

Happiness and Indigenous Wisdom in the History of the Americas

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Introduction

The attainment of happiness has always been a fundamental human aspiration since time immemorial. This is why all traditions of wisdom have made reference in one way or another to how it can be obtained, frequently conceiving happiness as the *sumum*, or pinnacle, of human achievement. Happiness as a goal has even been enshrined as a fundamental value for nations or governments.. The United States' Declaration of Independence, for example, specifies "the pursuit of happiness" as one of the new nation's fundamental aspirations, and the fathers of this manifesto, such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, in their body of political ideas, made happiness a central good. Simon Bolivar, leader of the independence of several South American republics, did the same when he affirmed: "*The most perfect system of government is that which produces the greatest possible amount of happiness...*" (Bolivar, 1819). In those eighteenth century times, happiness was usually linked to feelings of safety and personal and social stability. In spite of all the foregoing, such an ideal as happiness might seem too general or utopian to some skeptic-pragmatists of today, and some might even say, sarcastically, that if in those days the Gross National Product --- the measurement that today's economists have enshrined as the supreme value of any national well-being-- had existed, the founding fathers would have preferred it.

But the goal of happiness keeps returning to the agenda of leaders and nations, as a vital, unsatisfied aspiration; nations as diverse as Bhutan, whose government recently declared, on the basis of ancient Buddhist teachings, that "the National Happiness Product is more important than the Gross National Product", and England, where the government has decided to highlight the pursuit of well-being and social happiness in its public policies. At the international level, the desire for happiness is central: at the United Nations' Millennium Summit, held in 2000 in New York, Secretary General Kofi Annan presented a Gallup International poll, the biggest public opinion poll ever taken, covering about 60 nations, to the Heads of State. The poll concluded, "People

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value good health and a happy family as being more important than anything else." (Report of the Secretary General, 2000)

On the subject of the pursuit of happiness, one of the more illuminating and renowned wisdom traditions has been that of the indigenous peoples. And among these was the wisdom of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, which greatly influenced the thinking of prominent revolutionary leaders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe and the Americas in their struggle against monarchic-feudal authoritarianism and in favor of more human, freer societies including leaders such as Franklin, Jefferson and Bolivar.

Jefferson's admiration for indigenous wisdom in terms of happiness led him to exclaim: "I am convinced that those societies as the Indians which live without government enjoy in their general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under European governments". Jefferson had seen, likewise, that: "Native Americans are not submitted to any laws, any coercive power and shadow of government. The only controls are their manners, and the moral sense of right and wrong. . An offence against these is punished by contempt, by exclusion from society...Imperfect as this species of coercion may seem, crimes are very rare among them" (Johansen, 1982).

Bolivar, for his part, left us the following comments: "The Indian is of such a peaceable character that he only wishes for repose and solitude; he does not expect to lead his tribe, much less dominate others... this species of men is the one that least claims preponderance; although their numbers exceed the sum of the other inhabitants... he is a sort of barrier to contain the other parties, he does not pretend authority, because he has no ambition for it, nor believes he has capability for exercising it, being contented with his peace, his land, and his family. The Indian is everyone's friend." (Bolivar, 1815). In his first chronicles, even Christopher Columbus had written the following in relation to his encounter with the indigenous culture of the "new continent": "They are the best people in the world, and the sanest. They love their neighbors as themselves. They are faithful and do not covet what others have... their speech is always sweet and gentle, accompanied by a smile." (Windwalker, 2002)

But before we go on with such great exaltation of the indigenous, which sadly proved to be short-lived in the Americas after the subsequent genocide of the aborigines, let us stop here and try to determine precisely what happiness means. And, starting from this determination, let us make more objective judgments about how and to what extent the ancestral indigenous wisdom achieved it.

Information coming to Europe of the happy goodness of indigenous self-government on the basis of the Natural Order truly influenced a series of revolutionary thinkers throughout several centuries, from Thomas More to John Locke, Rousseau and Marx. Their ideas, in turn, would return to the American continent to influence it in an interesting reverse flow. Despite their different ideological meanings (More's illustrated anarchy, Locke's and Rousseau's emphasis on natural rights, Marx's communist society, etc) and even the diverse forms in which said theories were put into practice, all those thinkers shared the reality of having been nurtured by the indigenous as an idealistic path to happiness and social harmony -- as was Jefferson's and Bolivar's on the American continent itself, through direct observation of the indigenous people.

What happiness consists of?

Happiness can be understood as a state of satisfaction or contentment and well-being, based on our natural identity.

Insofar as our natural identity is concerned, it is generally accepted that we human beings are matter and spirit, body and soul, depending on what we want to call our two characteristic identity components: the dense and the subtle.

Well-being's dimension in the concept of happiness refers to the more physical, dense and external aspects of our being. While satisfaction/contentment's dimension would refer to the more spiritual, more subtle and inner aspects of our identity.

We could also link the well-being dimension with health, as defined in the wide-ranging sense given by the World Health Organization (WHO), for which health is: "*A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*". This broad concept highlights the importance of affirmative and preventive health aspects (beyond the repair-cure syndrome in which modern medicine has remained); it emphasizes health as a lifestyle in which are included, besides attention to health as such, attention to nutrition, housing, clothing, education, environmental quality, and the affection and protection afforded by community-based life.

However, it is evident that health cuts across, and has a continuity relationship with, the other subtler dimension. Both, the term used by WHO, "infirmity" (disease), coming from the Latin "*infirmus*," which means lacking firmness or equilibrium, as well the mental scope of health as cited in the WHO definition, remind us of health's more subtle aspects. It has also been said that matter, in the final analysis, is but concentrated energy.

In reference to the satisfaction/contentment dimension, a prerequisite for happiness is wisdom, since it will give us the correct leads for differentiating that which makes us happy from that which does not. Being able to relate to our self and to other beings from a perspective of love, compassion, and respect for all life, as well as feeling useful, are other fundamental requirements for a happy life. The eminent Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana has noted: "Our biological essence is based on love and cooperation", adding, in a note that returns us to the linkages with the well-being/health dimension, "we tend to become ill for a lack of love, but never for a lack of violence or aggressiveness."

In spite of those links between the two dimensions, those of well-being/health and satisfaction/contentment, it is evident that this last, linked to the more spiritual aspects, is the most crucial. As the Christian theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin highlighted: "We are not human beings on a spiritual quest, we are spiritual beings in a human experience".

Recapitulating, the following basic needs emerge from the above-stated definition of happiness: with relation to the well-being/health dimension: health as such, nutrition, housing, clothing, physical exercise, environmental quality, education, and community-based affection and protection; with relation to the satisfaction/contentment dimension: wisdom, love, compassion, respect for all life, and feeling useful. Bearing in mind that, if we are to be faithful to the higher hierarchical standing of the spiritual, the latter set of requirements should really come first.

Indigenous wisdom and happiness and comparison with modern societies

How can we qualify ancestral indigenous wisdom in relation to these benchmarks for happiness? And on the other hand, what can we say of modern civilization's performance in this regard? Let us proceed now to some considerations of these questions.

With regard to the first, the indigenous should not be idealized or romanticized, nor should we deny that it has also been subjected to its own degenerative process in a cycle that seems to have been inescapable for all humanity. The forefathers and thinkers of the eighteenth century indulged, in point of truth, in a certain idealization of indigenous wisdom, the idealization of he who tends to see in another that which he is deeply lacking, or simply the idealization of the simplifier or the one of limited knowledge. Not all indigenous cultures encountered by the Europeans when they arrived in the Americas were at their highest stage of wisdom; some, such as the Aztecs, Mayas and Incas were in decline

from their “golden years”. Nevertheless, it is true that with reference to what was originally and ancestrally indigenous, the expressions of admiration of Europeans and Americans of European descent, were not far from the truth.

When we speak of the originally or ancestrally indigenous, it should be clear that, for us, the indigenous, more than skin colour or race, is a state of consciousness that embodies an intimate and respectful communion with Mother Nature and its laws.

Although it may be that the term “happiness” did not always appear explicitly in indigenous languages, their lifestyles and attending values did express the concept.

In the language of the *Waraos*, the ancestral aborigines of the Orinoco Delta in Venezuela, the word did exist as such, in the expression: “*oriwaka*”. *Oriwaka*, for the Waraos, has the following meanings: “wait together”, “have a party”, “joy of sharing with others”, “paradise where the dead are happy”, meanings that highlight the importance of sharing, of joy, and of the transcendent as the key to happiness. In the *Piaroa* language (a Venezuelan Amazonian ethnic group) “happiness” is called “*eseusa*” and means, principally “the joy of sharing with others”, a value quite similar to the Warao concept. To the ancient *achaguas arawak*, who also inhabited Venezuela, the word “*chunikai*” meant both “happiness” and health” (which takes us back to the equation we earlier highlighted). To the *Baris*, in western Venezuela, when their Creator *Sabaseba* gave life to them it was with the following mandate: “*You will be called Bari and will always be happy and smiling*” and that’s why their oral tradition says that “*the Baris are thus not allowed to get angry, because so we were made by Sabaseba, as our elders have said. Because so all Bari have been from the beginning and so we shall continue to be*”.

Insofar as the Mayas are concerned, it is interesting to note the importance given to happiness in the behavior prescribed by their moral code, known as The Pixab: “*A thing is good as long as it harms no one. A thing is right as long as it contributes to happiness and life*” (Oxlajuj Ajpup, 2001) (emphasis added).

In the Maya language *Q’eqchi*, happiness is called *sahil ch’oolejil* and means literally “having a glad heart”. Confirming the great centrality that the value of happiness had in daily *Q’eqchi* Maya life, the main social greeting is *masa’ laa ch’ool*, which means: “How is your heart?”

The contrast with the European lifestyle served to raise consciousness among indigenous peoples of the merits of their ancestral lifestyle, relative to happiness. In this regard, the following reflection, from around 1676 by Chief Micmac in North America, is eloquent: “*Which of these is the wisest and happiest - he who labors without ceasing and*

only obtains, with great trouble, enough to live on, or he who rests in comfort and finds all he needs in the pleasure of hunting and fishing?...There is no Indian who does not consider himself infinitely more happy and powerful than the French" (Nerburn and Mengelkoch, 1991). Or consider the following comparison by Chief Maquinna, of the *Nootka* nation, also in North America, after having learned the banking practices brought by white civilization: *"We Indians have no such bank; but when we have plenty of money and blankets, we give them away to other chiefs and people, and by and by they return them, with interest, and our hearts feel good. Our way of giving is our bank"* (Idem).

Compare the above with the greed and individualism that, despite the best wishes of such founding fathers as Franklin, Jefferson and Bolivar, persisted in the bosom of the colonizing European cultures. Such inclinations would lead, in the end, to the dismal practices of subduing and slavery to which the colonists would subject indigenous peoples, and the subsequent traffic of African blacks, as well as the growing mercantilist and corporate materialism which would later take hold, in the Americas. In this last regard, as far as the United States is concerned, analysts such as the historian Richard Beard have highlighted the narrow economic interests that truncated much of the high idealism of that nation's Declaration of Independence, written in 1776, when it was translated eleven years later, in 1787, into the nation's Constitution, which explains, among other things, why black slavery was not abolished in the latter (so that blacks were excluded from the Rights proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence as universal to the human condition). In the end this omission cost the new nation dearly, since it had slavery had to be resolved some eighty years later by a dreadful Civil War. On the other hand, starting from that war, corporations and money would take center-stage in the nation, causing President Lincoln to voice the following concerns, prophetic in their portrayal of subsequent developments in the United States: *"I see in the near future a crisis approaching that un-nerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. As a result of the War, corporations have been enthroned....An era of corruption in high places will follow and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people"* (Waserman, 1984).

Those narrow economic ambitions, of course, also played their part "South of the Rio Grande" and also truncated the dreams of solidarity and social happiness cherished by the founding fathers of the new republics in that part of the continent. The new landowner and

commercial elites sought unscrupulous political and economic advantages for their own ends.

We can find the root of all the inexorable forces of economic greed in the Industrial Revolution. This greed, which, spread from England to the rest of the world contemporaneously with the great political and independence-seeking revolutions of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, predominated over much of what the latter pretended to do, including their ideals of social happiness. The great historian Arnold Toynbee has left the following judgment on the subject: *"There were paradoxical and unhappy human consequences of an increase in the production of material wealth. The cause of this social miscarriage was the motive of the entrepreneurs by whom the Industrial Revolution was launched. Their stimulus was greed, and greed was now released from the traditional restraints of law, custom, and conscience."* (Toynbee, 1978)

Since then, greed has become so ubiquitous that it is today a central subject of debate, particularly in light of events such as the great wave of corporate scandals which have shaken the world of late in generalized form, symbolized by cases such as Enron in the United States and Parmalat in Europe.

Well-being / health dimension

This statement by the North American indigenous leader *Tenskawata*, of the *Shawnee*, in 1805, has broad implications because it refers to the root and basic aspects of the happy indigenous lifestyle and its comparison to European culture: *"Our Creator put us on this wide, rich land, and told us we were free to go where the game was, where the soil was good for planting. That was our state of true happiness... Thus were we created. Thus we lived for a long time, proud and happy. We had never eaten pig meat, nor tasted the poison called whiskey, nor worn wool from sheep, nor struck fire or dug earth with steel, nor cooked in iron, nor hunted and fought with loud guns, nor ever had diseases which soured our blood or rotted our organs. We were pure, so we were strong and happy."* (Windwalker, 2002). Tenskwatawa's acute reflections are particularly relevant to illustrating indigenous concepts concerning the physical well-being and health dimension with respect to the happiness concept, as well as its comparison with the invading civilization that attempted to impose itself on the indigenous peoples.

Smithsonian Institute studies by historians such as Francisco Herrera Luque and Manuel Cartay, the chronicles of the naturalist scientist Humboldt, and even those of many of the conquistadors, bear witness to the biological and health superiority of the indigenous population in comparison with the Europeans. Let us quote briefly one of these latter, as an example -- the words of the conquistador Pedro

Alvares Cabral, who, observing the aboriginal world of what is today Brazil, expressed with admiration in 1500: *"They do not plow nor raise [animals] There are no oxen or cows, not goats, nor sheep nor chickens. Nor any animal used to living with men, nor do they eat except of that i-ame (mandioc), of which there is much here, and of those seeds and fruits of the land, and the trees which grow by themselves, and with this they walk as hardy and plump as we are ourselves not as much."* (Cartay, 1993).

Even the natives' curative practices for treating illnesses were generally superior. Smithsonian Institute researchers have pointed out the following, for the case of Mesoamerica: *"The conquistadors sunken in a general lack of confidence in their own medical skills, frequently sought out the Aztec practitioners for health complaints, in preference to their fellow countrymen."* (Verano & Ubulaker, 1993).

Well-being as health, in the broader sense of the WHO's definition, was in truth a lifestyle for the traditional native, where in respect and integration with the Five Elements of the Natural Order, that is to say, "earth", "water", "fire", "air" and "ether", the indigenous native obtained all he needed for his subsistence, including, besides health as such, the concomitant requirements of good nourishment, housing, clothing, education, physical exercise, environmental quality, and community-based affection and protection.

Chief *Seattle's* famous manifesto for the most part is a hymn to the virtues of the Five Elements of the Natural Order as vital requisites for human welfare and life.

When health was lost, the indigenous native would turn to purification in order to recover it. As pointed out in the Maya Pixab: *"When disease, problems, pain and desperation invade our days, it is necessary to perform a purification so that harmony will return, so that peace and happiness will return."* (Oxlajuj Ajput, 2001). Purification had diverse methods and depth, according to need: fasting, de-intoxication with multiple remedies, penitence, service to others, spiritual retreats, etc.

On the other hand, all the strength of the indigenous culture, and all its wisdom in terms of well-being, could not withstand the overpowering European conquering onslaught, which in the end inflicted on the aboriginal peoples one of the greatest genocides that the history of humanity has ever known. At the end of the conquest and colonial rule, about 90 percent of the American Indian population had succumbed. More than the action of the musket (harquebus), this was due to imported diseases that decimated them. And these, less than direct contact with the Europeans, as is usually said, came fundamentally from the collapse of their physical and spiritual aboriginal lifestyle in the face

of the European colonialist assault and enslavement. This meant the collapse of their immunological systems, leaving them prey to all types of disease. This is the same fate which, indeed, awaits present-day humanity, in which the deepening of an anti-nature lifestyle and the destruction or contamination of the natural environment have gone so far that it now faces a similar collapse, as evidenced by the present proliferation of diseases of the most diverse types.

The exploitation of the indigenous population continued in post-independence times, under the domination of the "criollo" (mestizo or mixed-race) culture in the new republics, in some aspects with even greater ferocity and contempt. This is true up to contemporary times, when after 500 years of servitude and resistance, a cultural and political indigenous resurrection movement seems finally to have begun in the Americas. This movement has benefited from international and domestic legal conquests that have recognized the "rights of indigenous peoples" to their own ancestral cultures and habitats, to a great extent. This laudable achievement must be tempered, nevertheless, with the warning that in the ancestral indigenous wisdom the concept of "rights" - if it ever existed as such - was subordinated to the more important concept of duty-fulfillment. If one reads Chief Seattle's emblematic manifesto, this is a charter of duties: the duty to care for nature, to respect other living beings, etc; Seattle speaks little of rights. In this regard, the famous expression attributed to him, "*the land does not belong to men, men belong to the land*", typical of universal indigenous wisdom, summarizes everything. The new kind of indigenous sovereignty, emphasizing only rights - a distortion brought by modern culture - has lent itself to abuses in some aboriginal territories through the implementation of natural resource depredation projects, or in opposition to the integrality of aboriginal culture, promoted by indigenous persons alienated from their traditional culture and unscrupulous foreign partners, sometime even going beyond more protective national laws.

Satisfaction / contentment dimension

Let us turn now our attention to the satisfaction/contentment dimension of the concept of happiness. It has to do, as we have said before, with the more subtle, but also more crucial, dimension of happiness.

We can end up being unhappy even with physical health\ and in possession of many material assets and social relations,. Part of the explanation for this could be having too much of all these things, so that we can end up as "possessed possessors" (having too much, like having nothing, is an extreme that conspires against happiness). When greed enters into play in this process, the matter becomes more serious. As we

have said before, greed is anathema to happiness in a major degree, since those human beings who have fallen prey to it are never satisfied. As Gandhi said so well, "The world has enough to satisfy everyone's needs, but not enough to satisfy a single one's greed." Greed makes us want to accumulate assets or money in an insatiable manner, frequently at the expense of the needs of others and of the Natural Order, against the precepts of love, compassion and not harming life. "Goods" accumulated in this manner end up turning into "bads".

Jefferson had excluded property from the category of "natural right" in the Declaration of independence of the United States; the Proclamation referred only to life, liberty and happiness. Jefferson considered that property should have social limits, and therefore was more a 'civil right' - subject to regulation - than a "natural right". Private property and its evil usage through greed or avarice was seen by indigenous cultures in the same manner, as shown in the following statement by *Ohiyesa (Santee Sioux)* Charles Eastman: "The tribe claimed the ground, the rivers and the game; only personal property was owned by the individual, and even that, it was considered a shame to greatly increase. For they held that greed grew into crime, and much property made men forget the poor....Without a thought of same or mendicancy, the young, helpless and aged all were cared for by the nation that, in the days of their strength, they were taught and eager to serve. And how did it work out? Thus: Avarice, said to be the root of all evil, and the dominant characteristic of the European races, was unknown among Indians, indeed it was made impossible by the system they had developed" (Windwalker, 2002)

Another part of the explanation of why possession of things or relationships may not necessarily make us happy may lie in the quality of what one has or enjoys. We may possess a great deal but the quality of our possessions may fail to satisfy us.

But the most important reason for explaining why having or enjoying things does not guarantee happiness is the *ephemeral* nature of many of these, which causes all attachment to them to be inexorably destined to suffering when they disappear - as inevitably they must - from our lives. In regard to the latter, the greatest attachment of all can be the attachment to our own physical life, since, in truth, the only certain thing in it is that it will end in its own death, but without certainty of exactly when or how.

From the above emerges, then, the importance of attaching ourselves only to the transcendent, the permanent, and this is only achieved in God's territory and in the territory of the soul, or to say it in more

indigenous terms, of the Great Spirit or Creator, and the spirit of each one of us.

From the Creator and his works, the Natural Cosmos, comes all the indigenous wisdom for happiness. And let us remember that wisdom is a prerequisite - together with love, compassion, respect for all life and feeling useful - for the fulfilling of the well-being/contentment dimension.

Thus the following admission in the sacred Thanksgiving Prayer of the North American Oneidas: "Our mother earth takes care of all lives. Let's put our minds together. So be it in our minds..... To the one who made all things that we are thankful here on earth. Let's put our minds together. So be it in our minds".

Separation from the Natural Order was, for the indigenous peoples, a separation from wisdom. As exemplified by the following statement by the *Oglala Sioux* Chief Luther Standing Bear: "The old Lakota was wise. He knew that man's heart, away from nature, becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too. So he kept his children close to nature's softening influence." (Nerburn and Mengelkoch, 1991)

Due to all of the above, it is necessary to reflect on the degree to which the most ancient indigenous gatherer-cultures, (those that had not entered the agricultural or industrial stages) were as primitive as present-day conventional wisdom would have us believe. The latter tells us that the evolutionary progression of man has ascended from gathering as the "most backward stage" to the industrial as "the most advanced". However, the gatherer cultures, on account of their depending on the intimate knowledge and mastery of the Natural Order in order to be able to survive sustainably on the basis of its wild fruits, were, indeed, closer to a greater wisdom - from the indigenous point of view that emphasizes a full understanding of the Natural Order.

On the other hand, conventional wisdom would also have us believe that aboriginal cultures such as the *Caribs*, who populated Brazil, Venezuela and the Caribbean Sea, were more backward than the Aztecs and the Incas simply because they lacked the monumentality of the latter - as reflected in their great cities, temples, pyramids, etc. But, could we not say, rather, that the Caribs were freer, happier, and wiser precisely because they avoided the above, being happy instead with living within a low-intensity use of their natural environment, through a de-centralized gatherer-hunter-agricultural culture, in good measure itinerant, without the ties of monumentality and social stratification characteristic of the great American indigenous empires? Historical evidence seems to indicate that, in fact, the Caribs, known for their great devotion to

freedom, remained in it deliberately and were, in fact, , more difficult to subjugate for the European Conquistadors.

Wisdom, Natural order Laws and happiness

For the indigenous peoples, therefore, the wisdom essential for happiness lies in being attuned to Nature and its laws. Among these the "The Law of the Oneness of Life" stands out, "All is one and all is alive" – the great Shaman maxim. If we humans are only "a thread in the weave of life," as the great Chief Seattle said, then in consequence, as he said too, "anything we do to the weave, we will be doing to ourselves."

From this we deduce the corollary that we must avoid doing harm to all life (the *ama gua-a* commandment of the Incas, analogous to the *ahimsa* of Buddhists and Hindus) and, on the contrary, must profess love for all Creation. Creation itself, in truth, is an act of love; even our own lives as human beings come, generally, of the loving fusion between two beings. All Creation arises from love, is nourished by love, lives for love, and ends by dissolving itself into love. No wonder the First Commandment in the Christian tradition, coinciding with all the other main religions, refers to Love, in a "golden rule" present in all religions and encompassing all the other commandments.

Another cardinal law of the Natural order is "The Law of Impermanence" that says that "the only constant is that nothing is constant". In indigenous cultures death in this sense is a great teacher, because it reminds us that today we have to live to the fullest. In the indigenous tradition, every "spiritual warrior" prepares for each battle as if it were the last, and by doing so achieves excellence. Impermanence teaches us to treasure the transcendent and the immortal as the most important elements for happiness, As the Yamparika Comanche Ten Bears said: "I look for the benefits which would last forever, and so my face shines with joy". (Nerburn and Mengelkoch, 1991). From the teachings of the famous Yaqui sage Don Juan, the saying: "always having death as companion and teacher" can stand as our key to wisdom.

A third fundamental law is the "The Law of Cause and Effect", which says to us that "Every action produces a consequence or reaction". Thus, in every traditional indigenous culture the native is careful of all his steps; he is in a permanent state of alertness to foresee the consequences of what he does; he relates to the natural environment from a perspective of great respect, so as not to cause undesirable consequences that would inevitably affect him. For the same reason, in indigenous wisdom the notion of trying to repair any damages immediately is common, as is the notion of trying always for positive

actions so as to obtain favorable effects. With regard to all of the above, the following teaching of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce nation in North America is illustrative: "We were taught to believe that the Great Spirit sees and hears everything, and that he never forgets, that thereafter he will give every man a spirit-home according to his deserts. If he has been a god man, he will have a good home; if he has been a bad man, he will have a bad home" (Nerburn and Mengelkoch, 1991).

In Venezuela, we see, with regard to indigenous cultures such as the Waraos and the Pemones, how the law of cause and effect is venerated in their meticulous ancestral cultural behavior codes, full of taboos and "contras" (to repair damages or counterweigh their effects) and recommendations so as to better get along with the environment and other living beings, how admirable their codes of behavior are.

Other laws, such as the "The Law of the Cyclical-spiraled Movement of life and its processes" (easily discerned by indigenous people in their close communion with the seasonal cycles of gathering, planting, water, etc.) "The Law of Analogy" (the microcosms reflects the macrocosms and vice versa), and "The Law of Complementary Poles", were also part of the vital cultural heritage of indigenous wisdom.

Happiness: a matter of being more than of having

From all of the above one can deduce that to reach happiness, definitively, the aspects of "being", linked to the transcendent and more lasting are more important than those of "having", linked to the less transcendent and more transitory.

Furthermore, in the case of ancestral indigenous wisdom, "Being", in the most satisfying manner, in the form most conducive to happiness, was linked to the greatest possible integration with Creation, with the natural order and its laws. The Hopi Indians, so revered for their ancestral wisdom, had summarized their creed of peace and happiness in the exclamation: *Techqua Ikachi*, which meant, "Blending with the land and celebrating life". This notion of life as a celebration reminds us of the following teachings in the Quechua tradition of the *Intij Inti*, The Creator said at the genesis of the indigenous people: "Go to the world to enjoy, because by enjoying you will learn, and by learning you will grow and by growing you will fulfill the sacred purpose of evolution." No wonder the general zeal of the traditional indigenous peoples for revering and respecting the Natural Order, so well summarized by Chief Joseph who, moreover, compared it with the attitude of the conquering European: "We were contented to let things remain as the Great Spirit Chief made them. They were not, and would change the rivers and mountains if they did not suit them" (idem).

Epilogue

Happiness: A vital life mission

All this brings us back to a fundamental aspect of the definition of happiness, its conformity with natural identity, in accordance with the Creator's designs, with our natural mission of existential life.

In this light, the following acute statement by Henry Steel Commager, with reference to the wisdom that has been lost, acquires universal significance: "Men were happy only in a natural state". Or, to say it in the reverse sense, if we achieve our natural identity we will automatically be happy, since as the Quechua Luis Espinoza has said, "Happiness is our natural condition and the main symptom of being in our right place."

To be happy, however, each of us has to add our individual life mission to the common existential mission in life we have as humans and living conscious beings. In relation to this, the following explanation of the Nawal concept of the Mayas summarizes it very well: "...Happiness and complete fulfillment in life are achieved by carrying through the work or function given to us at the moment of conception and birth... No one comes to the world because he wants to come, say the Elders, who wisely assure us that we all have a mission to fulfill in life; a role to play to benefit humanity. Every human being has a Nawal that defines a particular personality and makes him different from other persons... the life-mission will depend, then, on his qualities, aptitudes, virtues and defects as ruled by his Nawal, which is not more than a divinity that guides and helps the individual. It is his gift, his donation, his responsibility, and if he should resign the mission, he would fall sick, or worst of all, would die." (Oxlajuj Ajput, 2001).

We are happy, then, if we fulfill the mission to which we are destined as human beings, both in the cosmic sense as well as individually. We are happy, if we are simply what we are meant to be. And this constitutes a path, more than a destiny, in the here and now. Making an analogy with the simpler animal world: "the bird does not sing because it's happy, it's happy because it sings."

And by being happy, we transcend, we free ourselves from that which is of secondary value, the perishable.

This is analogous to the bird which does not fear the moment when the branch he is on will begin to creak, because it has wings to fly away.

This is like the wings to which we may appeal when physical death arrives, because, as Chief Seattle said, in the final analysis: "there is no such thing as death, but [only] a change of worlds."

This is like the wings placed over indigenous human beings in the sacred city of Tiwanaku in Bolivia or on the rocks of Atures in the Venezuelan Orinoco, which remind us of our own transcendence.

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