or zoom in on is this occasion when her husband did not want his dinner.

- **Emotional reasoning.** This cognitive error is so prevalent that people are not even aware that they are doing it. The reasoning goes like this:

‘I feel rubbish so, therefore, I must be rubbish.’

‘I feel as though I am going to die so, therefore, it must be true.’

Emotions are not necessarily true unless they are backed up with evidence. But this is the crux of the matter: emotional reasoning does not look at evidence and simply relies on a ‘feeling’. But feelings really have no value unless they are based on facts.

- **Magnification.** To make mountains out of molehills. Many people who work in marketing or sales are guilty of this. They play on the fears of people and magnify the consequences of not buying their product or service. But the reality is usually much less serious than it is painted.

When thoughts magnify themselves, they can overwhelm you to the extent that you become paralysed with fear. What is required here is some patience and time. The triple column technique (as explained later) is particularly effective here.

- **Disqualifying the positive.** Probably because they have been doing this from a very young age, the victim of this particular cognitive error can paint doom and gloom where there exists none and discount the positive aspects of their life with some skill and expertise. We have all probably been the victim of this kind of cognitive error without even realising what we are doing.

So, if someone genuinely pays you a compliment – on how healthy you are looking, for example – disqualifying the positive means you think, ‘Oh, they are just being courteous and polite, they don’t really mean it. And I don’t look healthy at all.’

- **Overgeneralisations.** When something negative happens, overgeneralisation extends that negativity to all walks of your life.

Let's say you have been jilted by someone at work; someone you were romantically involved with. Overgeneralisation would say 'This is the pattern of my life, I am just here for people to jilt me, I'll never find my perfect partner!' Common sense dictates that just because you are jilted once, this does not mean you will be jilted all the time.

- **Labelling.** When faced with a problem or a negative experience, it is very easy to label yourself or others with a negative brush, and thereby assign and fix what you feel about yourself or others:

'Oh he's just a jerk.'

'I'm just a loser.'

'She's nothing but a moaner.'

'He's such an idiot.'

'Oh, he's just a lazy bum.'

The problem with labelling is that it is usually a gross amplification of the state of affairs. It is a word that comes with a lot of erroneous baggage and serves no discernible good to the situation at hand. On the contrary, it does much unnecessary damage and should definitely be avoided.

The victim of this erroneous cognitive distortion should take a step back and assess the situation rationally and think about a more productive way of looking at the situation without labelling.

- **Personalisation**

With this error, the victim takes things to be the direct result of their actions. They think that the negative incident occurred because of them. But when this is looked at closer, it seems to come to light that they were wrongly blaming themselves – they were personalising.

It is not only those with depression who carry out these erroneous cognitive distortions. It can happen to people who are not actually diagnosed with depression, but it can certainly affect their search for happiness and fulfilment, and the person who is a victim should be aware of these distortions and not fall prey to them.

We observe that after hardship there follows ease. The sick become well again, and after uncertainty comes stability. So, have belief in hope. Whatever your situation, there is always hope.

Nevertheless, you may feel overwhelmed with the negative cognitive errors. But don't worry, there is a viable and effective solution to all these cognitive errors – the triple column technique.

This is where you basically place your thoughts on paper and examine the root cause of the troubling cognitions and replace the cognitive error with a rational response.

Let's take an example: John has to give an important speech to middle management on the performance of the company over the last year. He starts to doubt himself. The following is how the triple column technique works for him.

<b>Automatic thought</b>	<b>Cognitive error or distortion</b>	<b>Rational response</b>
I can't speak in public. I'm just not skilled enough. I will make a fool of myself. The listeners will laugh at me.	Jumping to unjustified conclusions.	If I concentrate on my brief sheet I will be okay.  The listeners will be sympathetic; I'm sure they have also faced a tense situation themselves. It is highly unlikely that they will make fun of me.

Your thoughts are generally wrong when you are thinking automatically and habitually and in the heat of the moment – you will appreciate this when you have written down the automatic thoughts and you can see them in the light of day.

The other thing you can do is talk back to the negative thoughts and argue with them. Try to bring them into context and look at them in the right perspective.

## **Health**

Your health is probably one of the most important aspects of leading a happy life. The best recommendation that I would give about happiness is to take care of your health. Without good health you will be limited in the other areas of your life and, while it's never too late to take care of yourself, it's infinitely better if you start early in your life. And what the experts have honed in on is two main factors affecting health – one is diet and the other is exercise. If you can maintain these two areas of your life you're on the path to a healthy future.

Reduce stress wherever possible. Have a method of dealing with stress; make sure you relax. The way I relax is to go out with friends for a meal. Although time and money does not always allow this, there are other options such as to sit down and read a good book. So I have something that works for me. Some people go for walks, or phone a friend for a good natter. Everyone has their own way, so please don't think that you have to copy anyone; what works best for you is what is required.

Don't copy others in personality. You are and always will be unique. There is no one like you; so develop your own ways of doing things. Develop your own personality. Only when you do this will you make your mark on the world.

Stress can have an impact on your happiness. Who doesn't suffer from stress? Everybody does. But did you know that some stress can be positive? Positive stress makes us act in a positive way, attempting to solve the problem causing the stress. Whether it is preparation for an exam or your driving test, positive stress will help you prepare for it, which can only be a good thing.

Negative stress is the type of stress which most people experience and find hard to deal with. Anxiety, depression and worry are all examples of negative stress. But there is a way out. Analyse which situations are stressful and make an effort to avoid those situations. Keep on top of negative stress by preparing for the stressful event. If the negative event cannot be avoided, quickly deal with it and conclude the situation so that you don't experience it for long.

Negative stress is linked to a number of other illnesses, e.g. stomach ulcers. So it is a good idea to deal with negative stress as quickly as possible.

### **Live in the present**

***'The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.'*** Malcolm X

Remember to live in the present. If you want to change the future the trick is to change the present. Don't live in the past; don't dwell on past mistakes you have made, just learn your lesson and move on. Some people can't get away from their past; they think, think and think about their past and cannot drag themselves away. This is a grave mistake and should be remedied by stopping oneself and focusing on the present. If you change your present I guarantee you that you will change your future. Your future is but a day away!

***'We are better equipped to be happy if we can enjoy the present, plan for the future and not dwell too much on the past.'*** Professor Martin Seligman

Whenever you come across something new or useful ask yourself, 'How can I apply this to my life?'

***'Focus on the journey, not the destination. Joy is found not in the finishing an activity but in doing it.'*** Greg Anderson

### **Be self-reliant**

Be self-reliant and don't be a burden on others. If you truly become self-reliant you will taste its sweetness. With me, I always want to help people, and what I find is that while I am helping people – whether it is family problem, a study problem, maybe the

person is a bit isolated and feels depressed and needs company, or they do not have enough money and need a small loan – I find that while I am helping them I experience a sense of self-reliance and independence.

You may want to be a bit independent financially – I know this is one of the top priorities for me (I don't like to rely on others financially) – so I am careful about my income and expenditure. I don't spend money on what I can't afford. Not everyone is like this, however. I know people who spend money like nobody's business only to find that, further down the line, they have nothing to live on. Spend some time being realistic about life's trials and tribulations to make sure you're not a burden on anyone.

However, don't feel that you are alone if you genuinely have a problem that is insurmountable and you genuinely need help. Your first point of call should be your close family members, then close friends and then some outside organisation. You may need professional help if, for example, you are suffering from a mental illness, in which case a qualified professional would be suitable. How the problem should be dealt with obviously depends on the nature of the problem.

With me, if I have a problem, I tend to research it on the Internet and I usually find some specialist or someone who can solve my problem.

In Islam, there is a saying that a strong believer is better than a weak believer. So make a promise to yourself that from now on you will try to be independent and help others instead of needing help yourself.

Part of being happy, for me, is also developing myself intellectually and socially. This means a lot of reading or writing and being with others. I tend to read for at least two hours a day and I do half an hour of writing each day. And I usually meet up with my friends every other day for a get-together. I feel this is a step in the right direction but I aim for more time reading and writing. You may want to do something similar, but maybe you have other ways of spending your time. It's really up to you and what makes you happy.

### **Thank your lucky stars**

Thank your lucky stars for what you have and don't look at what you don't have. Learn to appreciate the things that you already have instead of dreaming about things that you don't have. It may be that the things you don't have, but crave, may not bring you happiness and instead bring you angst.

Do you have parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, children of your own, a wife or husband? If you do, be grateful, because they can bring you joy and happiness.

Do you have arms, legs, hands, nose, eyes, feet, fingers? If you do, then be grateful, because there are people in this world who do not have some of the blessings that you have.

There are those who don't eat because they have no food and there are those who do not have a place to call home – they sleep on the streets. If you have food and a place to call home, be grateful.

The people of Bhutan live very simple lives, and I would say that simplicity is their secret to happiness. They don't need a Rolls Royce to make them happy. The chances are that you have a lot to be grateful for, so go ahead and appreciate what you have and don't be unhappy with your lot.

Just for your information, though, according to the World Database of Happiness at Erasmus University in the Netherlands, Denmark is officially the happiest nation in the world, followed by Malta, Switzerland, Iceland, Ireland and Canada. Some of these countries are more developed than others, but one thing is for sure – chasing cash will never bring you happiness.

***'Be happy with what you have and are, be generous with both and you won't have to hunt for happiness.'*** William E Gladstone

Identify and cultivate positive mental states. So, for example, you could cultivate your state of mind towards your children or other family members by being kinder to them – by doing them a favour, or buying them a gift. This will have an immediate effect. They will be happy with you and you, in turn, will be happy with them. The steps that you take to show kindness and compassion to develop your mental state are vast. And it doesn't always have to involve money. Sometimes a kiss and a cuddle with a loved one is all that is required.

Conversely, you can identify and eliminate negative states of mind. Anger is one of these. Instead of feeling angry with someone, take them aside and have a meaningful chat with them. If they are angry with you, it is also likely to come to the fore and, by discussing your problems with them, you can come to some sort of solution.

If you can make cultivating positive states of mind and eliminating, or at least controlling, negative states of mind into a habit, then you have indeed done yourself a favour. You will have generated an extremely helpful and productive habit which will help ease your road to happiness.

Happiness does not come to you like a bolt of lightning from the sky: you may need to work at it at first, but with practice it will become easier. Ask yourself before you undertake an action: 'Will this make me happy?'

Understanding how you gain happiness. Understanding what works and what doesn't, what are the triggers that make you happy, needs a lot of soul-searching. Be mindful of the fact that one man's happiness is another man's misery – meaning that one person's happiness is unique to them. You will have to find out what works for you and channel your efforts in that way to gain true happiness.

## Happiness can be experienced in a myriad of ways

Look at the list below and see if you can identify the ways you may have been experiencing happiness:

- Joy
- Compassion
- Accomplishment
- Love
- Peace
- Excitement
- Pleasure
- Satisfaction
- Contentment
- Fulfilment

(From the book *Secrets of Happy People* by Matt Avery)

Now, I am sure that you will have recently experienced at least some of the feelings listed above throughout the course of your life. And the fact that you have means that there exists hope that you can and will experience more of these feelings with some fine-tuning in your life.

Say, for example, you acknowledge that you do not experience 'accomplishment' very often; then why not take an evening course on creative writing or any other course of your choice? Then, when you complete the course, you will gain an enormous sense of accomplishment.

Smile, laugh and be merry. Stay in environments where smiles and laughter are prevalent. Both smiling and laughter are good for us.

Just as there are many ways to be happy, ditto with ways of being unhappy. These include:

- Despondency
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Loneliness
- Heartache
- Bereavement
- Lack of fulfilment
- Lack of self-worth

(From the book *Secrets of Happy People* by Matt Avery)

The advantage of being aware of what types of unhappiness can strike you is that you can recognise them straight away and you will be much better placed to deal with them quickly and effectively. If you do come across more than one type of unhappiness, then it's a case of prioritising the more serious ones and dealing with them first.

Be aware that you will have to be alert to unhappiness creeping in to your life without you noticing. To avoid this happening be sure to take regular 'happiness reviews' to make sure you can nip in the bud anything that is causing you unhappiness, or even something that has the potential to do so.

Make time for 'quiet time'. In these days of being busy, busy, busy it's hard to sit back, relax and just enjoy the peace and tranquillity. The habit of enjoying peace and tranquillity can be developed within a surprisingly short amount of time, so go for it! You can just sit and think about your favourite subject and have a profound sense of peace as well as dreaming. And while dreaming, why not reach for the stars?

***'Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember you have within you the strength, patience and passion to reach for the stars to change the world.'***

Harriet Tubman

### **Spend your wealth, time and resources wisely**

Spend these blessings you have wisely. Many people do not consider time as a resource and so they waste their time on frivolous endeavours. They are, of course, deeply mistaken. Time is to be cherished and used to live a productive and robust life.

Be careful and make sure you spend your resources on things that really matter; not on things that others tell you to spend them on. For this to happen, you must have a clear idea of what you really want and what would really make you happy, and then you must take the practical steps to make it happen. Don't live by what others think your standards should be, live by your own expectations of your life.

### **Don't chase cash, chase happiness**

For many people cash and happiness are synonymous. There is no separating of the two. As an acquaintance of mine sometimes says, 'Money is sweeter than honey'. But is that a real reflection of life? The truth is nearer to the fact that, as people get wealthier, they become used to their wealth and their living standard rises. But so do their expectations and hunger for more wealth, and there is no end to their desire. In the end, although they are wealthy, they are in fact deeply unhappy.

Can money buy you happiness? Well, yes and no. It can certainly help in securing the basic levels of need: food, shelter and clothing. However, when you go beyond this, it becomes less effective in buying you happiness. Those with money face many tribulations: addiction to shopping, negative feelings of insecurity, a competitive mindset (keeping up with the Joneses), negative effect on relationships (they are likely to suffer suspicions over their so called 'friends' – 'Are they my friends because they like me or because I am rich?').

People chase cash because they see others chasing it, and it is an all-pervading exercise. They see people with expensive cars, houses and clothes and they wish that they also had these things. But they don't stop for a moment to think 'Really? Will this

really make me happy?’ Some chase money to the detriment of other areas of their lives. They hardly have a family life; they don’t have time to see their friends. And, in the end, although they may have more money than they had before, they question themselves – was it really worth it? For some, feelings of guilt hit them all in one go and they experience mental breakdowns. Such people have at least come to their senses, but others just shrug these feelings off and continue chasing their dream, not giving a moment’s thought to how they are leading their lives.

Many lottery winners have actually expressed that they wished that they never won the lottery having seen all the angst that comes with it. And then there are the many rich and famous people who have expressed disdain for fame and fortune as they have ‘all a person wants’ but are, in fact, deeply unhappy. So money really does not make one happy.

Joy, happiness, contentment, pleasure and bliss can be found in many other ways. In fact, there are a very many people who are relatively poor but are deeply and profoundly happy, and do not see happiness in acquiring wealth.

I want to take a step back and ask the question – what is wealth? Your answer to this question may be what most people also say – money and material possessions.

But I beg to differ, and I think the answer is plainly wrong and limiting. I would include the following in what can also be wealth:

- Partners
- Friends
- Children
- Satisfying career
- Free and productive use of time
- Hobbies

When looked at it this way, you may notice that you are quite a wealthy person. Aim for richness in life, not just material possessions.

How much money is enough? The answer is you can never have enough. People never think that they have ‘enough’ money and are always chasing the next load of cash. And when they’ve got that amount of cash, they still want more, more, more.

***‘People are chasing cash, not happiness. When you chase money you’re going to lose. You’re just going to. Even if you get the money, you’re not going to be happy.’***  
Gary Vaynerchuk

### **Celebrate every success, however small**

Part of my happiness is to celebrate even the smallest of things. My philosophy is why not celebrate even a small development in one’s life? This is where my friends come in. If I have something to celebrate I usually take a friend out for a meal.

The success can be as small as you like; it’s really up to you. I like to celebrate if I’ve lost a bit of weight, finished reading a good book or finished writing an article. You

don't have to have a party every time you celebrate – maybe just buy yourself your favourite chocolate bar, or go to see that movie you have been wanting to see. Treat yourself. You can treat yourself from time to time or every day, whichever makes you happier. When you do treat yourself or celebrate, take the time to really appreciate and enjoy it.

Celebrate not just your own success but that of friends and family. Maybe your children did well in their exams; one of your siblings finally got that job they wanted; your niece or nephew got into university; or your friend's getting married. The scope of celebration can be very broad, so make good use of it.

***'The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.'***  
Oprah Winfrey

### **Fight back**

When you are consumed by worry, fight back with positive and realistic thoughts. Be proactive and put together a plan for when worrying thoughts or anxiety attack you. If you prepare for and have a plan for these moments you are much more likely to control and minimise their impact on your life.

Come to terms with your worries. Think about the causes or the triggers of your worries. Try to come to an understanding of them and then move on.

### **Don't panic... sleep on it!**

I've found that when I have a big decision to make, rather than make it quickly and rashly, it is best to delay for a while and sleep on it. The impulsiveness is then replaced by a night of thought and contemplation, after which I will have taken everything into consideration, leading to a sound and profound decision.

While we are on the subject of sleep, it is recommended to take about eight hours of deep sleep each night. I suffer from insomnia, so I know the benefit of deep and intense sleep. Sleep is essential in order for us to have a sound outlook. If you do not get enough sleep, you will not be able to concentrate on anything. Try to have a routine – go to bed at the same time each night.

It has also been noted that strenuous activity before you go to bed helps in going to sleep. So, if you can, try to do something strenuous before bedtime or during the day. If you are one of those active types, get into a regular pattern of exercise. If you are able to exercise, it's good for the body and mind and aids getting to sleep. GPs increasingly promote exercise as a solution towards better health in addition to a healthy diet. So, a good healthy diet and an exercise regime is the order of the day.

### **Spend time with the right people**

Spend your time with those who will benefit from your knowledge or efforts. The best I can advise regarding this point is to join a civil or social group whose aims are praiseworthy. There is much benefit to be had from joining a group. You gain from other members' knowledge and they gain from your knowledge. In all of this co-operation and teamwork you will achieve some good for the wider society.

Myself, I am a very politically motivated person so I support a political group which operates in nearly every single country. Make yourself available to the social group and lean towards them with enthusiasm and passion, and attend their activities. I am sure that you'll find that your charitable efforts have a profound positive impact on your own happiness. Make someone else happy and you yourself will follow through with happiness.

### **Prepare for the worst, hope for the best**

If you prepare for the worst and hope for the best, you will have taken steps which may stop you from getting hurt or upset. In this way, you're ready to take advantage of any happy situation while at the same time safeguarding yourself from any negativity that may arise from the situation.

Let's take an example of how this may work out. Let's say that you want to enrol your son or daughter into a good, prestigious school. This school, however, has an entry exam. You should take the following steps:

Prepare for the school entry exam

Apply to other schools in case this application falls through

By taking all necessary steps, you are preparing yourself for any possibility. Then hope for the best.

The best way to deal with negativity is planning. Look at your life and try to see in which situations negativity occurs. List them down and plan how you will deal with them (or avoid them altogether if possible). If a negative situation is unavoidable, resolve to deal with it as quickly as possible and get it over and done with.

### **Break down large tasks into smaller manageable ones**

If a task seems insurmountable, start with baby steps. Turn the large task into smaller, more manageable pieces. Be mindful that large accomplishments will always have started small somewhere. After all, Rome was not built in a day.

Sometimes when we look at our lives we find things which seem insurmountable; things that seem too big a task to complete successfully. We may have a Master's

degree to finish or a thesis to complete. The way that we can deal with these seemingly impossible tasks is to break them down into manageable pieces – take things day by day, item by item. Was anyone born a pilot, a prime minister, a president, a CEO, a brain surgeon or any other skilled professional? The answer is clearly, no. They took things day by day – small chunks at a time – and became the skilled people that they are now over time and with manageable quantities of tasks.

Similarly, professional writers are not born. It is a mixture of hard graft and some skills which can be developed over time. However, if people look at the job descriptions of most of the professions I have mentioned above, people would instantaneously say ‘I can’t do that’, but the fact is, given time and the right training, we most certainly can do whatever we commit ourselves to.

### **Quality thinking**

You need quality thinking and time to do it. Time may be difficult to find in our ever-demanding lives, but try to squeeze in half an hour or so each day to do your quality thinking in. Once you get into the habit of quality thinking, your life will become more focused and dedicated.

### **Setbacks can be a source of learning**

We can actually be grateful for setbacks. If we can learn from our mistakes, we will be better off than we were. From this learning we can gain a certain understanding that we may never have had before the setbacks. We learn not to make the same mistakes again and so, with time, from trials and tribulations comes wisdom.

The other thing to remember is that setbacks are not failures; they are temporary delays or hindrances. So if you view setbacks as setbacks and not failures you are much better placed to deal with things which did not come out as planned the first time. After all, how many times did we fall down before we learned how to walk?

One of the tricks with regard to making mistakes is to learn from other people’s mistakes. So, keep an eye out for other people’s mistakes so you don’t make the same ones. This is why I recommend you spend some quality time with elderly friends or relatives; I’m sure if you asked their advice on life matters they would be only too glad to oblige.

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### **Learn to let go a little**

What I mean by this is: decide on some areas where near perfection or not so ideal will do and be content with that. If there are areas which you have tried and tried to

change without being able to do so, maybe it's time to let go a little. Maybe you have been trying to change the behaviour of one of your children; or you've tried to change an aspect of your job; or you have been trying to get closer to your friend but they haven't reciprocated – maybe it's time to let these things be as they are.

Accept your lot and move on. Accepting things that are not in your control can be difficult, but is a fundamental aspect of moving on strongly.

### **Make the most of your days and nights**

Age gracefully. It may seem a bit odd or morbid to talk about growing old (and many people avoid the subject), but it is inevitable and we all have to face it. As my family grows larger with additions through babies I have come to realise that I will not always be here to see them grow up and I have come to terms with my own mortality. Once you come to terms with your own mortality, you can relax and enjoy the time you have left in this world.

Think about the days when you have been really happy. Why were you so happy? Analyse it. When you've nailed the reason you were happy, do more of it. It goes without saying that one of our main goals as human beings is to be happy. Everyone wants happiness, so it's worth spending some time analysing what happiness means for you. Identify what makes you happy and spend more time doing it – It really is as simple as that.

One of the things that makes me happy is seeing my children, seeing how they are developing into adults; it really does make me proud to be a father. Another thing that makes me happy is going out for a meal with my friends and relaxing. It really was through analysing my life and what makes me happy that I came to the understanding that these two areas really make me happy. As such, I try to do these two things as much as possible.

Human beings are made in such a way that they have needs – biological needs, which, if unsatisfied, mean they will die. For example, protection from the elements; people die from the cold and people die from heat. If we do not protect ourselves from the elements we will die. We will also die if we do not have food, which is a biological need.

And we have instincts which, if we do not satisfy, we will not die, but we will be unhappy.

Survival instinct – this is characterised, for example, by the love of accumulating wealth in order for those seeking it to secure themselves. Wanting to excel at work and beat your colleagues to the next promotion is a manifestation of the survival instinct.

Procreation instinct – this is the instinct which can also be known as the social instinct. Man needs the company of other human beings. And he has the urge to procreate and to spread his offspring. If man is denied his social instinct he will be miserable.

Spiritual instinct – this instinct requires man to venerate those who are above him. To believe in the Creator of the universe or God is a manifestation of the spiritual instinct. Humans worshipping, whether they worship the sun, the moon, or even other human beings, is a manifestation of the spiritual instinct.

And because we have these needs, human beings act to satisfy them. This is where the problem lies. Human beings differ in the way they try to satisfy these needs and so conflict and wars begin.

### **Don't procrastinate**

Make a start on whatever you have determined you need to do to further your chances of being happier. You will feel much happier once you've actually started it.

It could be gardening, writing, reading, meeting up with friends, taking long walks with your partner, searching for a partner, developing a hobby, looking for a much more fulfilling job. It is something you have determined that will certainly bring you happiness but you may be feeling frightened that it won't work out, or you may be feeling plain lazy; get off your butt and get on with it!

### **The only thing holding you back is your own thoughts**

Only your self-limiting thoughts are stopping you from achieving what you want to achieve. So the only barriers are your thoughts. If you change your thoughts, the world is your oyster and anything becomes possible.

Self-limiting thoughts can be source of great unhappiness. A person may have big dreams, but be told by others that they are not possible; that they are only dreaming; that they should get 'real'. But in reality many of today's dreamers have achieved their dreams in spite of the negative comments and thoughts of other people.

So take a good look at your self-limiting thoughts and give them the boot, because anything is possible. Once you determine within yourself that you want to achieve something and nothing will get in the way of your determination you are halfway there.

Isn't it interesting that we as human beings tend to limit our capacity; tend to downplay achieving high goals almost spontaneously? This may be due to our surroundings and environment as we grew up, holding us back. However, now that we are adults, we are in charge of our thoughts; we have free rein on how we think and

what we choose to think about and the aims and goals that we set ourselves. So, go ahead and be what you want to be!

One way of getting where you want to be is acting 'as if'. This is a method of placing yourself in the position of the person who has already achieved what you want to achieve. So, how would they speak? Deal with others? How would they think? How would they dress? By placing yourself in the shoes of the achiever, you get one step closer to your dream.

### **The power of the list**

Make a list of things that are most important to you – whatever you want and is personal to you. It is not what others want and is your personal list of importance. It could be things like family, friends, a hobby or work.

Then work out which areas you want to develop, and prioritise them. You may, for example, want to set a plan for making your work life more interesting by speaking to your line manager and taking on some more important responsibilities, maybe some more management tasks.

Write down and plan which areas you want to develop and be clear as to how this will make you happier. Don't worry, this method may take some time but it will be worth it in the end.

Also, if you feel more comfortable making a mental list of your important areas and the ways you want to develop them, then all well and good.

Another way of maximising your happiness is to write down all that is negative in your life: money, work and relationships are three common areas of unhappiness, but it could be other areas. Anyway, write them down and see if you can come up with ways of reducing their impact on your life. Avoiding the negative situation in the first place may be one solution. If it cannot be avoided, dealing with it head-on but as quickly as possible so that it does not take up much of your time is another solution.

Write down the ways you come up with on a piece of paper. Once you have done this you will have created some room for some positive happiness to take its space. Once you start positive thinking, you will in all probability banish negative thinking. You mustn't allow your mind to dwell on any thought that is not positive, optimistic or constructive.

Do the same with the positive things in your life. Write them down and see if you can accentuate, improve the positives to make you happier. For example, you may have a good circle of friends; to improve this positive in your life you may want more interaction with them, so call them up and make a date to go out for a meal. Fix a timetable with your friends, maybe once a week or once a month, to meet up and go for a meal. Trust me, having a day to look forward to can make all the difference to your mood and happiness.

Don't just read about positivity, listen to positive things and also act on them. There was a time in my life where I thought that I only had to read articles on positivity to become more of a positive person (as I have had a lifetime of negativity). But I realised that reading alone is not enough – one must act positive as well to make an adequate impact on one's life.

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## **Role model**

Who is your role model? I believe that everyone needs a role model; someone who tells you how to live life and gives you guidance. Without a role model you are likely to stray and wander through life. So have a positive role model; someone you can turn to as you face the trials and tribulations of this life. This should be someone you can turn to when you are completely stumped on something. This is not to say that you should be joined at the hip with your role model and not have your own opinions and views.

Role models can be surprisingly useful. A role model should be a person whose life is admirable and worthy of being followed. Ideally, they should be someone you can talk to in person if need be and I would not recommend someone who you've met online, for the simple reason that you do not know who you are talking to when it is online. So preferably it should be someone whom you know or have been introduced to by a reliable person. I am absolutely sure that you will be able to find someone who fits the criteria.

Nobody can live life on their own or without help from others, so go ahead and choose someone who can raise your happiness levels.

## **Make your wishes come true**

Make a plan to do the things that you've always wanted to do. It may seem a bit morbid to talk about death, but it is one of life's certainties whether we accept it or not; it will come to us all eventually. There are two certainties in life: tax and death.

It has been said:

***'Every soul shall taste death.'***

Once we come to accept our own departure from this world we will be much more settled. Everything in life will fall into place and you will be able to determine what is important and what is not. Those who avoid life's fundamental questions – How did we get here? What is the purpose of my life? What happens after death? – are not settled individuals. They avoid discussing these matters because they don't feel comfortable.

But these questions have to be addressed and the individual has to come to terms with what the answers are. Live life and enjoy it now.

***'Learn to enjoy every minute of your life. Be happy now. Don't wait for something outside of yourself to make you happy in the future. Think how really precious is the time you have to spend, whether it's at work or with your family. Every minute should be enjoyed and savoured.'*** Earl Nightingale

Plan your days in advance for greater happiness. Invest in a diary and plan in as much detail as you can for your days to come and be sure to be on top of the things that you have to do. That way you remain in control of your life's activities.

If you plan your days you will be able to see the unhappy activities which you will want to cut down on, and you will also be able to see the happy activities which you will want to maximise.

And remember, life is about the journey as well as the destination. Happiness has to be there in both.

***'Learn how to be happy with what you have while you pursue all that you want.'***  
Jim Rohn

### **Limit your connectivity**

Overuse of communication – landline phone, mobile phone, email, SMS, social media websites, Facebook, Twitter – can all take its toll on your freedom and take up a lot of your valuable time, to the extent that you feel uncomfortable if you can't be accessed.

I remember that when I was holidaying in Bangladesh (where I am originally from) I was completely cut off from the digital world. Nobody could contact me as I was staying in quite a remote place in Bangladesh and it gave me a kind of calm and comfort and a feeling of relaxation.

Workaholics (some of which I know) probably think that relaxing and taking it easy is not productive or is inefficient and does not allow for a productive life. I take the opposite view: once you have had time to relax and recharge your batteries, your level or quality of work is of a higher standard than when you've been banging your head against a brick wall trying to decipher a problem at work or at home.

Those of us who work full-time spend a big chunk of our time at work. So it is worthwhile taking a close look at this element of our lives.

People work for three main reasons:

- for the financial benefit;
- to build their self-confidence / the feeling that they are needed and valued;

- to build their careers.

Although there is nothing wrong with these ambitions, what invariably happens is that the balance between work life and life outside of work is not conducive to a healthy and robust existence.

So have some time in a place where you can go to and be cut off from the rat race and the hustle and bustle of modern-day life. I am only available through mobile phone and email, both of which I can switch off if I don't want to be contacted. So, that's my way of limiting my connectivity.

I think everybody needs some downtime once in a while, or, if you're like me, some time during each day for relaxation and taking it easy. That time for relaxation should preferably be in the evening. I don't watch TV, so after my day's work I can relax in own room and deliberate over how my day has progressed. Have I been able to meet one of my goals I have set myself? (I believe in setting crystal clear and achievable goals having thought through what I have decided I want out of life.) Are there any problems I need to sort out? Doing this type of daily analysis, I feel that I am staying on top of things and I am directing matters instead of matters directing me.

***'Goals provide the energy source that powers our lives. One the best ways we can get the most from the energy we have is to focus it. That is what goals can do for us; concentrate our energy.'*** Denis Waitley

### **Create a database or bank of positive memories**

If you can build for yourself an archive of positive memories in the form of a list or a family album, this will help you at times of trouble or negativity or when you're feeling down. This will give your mind a happiness boost to help you recover from times of negativity. Also, when you are feeling down, as a remedy, do a kind deed and a good act for someone. Doing good to others gives comfort to the heart.

You may want to list the things that you should be grateful for or have a personal album of sayings or books which you've read and want to reread to go back and refresh your ideas. I personally have one book that I read and reread just to boost my levels of positivity. And just in case you're wondering, 'Isn't it a bit odd to reread a book?' the answer is no, it is not odd to reread a book; lots of successful people do it.

Maybe you want to retain a saying like this, for your album:

***'We should regret our mistakes and learn from them, but never carry them forward into the future with us.'*** Lucy Maud Montgomery

### **Be careful, you may already be happy**

If you're the type who frets about anything and everything, be careful with your happiness. You may already be there, but you mistakenly think that a bolt of happiness should strike you after which you will be 'happy'. Fortunately things don't work out this way in life and you will be happy to know that you don't have to leave happiness to chance or 'fate'. Happiness can be something which can be learned, and events in your life can be engineered so that you experience happiness to the max while banishing the blues to the scrapheap of life.

Happiness can be recognised when it is seen, so expect some encouraging comments from people around you, friends and family if you are displaying the signs of happiness. And, even if you don't receive compliments, you will know in your heart of hearts that you are truly happy.

You will look at your life and you will see positive symptoms, a certain calm, serenity, joy, acceptance, peacefulness, contentment. If you have these symptoms, then enjoy it and make the most of it. You can also engineer events so that you experience moments of happiness on a more regular basis. This is best achieved by examining your happy moments and making more time for them to occur repeatedly, while steering away from negative occasions and not giving them the time of day. If a negative occasion is unavoidable, it is best to plan ahead for it so that you remain in control of it and can deal with it swiftly.

How you will experience the indicators of happiness will differ from person to person. This is because everyone has different values attached to occurrences; some may be happy when they see and interact with their children or grandchildren, while others may be happiest while with their friends. And so each person has their own unique road to happiness.

You are most likely to be happy if you are mature, and at an advanced age. The reason being that mature people have had the opportunity of living through trials and tribulations and have been tested with ordeals and have had to learn through experience. But this does not rule out youngsters or middle-aged people; it's just that elderly people have had the personal experience of learning from the School of Life. You know what they say: with time comes wisdom. However, there are certainly people amongst every age group who are happy; this is because they have learned in a harder way and more quickly from life. And you most certainly could be one of them! Certainly, it can be said in truth that it is never too late to be happy.

So be on the lookout for happiness symptoms, because the lifestyle that many lead in today's day and age certainly does not encourage one to sit back and analyse and examine one's life, and recognise something that may be staring one in the face. People are often far too 'busy' to sit down and take a long hard look at life and determine whether their life is going in the right direction – indeed, whether they are happy or not.

## **The power of the spirit**

If you believe in a spiritual life, nurture it. If you believe in God, turn to Him. Myself, I believe in the Islamic way of life and civilisation and I turn to Allah (SWT) for guidance and assistance. In the following section I will tell you why I believe in the Islamic ideology as opposed to any other ideology as the only one to provide happiness and tranquillity.

Human beings are by far the most important beings that inhabit the Earth. This is because we, and only we, can make the Earth or break the Earth. We are the only creation which has the power and weapons to destroy the world many times over. Everything is subservient to us and we stand head and shoulders above other creations that we share the Earth with.

War amongst us comes easily and we are not afraid of wiping each other out in the name of nationalism or for some other material benefit. Other beings are not as sophisticated as we are and it is we who have been endowed with the sharpest of intellects meaning we can do as we wish. There is no doubt about this.

We therefore have a lot to contribute to this world and we are the ones who primarily decide how we live our lives in this world. However, human beings differ on how to live life; we have a plethora of philosophies, religions and ideologies, all saying that their way is the right way to live life.

Some of us say that there is a Creator of this universe and we should live by His laws; that we have a spirit and that we should nurture our spiritual life, and we neglect the spirit at our own peril. Others say that there is no such thing as the spirit and after death we simply become dust and bones. Yet others say that these values should not be discussed or have any influence in our worldly life and that human beings have sufficient intelligence and ability to decide their personal lives and that affairs of the state should be left to the collective decisions of human beings. And it is these differences that have preoccupied the greatest of minds for thousands of years and have been the cause of many wars.

## **The qualities of happy people**

Let's not be like those for whom the glass is always half empty; that lament over every occurrence that is beyond their control and for whom it is never a sunny day.

If we observe people who are happy and if we take their advice, we will gain an insight into happiness. We will see that they share some qualities.

- Patience really is a virtue. I understand that many people find this quality amongst the most difficult to develop, but, if you can develop it, life does become much easier.

- They are gentle in whatever they do. That's the best way to conduct yourself. So, be gentle with your children, even if they are misbehaving. Take them aside and lower your wings of mercy around them and try to understand them.
- Environment. Happy people keep company with people who are positive, which in turn positively impacts on them. We all know the impact an environment can have on us. There is a saying: Keep company with the blacksmith and the soot from his practice will rub off on you. And keep company with the one who sells perfume and the fragrance will rub off on you.
- Jealousy. They are never jealous of others, in fact they wish for others what they wish for themselves. When you are not jealous and want goodness for others, your heart will find settlement and tranquillity.
- Gratitude. Happy people are grateful for what they have, even when times are tough. It has to be said that some of the happiest people on Earth are very poor and probably do not know where their next meal will come from. But they remain positive and optimistic.
- Hit the middle ground. They are balanced in their actions and outlook. You will find they are just and even-handed and do not fall into the extremes. They are loved by everyone since they are well balanced and treat people as they should be treated.

Workaholics, for example, are the opposite of a just and balanced personality. They work all the hours that God sends them and have no interest or concern for others. They are not liked by either friends or family since they cannot give even a little of their time and attention. For them, only work and career matters.

At the other end of the spectrum, or the other extremity, you have those who do nothing at all or are simply busy playing computer games all day. They are truly the layabouts and all they can think about is their frivolous pursuits and filling their stomachs. They have no noble aim in life and drift through life without aim, achievement or goal.

So, we seek due moderation in all matters. It has been said:

***'Love the one who is beloved to you in due moderation, for perhaps the day will come when you will abhor him. And hate the one whom you detest in due moderation, for perhaps the day will arrive when you will come to love him.'***

- They smile and laugh moderately. Smiling and laughing affects our mood and can encourage happiness. One of our predecessors said:

***'I make a practice to laugh in order to give rest and comfort to my heart.'***

We must keep a balance with laughing because it has also been said:

***‘Do not laugh excessively, for verily, excessive laughter kills the heart.’***

It has also been said:

***‘People who are always smiling not only make their own lives more joyful, but what’s more they are more productive people in their work and have a greater ability to live up to their responsibilities.’***

- They are well-informed. They read, read, and read some more. So the advice given here is to fill your life with knowledge. Develop a hobby. Read around it and become an expert at it. All the experts in the world started somewhere, and they started small and developed and kept on developing.

I am sure that you can find something that interests you; some subject that you are inquisitive about. It can be anything in the world and it does not have to be what others like – it should be unique to you. You will find that by pursuing your interest you become much more of a whole person; an interesting person; a person with purpose and resolution.

Once you have identified an area or areas of interest, go to your local library and take out some books, or just one book, on your subject of interest. Read the book, or books, cover to cover. Once you’ve read it, it’s time for action. Ask yourself, ‘What did I learn from this book?’, ‘How can I apply what I’ve read or learned to my life?’

I hope that you will enjoy a profound effect from reading and acting on books.

- They live life to the full. They seize the moment and live life as if there’s no tomorrow. Don’t let life’s opportunities pass you by. It has been said:

***‘When morning comes, do not expect to see the evening and when the evening comes, do not expect to see the morning.’***

Part of the meaning of this saying is expect death and act with goodness and good actions until you die.

- Looking forward to relief is another one of their qualities. It is said that with every hardship there come two reliefs. So if you are in hardship, your character and whole being is being tested; you should know that relief is on its way and you should remain patient.

Situations are always changing. Today is not the same as yesterday and tomorrow will be different from today and yesterday. So look forward to the relief. If you feel

motivated, take some actions to hasten the relief – it will surely make you feel better.

- They treat themselves well. Treat yourself as you would a good friend. When I first came across this idea, it sounded weird and unnatural, but then I thought, ‘Why not? Why not treat myself like I would a good friend?’ It makes perfect sense. And so this is something I do.
- They are not obsessed with the future. This is a hard one because I, myself, do not like to leave anything to chance. So this advice is aimed at both you and me.

We need to stop obsessing about the future. Relax and take things as they come. Do the necessary amount of future planning and then let go. I am not proposing fatalism, just a little bit less intensity.

However, don’t let things go to pot. You still need to plan ahead. So whether it is preparing for your driving test, planning your financial income and expenditure, planning your children’s meals – these are all the necessary things in life we should and must plan for.

The extremes that I’m talking about are unnecessary obsessing. You’ll know it, once it comes to your attention. It is this type of obsessing that we need to cut down on and minimise its effect on our lives.

- They avoid multitasking wherever possible. The multitasking that I’m talking about is the one where the quality of the task you are undertaking is reduced due to you having two or three things on the go. An example is that you are trying to teach your children or help them out with their homework while trying to cook at the same time. You will be better served to complete your cooking and then give your full attention to your children’s homework.

However, if you feel that you can have two things on the go at the same time, then go for it. Maybe you like to listen to the radio while writing; that is all well and good.

- They are fully present. Having a conversation with them, you feel that you are the only one that matters; you have their full attention.
- Empathy. They are able to appreciate another’s point of view.
- Good listeners. They listen attentively, trying to grasp what the other person is saying. This skill of listening to the one who is speaking to you is embedded in many cultures and it is generally accepted to be impolite not to be listening.

- Eye contact. Happy people are joyous and will look you in the eye when speaking to you. They make eye contact and retain it. This is a valued skill or quality in many cultures. It is also one of the qualities that makes the person you are speaking to assured that you are considering them.
- Self-confidence. Because they know who they are, they have come to terms with their place in life and are well placed to express what they stand for; they have self-confidence.
- Enthusiasm. They have a very positive outlook and are keen on getting things done. They are assured about facing life's trials and tribulations and are eager to make a difference.
- Technology. They rule technology but technology does not rule them. Here's a thought: why not take a break from technology? Once in a while switch off your computer, your phone, your Internet access and anything else that can distract you, and go for a walk. If you live near a park or some natural woodland, it's a perfect opportunity to rest and relax your mind and go for a long walk.

I live in the city, but I still find some time (usually at night) to go for a refreshing walk. Trust me, you'll enjoy it, and you can add this to the list of things you can do to relax your mind.

### **The example of Islam in relation to happiness**

Islam is an ideology which is a complete and comprehensive way of life. The revelation given to Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) did not leave out or omit anything from problems that people may encounter. Whether it is a political matter or a spiritual matter, Islam answered them with wisdom and insight. So there will never exist a situation where any Muslim or non-Muslim will be left without a solution to their problems.

Without a way of life, we drift through without a purpose or aim. People without a way of life cannot truly be happy as they have not answered the vital questions of existence sufficiently and may have only looked at the subject of man, life and the universe fleetingly. In the following sections of this work, I will take you through the journey of life and explain why only Islam can be the true and correct way of life.

### **What is an ideology?**

An ideology is a basis which answers the fundamental questions of life: Where did we come from? What are we doing on Earth? What happens after death? And from this basis there comes a system of life. Each ideology answers the questions of life and from their basis comes a system of life to govern life's affairs. There exist three dominant ideologies at present: Capitalism, Communism and Islam. My purpose in

looking at ideologies is to find out which ideology is true and to see which brings man to happiness.

Capitalism is an ideology and we live at a time where it is the dominant ideology in the world. Capitalism's basis is secularism: the separation of religion from state. It states that individuals (who are seen to be sovereign) can decide for themselves their personal beliefs and they should not bring religion or religious beliefs into worldly or political matters. Democracy is Capitalism's tool, used to govern the people's lives.

Whether there is a creator of the universe is irrelevant to life in this world. Capitalism is an ideology that states that people or private individuals should own private businesses, and not the state, as suggested by Communism. Capitalism is deeply unpopular in some parts of the world today as the implementation of this ideology has blatantly meant that the wealth gap between the rich and the poor is obvious for all to see. Capitalism unashamedly works for the rich and the super-rich – taking from the poor and giving to the rich. In capitalism, the main goal of society is to enjoy the freedoms of life and to engage in making money. This, in actual fact, leads to greediness and undignified behaviour.

However, not everyone is allowed to make money: the capitalist elite have an advantage in as much as their influence and the fact that they have the ear of the ruling elite means their interests are secured over and beyond the working classes.

***'Capitalism does not permit an even flow of economic resources. With this system, a small privileged few are rich beyond conscience, and almost all others are doomed to be poor at some level. That's the way the system works. And since we know that the system will not change the rules, we are going to have to change the system.'***

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Capitalism has a lot to answer for when it comes to human peace and tranquillity. Currently, governments are governed by capitalists. They run the governments and are the rich elite who are simply in the business of making money and harnessing their own powers and influence. So every government policy is governed by three main concerns: How much does this policy cost? Can we make money from this policy? Will it make me or my cronies more powerful? Considerations about the welfare of the population are secondary and are sidelined.

Apathy towards politics is a key indicator of low morale within the population. And there exists among Western countries and populations indifference about politics, government and politicians as the masses feel there's really no one who is concerned about the real issues that matter to them. Each and every political party fails to bring anything new; instead it is whatever is in the best interest of the ruling elite.

This disparity between the rich and poor was latched on to by communist USSR, China and the socialist states of the world today, making their call for common ownership of

businesses and goods very popular with the masses. This political or ideological flaw in Capitalism is also used by Islamic groups and activists, who point out that under the Islamic State or society this disparity would not exist. Under Islam, for example, there would be no lobby groups who are made up of wealthy individuals and businesses who lobby politicians to make laws that favour their businesses and interests.

***'Capitalism is an organized system to guarantee that greed becomes the primary force of our economic system and allows the few at the top to get very wealthy and has the rest of us riding around thinking we can be that way, too – if we just work hard enough, sell enough Tupperware and Amway products, we can get a pink Cadillac.'*** Michael Moore

When issues are looked at through capitalist glasses, you are simply going to have disaster:

- people feel alone and lonely, nobody cares for each other;
- secure social entities such as the family break up, there is no cohesion or compassion;
- greed and the satisfying of only one's needs are prevalent;
- there is general disdain with politics and political affairs;
- there is an increase in social and moral corruption.

Capitalism has not reached all parts of the world yet, but it's getting close. But if we look at the lands which Islam once governed, we can see remnants of the Islamic values. And it is to these values that we wish to return, and only then will we have social and political satisfaction.

***'They talk about the failure of socialism but where is the success of Capitalism in Africa, Asia and Latin America?'*** Fidel Castro

Many who live under the capitalist states can see the problem and the corruption of the capitalists, but they cannot see any alternative. This is where Islam comes in, to offer an alternative way of life. Under Islam, for example, the wealth or natural resources such as gas, oil and water would be under the control of the state, that would distribute it according to need and would use any money made from selling these commodities to external nations for the public good.

Communism's basis is materialism. It believes that there exists nothing but material. That the universe is all material. The fact that Communism does not believe in a creator of the universe means it is a godless ideology. This alone makes it undesirable for many in the Muslim nation as Muslims firmly believe in the Creator, Allah (SWT).

Karl Marx made Communism's position on religion clear when he said:

***'The first requisite for the happiness of the people is the abolition of religion.'***

Communism denies the spiritual instinct of man. Under the communist Soviet Union, there was a purge on religion under the understanding that religion was nothing but superstition and the practices of ignorant people. People, however, resisted and even worshipped in secret, and when the Soviet Union broke up, they returned to worshipping their deities.

Karl Marx also summarised Communism's position on wealth:

***'The theory of Communism may be summed up in one sentence: Abolish all private property.'***

Communism's system for life is that the single-party communist state controls much of life. It governs and controls the economy, with private ownership forbidden. The state controls man's role within that economy. Much more so than under Capitalism.

Islam is an ideology whose basis has a spiritual aspect. Its basis states that there exists a Creator of the universe Who created man to worship Him and Him alone. The Creator stipulates that man lives in accordance with the Sharia (holy law of Islam). According to the Islamic narrative, the Creator did not leave man alone without a belief or without a system of life to live by. He has given mankind a political system, a social system, a method and system of war, a punishment system and rules and principles from which they can derive laws for any and every problem that they should face until the Day of Judgement.

Islam states that the Creator has sent prophets and messengers to every nation that existed on Earth. However, Islam is the last and final message for mankind and the whole of mankind is obliged to follow Islam to achieve salvation.

### **What is a civilisation?**

A civilisation is created when a distinct ideology is implemented on a society over generations. It is a description of reality or it is a normal course which society takes when an ideology is implemented in any society. At its core, a civilisation is dynamic and always looks to improve and grow greater and higher and, if it doesn't, it fears destruction by its competitors.

Society and those who reside in it are moulded by its values. They take on its beliefs and customs and share its world view to the extent that they are willing to give their lives for the cause. It is my view that one has to have an ideology first before a civilisation is created. From an ideology comes civilisation. Like a tree – the ideology is the roots and trunk. From the roots and trunk come branches and leaves which go to form the civilisation. Similarly, the ideology flourishes and gives rise to civilisations which produce development in sciences, art, calligraphy, social systems, punishment systems, distinct architecture, buildings and much more.

When civilisations cross each other, it can end in war. Nations who represent a particular civilisation can also experience civil war, with groups within their civilisation fighting each other. Islam, for example, has had its fair share of civil war after the death of the Prophet (peace be upon him). This era saw the emergence of factions and groups – some political and some religious. The main thing to remember is that human beings differ and they will always differ.

It goes without saying that civil war weakens a civilisation as it cannot deal with the external threats appropriately and with a strong, unified response. So unity is a must if a civilisation is to expand, grow and quite literally gain new ground.

The Chinese, for example, have experienced civil wars throughout their long existence. They are all too aware of the dangers of splitting up and have learned the benefits of unity. The Chinese civilisation started some eight thousand years ago and it is still intact and flourishing. It has faced dynasties to Communism, and still continues to exist where others have failed. Its language and customs will have to be respected and appreciated by the rest of the world as its international influence rises.

So do states create civilisations or do civilisations create states? This is an interesting question and it's a bit of a 'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?' question. But personally I think that states create civilisations over a period of time. How long it takes for a particular civilisation to thrive depends on how quickly the masses embrace the ideology and its implementation.

The communist civilisation has impacted a number of countries. It affected the Soviet Union, China and South American countries. It has had many philosophers and has left an indelible result on world and national politics. It is here to stay.

The Islamic civilisation has had the longest opportunity in recent history to make its mark on the world. And that mark has surely been made. The Muslim nation now boasts a population of around 1.3 billion and has in the region of 53 nation states where the Muslims make up the majority of the population, making them 'Muslim countries'. It has had the chance of impacting other civilisations as the Islamic State implemented its expansionist policy and was only destroyed as a state in 1924.

### **Leaders and followers**

There will always be leaders and there will always be followers. This is how things have been since time immemorial. Leaders will either be voted in by the people or will take the position by force. Some leaders are good for civilisations and some are not.

The role of rulers is arguably the most important one since they are the ones who establish the good and the bad within society, i.e. their actions affect the masses. Most rulers are dictators, with very few listening to the opinions of the masses. Take, for example, Tony Blair's ignoring the voice of one million people (one of the largest demonstrations in history) who marched against the Iraq War.

Western civilisations have mainly been affected by the capitalist ideology and have produced leaders and ideologues such as David Hume, Adam Smith, David Ricardo and James Stuart. These leaders have been followed by contemporary leaders including Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Tony Blair and others. These leaders have assisted the capitalist ideology and worked fervently against Communism and Islam.

Communist and socialist leaders included Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Chairman Mao, Fidel Castro, Stalin and many more. All of these leaders did their bit for the struggle mainly against the capitalists. Capitalism was being implemented at a state level, where its strength lasted as without a state, society wanders around like a headless chicken.

The Islamic civilisation has produced some inspirational leaders who did wonders for the Islamic ideology and showed the whole world how to rule. Abu Bakr, Omar ibn al-Kattab, Uthman ibn Affan and Ali bin Abi Talib are hailed by the Muslims as the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs'. This is because they governed Muslims as well as non-Muslims with compassion and dignity and so left a pure legacy on how to rule and how to practise Islam.

What all of these leaders have in common is that at some point in their history they had to struggle for what they believed in, and only with patience and steadfastness did they get results. It could be said that the current followers of these three ideologies are still struggling to maintain the superiority of their ideology.

How do you judge whether a civilisation is thriving and is in robust form? Well, essentially you have to judge whether the state and people in society are ideological. Are the state and the ruling elite in the society referring life's affairs to a particular ideology repeatedly and on a consistent basis? If they are referring to a particular ideology, the civilisation will be considered thriving and ideological.

It should be noted that it is not necessary that the masses of society in a particular state have to hold the same belief as the state they are residing in, in order to be considered an ideological state. So, for example, under the capitalist states there exist many different cultural and ideological groups of people – there exist Muslims, Jews and communists. But when it comes to solving life's problems, the ruling elite refer to Capitalism for solutions. Secularism is the basis and from that comes the democratic system which is used to produce solutions.

And historically, in the Islamic State there existed a number of different groups such as the Jews and Christians. The groups were not Muslims and were not forced to adopt the belief of the Islamic State and they were allowed to live in peace under the protection of the state. The Prophet of Islam, Mohammed (peace be upon him) established an ideological state in Medina in what is known today as Saudi Arabia. Jews, Christians and Muslims – he ruled over all groups referring all matters to the

Quran and his own opinions (which we now call the Sunnah). He did not divert from this basis in any of his dealing with people even though they were different from him.

The Prophet's companions did the same and so did all rulers that came after them. In fact, the Jews experienced their Golden Era under Muslim rule and the Christians and Jews enjoyed a special status under the Islamic State as they are the People of the Book. This is so because they were at one point in history people who received revelation from Allah (SWT).

### **Unstable ideology – a danger for all**

Part of the instability which exists in the Muslim states is because the societies do not find an acceptance of state systems. They are not fully acquainted with democracy; they only have slogans to cry out. They do not understand how Western civilisation contradicts the Islamic narrative. All they see is the material advancement in the leading Western nations and they want a piece of the action.

They do not see or hear about the high rates of crime; the cases of sexual abuse; the increasing rates of homelessness; the corruption amongst politicians; the fact that there still exists people living in poverty; the irresponsible and reckless capitalists who squander the money of taxpayers; they do not see the members of the capitalist elite who scratch each other's backs; the move towards privatisation of every government service to the fat cats. I could go on.

Furthermore, the Muslim populations are aware that the rulers that they have, have been imposed on them since the colonialist powers granted the lands 'freedom'. And they are also aware that these leaders have no interest in governing the populations but are in the business of lining their own pockets and those of their cronies. So, these societies are unstable and inconsistent and cannot be called ideological or progressive states.

Once the implementation of an ideology by the state takes place, there are distinct features which occur in a society. Flourishing aspects of this society will be characterised by the success in sciences – maths, languages, intellectual progress, characteristics which the ideology aspires to.

So, for example, the communist ideology aims for a reduction in societal poverty and equal distribution of wealth. If this aim were to become prevalent in society, it will be a distinct success for the communist ideology and would serve to contribute to meet the definition of a successful or progressive civilisation. As soon as these characteristics are prevalent, one can call this a civilisation. How long this takes depends on the speed with which the state implements its ideology and with which the masses embrace it. So it could take a generation or more.

An ideology can be created in the minds of men or it can come in the form of revelation from the Creator, Allah (SWT). Karl Marx, the protagonist of Communism, is an

example of how an ideology can be spread by a leading or influential individual. I say this because the ideas of Communism are older than Karl Marx himself. He was simply a carrier with a clear understanding of the ideology.

An ideology can also come from a divine source, revealed to a human being. The Prophet of Islam, Mohammed (peace be upon him) is an example of this. He had revelation given to him to spread to the whole of mankind.

Ideologies can be in the minds of men and in the written word, books. For the ideology to flourish and become a civilisation, it needs to implement its laws through a state where it will be tested, and it will either bring tranquillity or sorrow or something in between. Ideologies can bring delight or grief.

In Islam, one sees that the ideology would provide the greatest deal of stability for society from the minds of the individuals to the workings of the state. The individual will remain with Allah (SWT), acknowledging Him and knowing that He watches over his every move; so in an Islamic society there will certainly be less crime as everyone will know that Allah is strict in punishment and their conduct will be guided by the sources of law which include the inimitable Words of Allah (SWT) – the Quran and Sunnah – the sayings and actions of the Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessing upon him).

### **Nations rise and fall**

Nations rise because they have adopted a distinct and forceful ideology, because they have something to say or contribute to the world. It is usually on how to live life and how to view it. No nation rises without answering the fundamental questions of life, and no nation rises without stability and steadiness, having been given the chance to flourish.

Nations fall because they let go of the ideologies that formed them. They fall into disunity and there is no cohesion in society. There exist factions and opposing groups who destabilise society and they differ on how to live life. So, the individual finds it hard to find happiness within this type of society as there is conflict and a lack of cohesion within the society he lives in.

The Western nations of today are, broadly speaking, progressive nations. One of the characteristics of a progressive nation is that there exists a consensus on how to live life and how to deal with life's problems.

The Muslim countries, however, are in complete chaos, with no one voice on how to progress. There is not the consensus that is required. Some are calling for the implementation of Islamic law while others are calling for secularism; some are calling for nationalism; yet others are calling for Communism or socialism. The Muslim nations are going about trying to see what works and what fits with them, being let

down time after time by unscrupulous political leaders playing on their hopes and wishes, only to dish out 'more of the same'.

One of the benefits of following an ideology resolutely is that you see material and social progress sooner or later and people have a good standard of living. And it has to be said that to bring about change and revolution in a society which enjoys a high standard of living is difficult, because people are satisfied with what they have and do not want to rock the boat.

Therefore, it can be said that it is much easier to bring about change in poorer and disgruntled societies because they feel problems... the problem of poverty, the withering away of moral and ethical values, the corruption of their rulers, contradictory and inhumane laws, and much more. And it is in this situation that you will get a clash of ideologies and civilisations. There will be those who are happy with what they have and those who seek change to a different society.

## **Society**

In order to change or influence something you have to have an understanding of what it is: what are its constituent parts? Having studied and analysed society, one can say that society is more than just a collection of individuals. A society has individuals who have relationships between each other on an agreed basis; they also have a system of government which facilitates and governs these relationships. A society also has dominant ideas which are prevalent among the individuals. These dominant ideas are held to be true and right and they will not be challenged. Along with these dominant ideas, there will be emotions attached, and the society will hold these emotions also to be true and praiseworthy.

So, seeking to change society (which is what all ideologies and civilisations seek to do) without understanding what society is, is a futile exercise. It is the constituent parts that have to be targeted and changed if one is to change society.

People of power and influence are special groups of people who have to be influenced and strengthened with the Islamic civilisation and ideology since they are truly the ones who hold power and sway over a society. These include intellectuals, tribal leaders, politicians, army generals and personnel, newspaper editors, etc.

However, it is the carriers of dawah (duat) who have to carry the message of Islam to the rest of the world. These are indeed the praised group of people. They are the ones who have to have the exemplary qualities to make them into shining stars so that they take the lead towards the magnificent ideology of Islam. These individuals can be an example for happiness and, what is more, they call others to happiness and tranquillity through their practical example.

## **Politics – a natural occurrence**

As long as humans exist, there will always be politics. This is because we as human beings cannot really survive by ourselves. We have needs and instincts. We have the need to eat, the need to be clothed and to have shelter. Our survival, spiritual and social instincts also need to be satisfied.

Let's take, for example, a little baby. Can the baby feed itself? Can it dress itself? Can it clean itself? The answer is clearly, no. So the baby needs food, clothes and shelter. Who will provide these things? The parents or the guardians. For them to be able to provide these necessities in a modern-day society requires businesses that sell food, that sell clothes and that sell shelter.

All of these providers need to be regulated. There needs to be common agreement about price and quality. Who will guarantee that these common agreements are upheld? A system of government. You can now see that society cannot function well without common agreements and a system to enforce these agreements. Since politics defines and establishes itself in solving and governing the affairs of the people in society, all of the above issues are political issues.

Where the state intervenes and where it doesn't is a matter for the ideology from which the system of government emanated. In Communism the state has a hand in all affairs, and decisions by the state are made in the name of the common good. In Capitalism there is much more freedom and less regulation or intervention by the capitalist state. Individuals make their own decisions based on whatever is seen to be beneficial. In Islam, the affairs of a Muslim are defined and controlled by the Sharia (holy Islamic law) and he/she is not free to do as they wish. There is, of course, intervention made by the Islamic State whenever it is required in accordance with the Shariah.

## **War and ideological struggle**

Civilisations will go to war to protect their way of life, as we have seen through history and as we see in today's day and age. Civilisations will either be in all-out war or they will be vilifying their enemies through propaganda. With Western Capitalism we had the fear of the 'reds under the beds' to put the fear of Communism into the hearts of the people, and now the new enemy is Islam and the portrayal of 'fundamentalist' Muslims as 'terrorists'.

Terrorism is not a part of Islam and Muslims are not terrorists, yet this is the way the capitalist ideologues want Islam and Muslims to be viewed. There is a great effort being made in this regard so that Muslims are put on the back foot and feel that they have to be apologetic for their way of life. Muslims should be aware of this strategy and plan so that they can react to it in the right way.

The recent rise and fall of the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq gave the capitalist ideologues in the Western nations (mainly the USA, the UK and France) ammunition to link the call of Muslim groups to establish the true Islamic State to the barbaric and inhumane actions of those in Iraq and Syria. The so-called Islamic State fell into the trap laid by the Western nations in order to say to the world that 'This is what the Islamic State is all about – barbaric practices'. It should be noted here that what really went on inside the so-called Islamic State has to be verified by Muslim sources.

Not happy with this, the so-called Islamic State encouraged Muslim individuals to engage in acts of terror not just in the UK, USA and France, but also in the Muslim lands. Anybody with a thread of intelligence would point out to the Islamic State group that these acts of terrorism serve no purpose at all, other than to give ammunition to the West and their propaganda war. The upshot of all this is that those who call for the true Islamic State are automatically labelled as supporters of terrorism. We can see in this example how civilisations clash and are at war with each other.

All civilisations have a system of war and a way to gain new ground and ultimately expand. However, just because there is the means of war does not mean it should always be used. My view is that actual war should be avoided at all costs. There exists no issue which cannot be solved through diplomacy and through peaceful means.

The Islamic civilisation is without doubt from Allah (SWT) and the revelation is infallible. This is not to say that there should not be any checks and balances to make sure the civilisations, and in particular the Islamic civilisation, should take steps to reduce or eliminate the possibility of another regression and decline in adherence to the ideology of Islam.

There are a number of things that should be put in place to safeguard the Muslims' adherence to Islam. One of the major steps would be to have lots of political groups or parties based on the Islamic ideology. In fact, Islam makes it a recommendation that there should exist groups enjoining the good and forbidding the evil within society. This is contrary to some opinions among the scholars or ulema, who say that having groups within a society causes disunity in an Islamic society. This view is not correct – the opposite is true; having groups guiding and supporting the Islamic society, increasing the knowledge of Muslims, being the eyes and ears of the Muslims, is a way of safeguarding from decline and stagnation. The people who seek long and enduring happiness will be suitable for this type of propagation of Islam.

One of the reasons for the initial decline of the Muslim community was that they did not hold to account their leaders as they should have done. This will be one of the duties of Islamic groups – to hold to account the leader of the Muslims and to make sure that he is not going astray and to make sure he is acting in accordance with the Islamic ideology.

If there is anyone to be wary of in today's world it is the Chinese. This is because their way of life is represented by an exceptional state, moving ever faster towards domination of world markets. Not much has been said about China's cultural risk and rise. It is a rising nation, with its economy rivalling the USA as the world's largest economy.

In the UK now nobody can speak their mind, especially the young. With government initiatives like Prevent and others set up to counteract 'extremist' views, thousands of young people have been reported for expressing 'extreme' views. The upshot of all this is that Muslims will be unable to speak their mind and there will be suspicion and distrust among the Muslim community. Muslims and non-Muslims are now positively encouraged to report on each other. What is the difference between this and Nazi Germany?

There is no such thing as complete freedom. One is not free to rebel against the state or challenge the authority of an ideology. A current example of misunderstanding of freedom is the trouble in Spain and the Catalonian struggle for 'freedom' from Spain. Spain has now sacked the Catalonian leader and has taken direct rule. There have been huge demonstrations in favour of separation, but the Spanish government has ignored the will of the Catalonian people and has declared the attempted referendum on independence illegal and unconstitutional.

Every civilisation protects itself from rebellion. Islam kills the one who abandons the religion – the apostates are put to death. Capitalist and communist states have laws against rebellion and each civilisation implements the laws with force. My point is that there is no such thing as complete freedom. You either have to abide by the laws of an ideology or face its retribution.

### **Ideologies in practice**

Under Capitalism we have seen the wholesale selling of public services and capital to the capitalists of society, leading to greed-loving societies with only the fat cats benefiting from these sales. Anyone who opposes this is disregarded and is said to be not living in the real world.

In the UK alone gas, electricity, schools, the National Health Service, the prison system and housing management have had their part ownership and management transferred to private companies or have had encouragement from the Government to make use of private company services. Now, what is striking is that these private companies are only interested in making money and are not really concerned about the feelings and emotions of the people they are 'serving'. What has happened is that the ruling elite have done their buddies a favour and sold out the public ownership policies.

Capitalism is a system of greed where the capitalist class exploit the working class for their benefit alone. And so it is no surprise that many people are becoming fed up with being used and abused, but they cannot see an alternative. But slowly and surely public belief in this system of greed is starting to wane. And we may yet live to see the demise of Capitalism.

In Capitalism, the free market should be free of any governmental interference. Basically, the markets should be left to their own devices. But invariably what happens is that the major players, who have all the money, take over market share of any given market and make use of their unfair advantage to put medium- and small-sized competitors out of business. And this model of the economic system is enforced and supported by the capitalist politicians and assisted by law.

Look, for example, at the rise of supermarkets over recent years in the UK. They are directly responsible for the local grocer going out of business. And this phenomenon is seen through all markets: where the businesses with greater capital outdo their competitors and put them out of business. Monopolies are created which hunker down to rid themselves of any competitors; this results in small- and medium-sized businesses going out of business.

Members of the working class who work for the super-rich and super-powerful get a pittance for their efforts at work. This leaves them struggling to live, even in the so-called First World. I have practical experience of this as I used to work in the retail market and we used to get peanuts as wages even though we may be working all the hours God gives.

Part of the problem of poverty is that the way Capitalism measures how a nation is performing economically is by working out the gross domestic product (GDP), which is erroneous. The GDP is simply a figure and has no bearing on practically measuring wealth. If you measure wealth by the GDP you may find that the country is wealthy, but the wealth is owned by a small group of people whereas the majority of people are struggling to make ends meet and live in poverty. This is the situation even in First World countries like the USA and UK.

The economic system of any country should take into account those who are in poverty as well as those doing well. In an economic system one should see whether the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing are being met.

Communism's problem is that it does not recognise private property as everything is owned communally or, more accurately, by the communist state. This standard goes against the natural human instinct of private ownership and gives no incentive for individuals to trade or start-up businesses, leaving a hole in the economic system of a communist state.

Under Islam there is no concentration of wealth as there is in Capitalism, and unlike under Communism, one is allowed to own private property. In the Islamic system the focus is on whether the people's basic needs of food, clothing and shelter are met. Furthermore, because in an Islamic society there is no banking system, the wealth of a society will be circulating amongst the members of the public and not hoarded in a bank somewhere doing nothing.

### **The correct civilisation and ideology**

The correct civilisation is the civilisation with the right ideology being implemented. So, how do we judge what the right ideology is? The answer is that if the ideology satisfies the mind (by agreeing with reality), and acknowledges and satisfies the spiritual instinct within man, it can be said to be the correct ideology.

Agreeing with reality and the mind means that reality should be in agreement with what human beings perceive through the senses and not go against it.

Man has always worshipped. He has worshipped the sun, fire, animals and even other human beings. This is because man needs to worship. He has a spiritual instinct. He feels weak and limited and needs to look up to, and seek guidance from, a higher authority. Satisfaction of the spiritual instinct will lead to the settlement of the heart and will bring comfort and tranquillity.

The Western capitalist ideology does not fit the bill since the basis of the ideology is secularism, i.e. a separation of religion and state. The assertion is that whether God exists or does not exist does not really matter, and to claim the answer to this question should not affect this life's affairs is simply erroneous. This basis is essentially saying that religious views should not affect the political life of this temporal existence.

This view is wrong because the fundamental question of whether God exists or not has a relevance to this life. Since, if He does exist we must find out why He has put us on this Earth. If He does not exist then this also has relevance for this worldly life. One way or another, the answer to the question of whether God exists or not has a relevance to this life. This is why the basis of secularism is wrong and does not convince the mind, nor does it settle the heart and so it does not satisfy the spiritual instinct of man.

The capitalist ideology does not bring tranquillity to the heart since the spiritual belief in a creator does not extend from the personal belief. It does not extend to political matters and is restricted to personal belief. It has to be said that only belief in the spiritual aspect of the universe brings satisfaction to the heart.

Communism's basis of atheism or materialism in no way convinces the mind. Its explanation of the universe being material and eternal is incorrect. This is because material is limited and planned; the laws of the universe do not point towards material being able to pop into existence, create itself, plan itself and maintain itself.

Thus, if one were to throw thousands of random letters of the alphabet in the air, expecting them to fall onto the floor, producing a masterpiece of a poem, any rational being would say that it would be impossible! Yet, when we view the universe with its intricate planning and organisation, how can we say that all the atoms of the universe fell into place producing this complexity?!

Secondly, our observation of the universe points to the fact that matter is limited. This means that it can be said with certainty that the whole universe, including the edges of the universe, is limited and finite and cannot exist on its own power and, therefore, must be dependent on a higher power.

So, the natural organisation or planning of the universe points to an Organiser or a Planner, i.e. points to the existence of a God since the universe is mind-bogglingly intricate and planned right down to the single atom. This is the only point of view that agrees with reality and satisfies the mind.

Communism does not satisfy the spiritual instinct; in fact, it denies that such a thing exists within humans. It positively goes against it and it goes against any form of worship.

This leaves Islam as the only ideology to state clearly and firmly that there exists a Creator of the universe Who planned it, created it and sustains it. The belief in a Creator who plans everything agrees with reality since when we observe the universe we can see for sure its complexity and organisation. This can only be the work of a Creator and a Sustainer.

There are numerous verses of the Quran asking man to contemplate upon the universe and see how it is organised. They were also asked to think even about the animals which Allah (SWT) has subdued and made them a thing of necessity for man:

***'Do they not see that We have created for them of what Our Hands have created, the cattle, so that they are their owners? And We have subdued them unto them so that some of them they have for riding and some they eat.'*** (Quran 36:71–72)

And about themselves:

***'Have they not thought about their own selves? God did not create the heavens and Earth and everything between them without a serious purpose and an appointed time, yet many people deny that they will meet their Lord.'*** (Quran 30:8)

Islam is the only ideology which agrees with the spiritual instinct within man, settles and brings tranquillity to the heart since there is agreement between the weakness of the created and the recognition that he is at the mercy of the Creator.

***'...Verily in the remembrance of Allah do the hearts find contentment.'*** (Quran 13:28)

In Islam we are truly and confidently told that Islam is superior and can never be surpassed. This brings us confidence and tranquillity. And finally, we are told:

***'This day I have perfected for you your way of life and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as your way of life.'*** (Quran 5:3)

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