

## ‘GOODY-GOODY LIFE’ or ‘A GOOD LIFE’ (*All Saints’ Day Special*)



The major part of my life I spent playing nice and goody-goody all the time and perhaps to everybody. It was the most acceptable behaviour I found as I related to my environment to the best of my ability. It gained me adjectives like ‘*a good girl, a promising daughter, a family blessing, a witnessing religious*’ etc. etc. **But deep within, I didn’t feel that good!** I knew I was way far from true goodness and I still sought it...!

While pursuing Postgraduation in Psychotherapy and getting trained as a Counsellor, the greatest obstacle I faced was this ‘*idealistic goody concept*’ of self and of life that I thrust upon my clients and that led to almost all failed counselling sessions.

It took me years of study and experience to get a bit of clarity on what really makes a ‘*good life*’. I think, it all begins first and foremost, with a **deep inner experience of unconditional acceptance that one may receive either in one’s relationship with God or with an enlightened therapist or with someone who truly loves.** It’s this experience of unconditional self-worth; of value, that gives one the possibility to explore life without any distortions or facades.

I love to share a thumbnail sketch of my views of the ‘*good life*’, in context of my own experience as an evolving being and also as a therapist. It seems to me that **the ‘good life’ is not any fixed state** of virtue, or contentment, or nirvana, or happiness. It is neither a condition in which the individual is adjusted, or fulfilled, or actualized. To use psychological terms, it is not a state of drive-reduction, or tension-reduction, or homeostasis. All these refer to fixed states of being and are inappropriate to describe a ‘*good life*’. **The ‘good life’ is a process, not a state of being.** Here I share a few universal characteristic qualities of this process of movement:

### **AN INCREASING OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE**

In the first place, the process of the ‘*good life*’ seems to involve an increasing openness to experience. If a person could be fully open to his experience, however, every stimulus – whether originating within the organism or in the environment – would be freely relayed through the nervous system without being distorted by any defensive mechanism. *Thus, one aspect of this process called ‘the good life’ appears to be a movement away from the pole of defensiveness toward the pole of openness to experience.* The individual is becoming more able to listen to himself, to experience what is going on within himself. He is more open to his feelings of fear and discouragement and pain. He is also more open to his feelings of courage and tenderness and awe. He is more fully able to live the experiences of his organism rather than shutting them out of awareness.

### **INCREASINGLY EXISTENTIAL LIVING**

A second characteristic of the process which for me is the ‘*good life*’, is that it involves an increasing tendency to live fully in each moment. One way of expressing the fluidity which is present in such existential living is to say that the self and personality emerge from experience, rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit preconceived self-structure. *To open one’s spirit to what is going on now, and to discover in that present process whatever structure it appears to have* – this to me is one of the qualities of the ‘*good life*’, the mature life.

### **AN INCREASING TRUST IN ONE’S ORGANISM**

As I observe the individuals whose experiences in living have taught me so much, I find that increasingly such individuals are able to trust their total organismic reaction to a new situation. An analogy which might come close to this description would be to compare this person to a *giant ‘electronic computing machine’*. Since he is open to his experience, all of the data from his sense impressions, from his memory, from previous learning, from his visceral and internal states, is fed into

the machine. The machine takes all of these multitudinous pulls and forces which are fed in as data, and quickly computes the course of action which would be the most economical vector of need-satisfaction in this existential situation. *Such individuals make use of all of the information their nervous system can thus supply, using it in awareness, but recognizing that their total organism may be, and often is, wiser than their awareness.* They are able to put more trust in their organism in this functioning, not because it is infallible, but because they can be fully open to the consequences of each of their actions and can correct them if they prove to be less than satisfying.

Such individuals when 'feel like' expressing anger they do so very satisfactorily, because they are equally alive to their other desires for affection, affiliation, and relationship. They are surprised at their own intuitive skill in finding behavioural solutions to complex and troubling human relationships.

The defects which in most of us make this process untrustworthy are the *inclusion of information which does not belong to this present situation, or the exclusion of information which does.* When certain threatening experiences are inhibited from awareness, and hence are withheld from the computation or fed into it in distorted form, this produces error.

### **INCREASINGLY GREATER RICHNESS OF LIFE**

One last implication I would like to mention is that this process of living in the 'good life' involves a wider range, a greater richness, a creative living, than the constricted living in which most of us find ourselves. These individuals live more intimately with their feelings of pain, and also more vividly with their feelings of ecstasy; that anger is more clearly felt, so also is love; that fear is an experience they know more deeply, so is courage. *And the reason they can thus live fully in a wider range is that they have this underlying confidence in themselves as trustworthy instruments for encountering life.*

The adjectives such as happy, contented, blissful, enjoyable, do not seem quite appropriate to any general description of this process called the 'good life'. But the adjectives which seem more generally fitting are adjectives such as enriching, exciting, rewarding, challenging, meaningful. *This process of the 'good life', I am convinced, is not for the faint-hearted. It involves the stretching and growing more and more of one's potentialities.* It involves the 'courage to be' and choosing this process of 'becoming' as the 'good life'. It means launching oneself fully into the ocean of life.

*There are things which you cannot change...leave them...*

*There are things which you can...make them better if you want...*

*But don't torture yourself...it's a short life...few blinks and it's gone.*

**Rest as always choice is yours as to what you want to do with your life...)))**

*May the Saints in heaven be our guides as we explore the process called the 'good life'!* **Wish you a Blessed All Saints' Day!**

**Sr. Rekha Punia, UMI**

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