

HEALTH, HAPPINESS AND DISEASE

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Our main objectives are to review the definitions of health and disease, the mind-body aspects of disease states, and concepts of happiness as the core of mental and physical health. In addition, we offer some suggestions for improved health through the application of Rosicrucian principles.

HEALTH AND DISEASE

Health is a state of equilibrium or balance of mind and body. This balance, along with the mechanisms to maintain it, has been referred to as *homeostasis*.¹ A healthy person can withstand challenges or stressors in order to maintain this balanced state. This state of balance allows such individuals to lead socially and economically productive lives, while enjoying some level of happiness (see “Happiness,” later).

Conversely, disease is a state of imbalance or disequilibrium of part of the person, but often the person as a whole is affected. Discomfort and distress are common; unhappiness is a common accompaniment. Disability or death may result if severe imbalances are not corrected.

THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

There is an association of the mind-brain and bodily functions, with the former playing an executive role in influencing autonomic, endocrine and immune systems of the body. The hypothalamus is a major control center for the autonomic and endocrine systems of the body. The hypothalamus, in turn, is influenced by other brain regions, including the limbic system, which is involved in emotions and memory. According to Rosicrucian philosophy, the hypothalamus also connects with the Cosmic. The degree to which this happens to influence us is dependent upon how attuned we are with our inner Selves/the Master Within. The brain works in a modular (functions are represented in discrete brain regions) but interconnected manner. The limbic system interacts with the frontal lobes, which give direction and motivation, and other centres that allow for execution of motor commands, monitoring of sensory feedback and interpretation.

The autonomic system is composed of sympathetic and parasympathetic arms. These usually have opposite actions, e.g., the sympathetic system accelerates the heart rate, while the parasympathetic system slows the heart. Normally the actions are balanced in health. At times of crisis the sympathetic system accelerates the heart, raises the blood pressure, slows the gastrointestinal tract action and causes secretion of epinephrine/adrenalin from the inner part (medulla) of the adrenal glands. The latter action increases availability of glucose (sugar) as an energy source for muscles in addition to contributing to the above-mentioned cardiovascular effects. Although phylogenetically this helped animals in “flight or fight” responses,¹ this “stress response” is often triggered too readily or inappropriately and is sustained for long periods in humans.² This is often counterproductive. Both physical (e.g., injury or infection) and mental (e.g., anguish, emotional tension) stress can trigger such responses.³ These can cause/contribute to hypertension (high blood pressure) and other problems of chronically stressed individuals.

The hypothalamus is intimately connected with the pituitary gland; these form the executives of the endocrine system. (As an aside, it is of interest that the combined vowel sound RAMA is thought to activate the pituitary gland to produce a feeling of happiness and peace.) Cortisol, another stress hormone, is secreted by the adrenal cortex (outer part of the gland) after stimulation by adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) from the pituitary gland under the direction of a releasing hormone from the hypothalamus.⁴ Cortisol mobilizes glucose, antagonizes insulin, contributes to high blood pressure and suppresses lymphocytes in the immune system.⁵ The immune system guards us from infections; it also surveys and eliminates mutations and other mitotic errors that could lead to the evolution and proliferation of cancer cells.^{6 7} In addition, it has recently been found that enhanced cortisol action has an adverse effect on memory circuits in the brain, disrupting retrieval mechanisms.⁸

Thus, the chronically stressed individual is in a state of disequilibrium, often with impaired memory and concentration, prone to diabetes, hypertension and cancer. Other disorders that may have a relation to stress are: obesity, asthma, some gastro-intestinal disorders (e.g., irritable bowel syndrome, flare-ups of inflammatory bowel disease), insomnia, depression and social isolation and post-traumatic stress disorder.⁵

PREVENTING AND AMELIORATING DISEASE THROUGH THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

The Rosicrucian dictum “Thoughts are things” has several meanings, one of which refers to the notion that our mental processes can have unfavorable or favorable effects on bodily functions via mechanisms described above. Not only can we become physically ill with mental distress, but mental “wellness,” psychic healing, visualization and various healing exercises may aid in fighting and preventing disease. The various healing techniques described in the sixth degree of the monographs require the practitioner to know how and when these are appropriately applied. These teachings state that such techniques are to be used adjunctively with standard medical methods. We can benefit ourselves and others by applying such techniques; metaphysical aid benefits the recipient and offers psychic and spiritual benefits to those giving the assistance.

We all have a resource within us, the Master Within, tied to Cosmic Consciousness. When attuned with our inner Selves we gain access to deeper truths, can assess the validity and meaning of our experiences (the voice of conscience is a manifestation of this) and can achieve Peace Profound. Peace Profound is that blissful/joyful/happy state when we are attuned to our inner Selves and the Cosmic where time and space no longer exist and all is harmonious; we can see our interconnectedness with others. Achieving Cosmic Consciousness is the ultimate personal happiness. We shall explore happiness in a brief review.

HAPPINESS

We contend that the optimal state of equilibrium is happiness, where resilient health and Peace Profound can be achieved. If inner happiness is robust this can prevent or ameliorate many of the stress-related illnesses that we have mentioned above. But just what is “happiness?” Most dictionary definitions are not adequate, e.g., “the state of being happy/joy/contentment.”

Eudaimonia, the Greek equivalent of happiness, literally means “good spirit.” We can come closer to grasping this concept by realizing happiness exists at different levels^{9 10 11}:

1. Reinforcement: satisfying the body’s motivational system or needs, i.e., food, water, air, shelter, sex and reproduction.
2. Goal fulfillment: security, money, job, promotions, marriage, family, etc.
3. Mystical: It is this higher aspect of happiness that we wish to explore, for this is the deeper meaning we seek as Rosicrucians. We shall first turn to the three classical philosophical schools of Happiness and then review Rosicrucian concepts.

The Aristotelian School: Aristotle (384 BCE-322 BCE) held that happiness was determined by the overall completeness of one’s life. *Orexis* is the attractive force directing us to the ultimate good, which is *virtue*. Human Beings are intrinsically good and can achieve making correct moral choices by heeding their inner nature and using reason. Thus the achievement of happiness / moral virtue depends on the collective wisdom of the mind and inner self.

It should be noted that Emmanuel Kant opposed Aristotle’s concept by proposing a categorical imperative: the test of a truth, notably happiness, is its universal applicability. An example is “the Golden Rule,” i.e., to treat others as we would wish to be treated. Whether Aristotle and Kant were diametrically opposed or not is debatable, however. The resultant is basically the same. Aristotle’s approach is more an inner quest, while Kant seeks a more external, universal truth. However, is not the inner truth a reflection of the greater, as in the Rosicrucian dictum “as above, so below”?

Thomism: St. Thomas Aquinas (1275-1274) held that happiness is the achievement of desires of the Soul. However, this happiness could only be achieved in God (beatific vision); this state cannot be achieved by contemplation of this world. Rather one must go beyond the transitory and embrace the eternal.

Utilitarianism: This theory was enunciated by John Stewart Mill (1806-1873). Good is the satisfaction of desire, and this leads to pleasure. Happiness is the net achievement of more pleasure than pain. It should be realized that Mill was not referring to hedonistic pleasure but to collective purpose and enjoyment. As Bernard Meltzer stated, “Happiness is like a kiss – you must share it to enjoy it.”¹²

Rosicrucian Concepts: Each of the above conceptual schools is compatible with Rosicrucian philosophy. Furthermore, personal well-being and happiness are linked. We must be happy within ourselves if we are to impart happiness and love to others in a truly meaningful way. For happiness to be complete we must be virtuous to others.

APPLICATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES TO HEALTH

The table lists some suggestions to help maintain health and prevent disease. These are meant to keep us from being too egocentric and stressed, to develop our spirituality, to extend our goodness to others, to be kind to our body, to connect with others and to be happy.

1. Meditate and pray often; read inspiring literature; offer thanks.
2. Give and accept hugs.
3. Reach out to help others in need.
4. Drink water.
5. Avoid excesses in food (especially high fats and high calories) and alcohol.
6. Use breathing exercises and practice diaphragmatic breathing (breathe from your belly).
7. Use music and incense that induces tranquility and pleases you.
8. Surround your personal space with comforting colors and lighting.
9. Laugh lots and use humor positively.
10. Don't forget to see your doctor and dentist for check-ups and take medication as prescribed. Communicate with your care-givers and establish a trusting relationship.

Ten suggestions for health and happiness.

Adhering to Rosicrucian principles will help maintain mental and physical equilibrium, i.e., a state of health. By helping others, we complete our Cosmic purpose and this brings us closer to God. Mother Theresa saw the face of God in the eyes of the poor. Jean Vanier, founder of the international organization *L'Arche*, has noted the mutual benefits in caring for the less fortunate.

Happiness is a common goal that links humans. One means of communication is humor, as a shared joyfulness. Humor forms the basis of approach for "Patch" Adams, an American physician who founded *Gesundheit!*, an organization, devoted to helping terminally ill children overcome their loneliness and isolation. Humor allowed him and his workers to form a bond with the patients: "It is impossible to be depressed if you hold another in your mind."

We hope this brief review will be helpful in reminding us to keep things in perspective, to live a healthy lifestyle, to be kind to and interact with others and to strive for happiness in all its dimensions.

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