

Happiness is not a matter of luck

Recently, in a German meditation centre, I once again read the saying: “There is no way to happiness; happiness is the way”, attributed to the Buddha. Apart from the fact that the statement appears like a Zen kōan, I, like probably many others, cannot agree with the first part in particular, according to which there is no way to happiness.

On the question of what makes people *happy*, I recently read an interesting book that attempts to shed light on the subject from a scientific perspective. As in the book in question, I would like to consider happiness and life satisfaction as essentially synonymous terms, whereby *happiness* may be experienced even more intensely than *satisfaction*. Probably in all ages, people have been concerned with how to increase the individual feeling of happiness, how to maintain satisfaction, how to conserve it. And in recent decades, the sciences such as psychology and sociology have also increasingly devoted themselves to these questions in branches of their disciplines, the so-called happiness research.

The American psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky has summarised the current state of research in her book *The How of Happiness* in an entertaining, well-founded and generally accessible way. Although it has been found that about half of our basic sense of happiness is unalterably predetermined by genetic factors, only about 10% is determined by general life circumstances such as salary or material goods, and this component does not even lead to a sustained increase in the subjective sense of happiness. After a limited phase of being more satisfied, the feeling of happiness falls back to the original basic level. On the other hand, the remaining 40% can be influenced individually by our own behaviour, and a positive feeling of happiness or well-being gained in this way is even easier to refresh and more lasting.

Lyubomirsky has divided happiness-enhancing behaviours into 12 happiness strategies, which I would like to list here without detailed explanations: 1) expressing gratitude; 2) cultivating optimism; 3) avoiding overthinking and social comparisons; 4) practising acts of kindness; 5) nurturing social relationships; 6) developing strategies for coping with crisis; 7) learning to forgive; 8) increasing flow experiences; 9) savouring life’s joys; 10) realising life’s dreams; 11) practising religion or spirituality; 12) taking care of body and soul. Further details and elaborate justifications can be found in her book. However, Lyubomirsky does not believe that all strategies should be followed by everyone. A few strategies that are felt to be suitable for one are sufficient, for some perhaps only a single strategy, in order to measurably increase the personal feeling of happiness or satisfaction.

The topic of this month's Tantranetz blog is not only about whether growing happiness is "feasible", but in particular what Tantra can contribute to a sustainable increase in the feeling of happiness. In the light of the above strategies for happiness, it should be considered to what extent these can be realised in tantric togetherness, through tantric exercises and rituals. Before I go into this in more detail, I would like to talk briefly about my personal understanding of Tantra, which I also described in more detail in an earlier Tantranetz article. For me, the central intention of Tantra is to grow *love*, understood in a substantially wider sense, as a feeling of connection, to myself, to other people, to living beings, to objects of nature, perhaps even to the world as a whole.

In a somewhat random sequence, I would therefore now like to look at how some of the cited happiness strategies also play a significant role in Tantra. Even though tantric exercises can be practised alone, and this is also very important, as for example in self-love, Tantra lives especially from togetherness, the tantric meetings, and thus quite naturally cultivates social relationships with sentient, emotional beings. Since meditation practice also plays an important role in Tantra, there is a natural connection to spirituality, and flow experiences can also arise there, or in all other practices, for example in massages, both in the giving person as well as in the receiving. Flow can be understood as the transition from doing to being, without intention. One's own body can also be taken care of in tantric practice through yoga elements, and isn't the exchange of massages a wonderful way to nourish and honour the body of the other as well as one's own. And through this, as it were, also the heart, the soul. Through all its different, manifold, interwoven facets, Tantra is able to increase kindness and gratitude as a beautiful side effect, and last but not least, to create special, joyful life moments in relishing, loving touches.

In general, it can be seen from the happiness strategies presented above that the feeling of happiness and life satisfaction is less influenced by external circumstances and more by inner attitudes. In the course of a lifetime, these attitudes can always be adapted and further developed, and in my experience, Tantra offers a plethora of fundamental, profound approaches with a long tradition that have the capacity to sustainably increase well-being, the feeling of happiness and love.