

The American Dream – At What Cost?

by: Geela When people are asked, “How many of you are content and happy with what you have?” the reply of an overwhelming majority of people is “Not me.” And when they are asked what do they want most out of life, the typical reply is “I want to be happy,” as if happy is some kind of a place, like Disneyland or Happy Land. But happiness is not a destination. It’s a process. In fact, happiness is not even so much a sentiment (contrary to popular culture reinforced by the media) but more of a state of being and an attitude if you will. It comes from feeling connected with everything and everyone. It is the level of our awareness that makes the difference between living “happily” or unhappily. Living in an increasingly artificial world, it’s easy to forget our spiritual roots, and very hard not to live the illusion of life rather than life itself. When we live by the motto: “He with the most toys lives,” rather than “He with the most joys lives,” we invariably experience artificial joy that prevents us from living fully in the here and now while connecting with real people, real life and having real joy. Perhaps that’s because knowingly or unknowingly, many of us fell victim to the illusion of The American Dream and its promise for sweet success based on a materialistic values system. So before rushing to say: “I want more money,” confusing material success with experiencing more love and joy, ask yourself “at what cost? Is the high price tag for achieving success, as narrowly defined by THE AMERICAN DREAM, worth the effort and the great sacrifice? In the pursuit of THE AMERICAN DREAM it’s easy to lose sight of what’s really important and overlook the many trappings of success. You may sacrifice so much just “to get there” only to discover that there is no “there” there. There is more to life than material success and living by the code of external and shallow values that really don’t serve our highest good and purpose. Then you become disillusioned and life easily becomes an empty experience devoid of meaning and real joy or purpose. This is not to say that you should not strive for excellence or even material success. After all, there is nothing virtuous about being poor. How can you help your fellow human being when you are suffering from lack yourself? It’s unfortunate that money has such a bad reputation (“money is the root of all evil”). In fact it’s the love of money – greed - that drives some to commit crimes that is the root of all evil). When used properly with the element of charity being incorporated, money can be a very useful tool to actually make a difference. It is more spiritual to live well for yourself so that you can give yourself away to benefit others. You are an expression of life itself and that demands your active participation in the process of life through creativity and prosperity. However, it’s essential that you make informed decisions based on the awareness that the promise of THE AMERICAN DREAM which is based on a materialistic and shallow values system (to have it all and enjoy it all and live happily ever after) is just an illusion that may not be in your best interest and can actually cause you more harm than good. Success has its own trappings. It demands a very high price tag that may not be worth it. But if you still insist on knowing whether or not you have reached “Happy Land,” in the end you will know it when you live your life consciously. That means you practice the attitude of gratitude for all the blessings in your life (remember it could always be worse). Your joy of life is not dependent on external values such as the accumulation of possessions that produce artificial joy that is as fleeting as it is cruel. You stop defining yourself based on somebody else’s narrow definition of who you are and should be. After all, your true essence, which is constantly changing and expansive, is beyond any man-made definition. Now that’s something to get excited about.

About the Author

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