

The Good Life

by Nancy Martz

I have to give credit to Aristotle who condensed all of life's riches down to five primary means of achieving happiness. These are health, wealth, friendship, knowledge and virtue. Attaining the most happiness depends on having all of these five plus a lot of good luck. If a person doesn't attain all of these means, he or she must learn to compensate.

Beginning with health, it is pure luck to inherit genes that allow longevity minus physical and mental challenges. With good health, one can pursue happiness over a full lifetime. Of course one can add or detract from the luck of genetics by making good or poor choices about life style, exercise, medical treatments, diet and so forth, and that is why knowledge is part of the mix. If good physical and mental health are not one's luck, then he must have sufficient wealth for cures and fixes. Wealth is also necessary for a healthy person so that he isn't spending all his time struggling for survival. Some may be lucky enough to inherit wealth or to have sufficient knowledge to earn a good living. If not, they have to struggle for life's bare essentials at wages that leave them little leisure time to pursue happiness.

The pursuit of happiness by a healthy person with sufficient wealth is enhanced by the company of friends. Friends add to one's physical enjoyment, emotional balance, and intellectual fulfillment. Without friends, the wealthy and healthy long life can be lonely and even miserable. Supposing one is fortunate enough to have or to attain health, wealth, and friendship. Yet these goods would be hollow without knowledge, which indicates self knowledge as well as knowledge of the world. If one knows little or nothing, he isn't likely to attract interesting friends. He would be likely to make poor decisions based on ignorance, lose his friends to misunderstandings, his wealth to scams, and his health to risky behavior. Plus he would be unable to distinguish fulfilling and long term pleasures from superficial, short lived, and dangerous ones in the pursuit of happiness.

Finally, virtue allows one to have honor and self esteem and to choose friends wisely with an eye to attributes like honesty, wisdom, compassion, and integrity. He might be lucky to have had wise, virtuous parents, or teachers, or someone who gave him guidance to develop and desire virtue. But without that luck, and if he is dishonest, selfish, greedy and lacks compassion and integrity, his friends who have these virtues will soon find him out, distrust him and abandon him to his meanness and ignominy.

So, for the best chance at a happy life full of all good things, one will be most fortunate to seek and to keep good health, sufficient wealth, honorable friends, rich knowledge of self and the world, and the all desirable virtues such as honesty, wisdom, compassion, and integrity. Finally, cross your fingers a lot.