

Taking the Blindfold off the Judge by Nigel Glassborow April 2019 thestoa@hotmail.co.uk

Very rarely can a person know all the facts about any given issue, especially as there will be outside influences of which they can have no knowledge. When one's opinions and actions have been based on incomplete knowledge and things do not work out as expected then, unless one should have taken more care and have sought out greater knowledge of the 'available' facts, there is no point in blaming oneself.

One just has to accept what has come to be and then adjust one's knowledge base, one's opinions and one's actions as appropriate and then one gets on with life – a simple principle of acceptance of what is and not wishing for what cannot be, while one continues to strive for the better.

Acceptance of what one is presented with within the Now is in fact already part of the Past and cannot be changed is key to a healthy mentality.

Making decisions based on 'what is' and not on one's view of how one thinks it should be is key to a healthy mentality.

Understanding that to fulfil a wish for things to be other than what they are requires a 'journey' where such a journey requires a clear understanding of the destination; an understanding of the means to complete the journey; an acceptance that there may be diversions on the route and that as time goes on a different destination may become preferable or may even be imposed on one by circumstances beyond one's control; and an understanding that such a 'journey' is not achieved by wishing to arrive at the destination without having 'done' the journey but by taking one step at a time, starting with the first. All this is key to a healthy mentality.

And of course striving to be wise in thought and action is key to a healthy mentality.

This all leads into considering the areas over which we can have some influence and degrees of control. Dissatisfaction with life and feelings of helplessness (non-clinical depression) are usually the result of not facing the realities of life.

The main areas that can blind the 'judge' to the realities of life generally come under the headings of: *Addictions, Untamed Emotions and Indoctrination*.

To counter the problems that addictions, emotions and indoctrination can cause, the processes needed to make good judgements are seen as: *Awareness, Preparedness and Reasoned Belief*.

And having removed the blindfolds from the ‘judge’ and in seeing things for what they are, one is able to move onto achieving: *Freedom of Mind, Right Living and Contentment*.

So at a glance we have the purpose of dealing with that which blinds one’s rational mind (the ‘judge’) to the realities of life:

Move from	Move to	Achieve
Addiction	Awareness	Freedom of Mind
Untamed Emotions	Preparedness	Right Living
Indoctrination	Reasoned Belief	Contentment

Addictions

By not seeing life as it really is we can cause ourselves much misery and miss opportunities for much enjoyment. It is obvious that in the use of any substance that is mind or mood altering that we are perverting our rational thinking processes – and in such circumstances it is all too easy to become addicted to not seeing life as it really is.

But it is not just the abuse of drugs that can become an addiction and so lead to misery. How many people are addicted to money and will ruin their lives in the pursuit of it by giving it a sense of value other than as just a means to barter for what is really useful in their lives. How many people so value money that they will destroy their marriages and their relationship with their children, will destroy all trust that others may have in them, and will even destroy their own future contentment in its pursuit.

A person can become addicted to almost anything. Here, ‘addiction’ is the inappropriate wanting to possess or to have control over something – be it money, a car, or even a spouse - to the point where one’s addiction becomes one’s slave master. One can even be addicted to an idea, gradually moving from having a thought to feeling the need to implement that thought no matter how irrational or harmful such action may be.

While much may not have the chemical hold that drugs can have when they cause addiction, it is the same lack of rational thinking that leads to a person turning to drugs for the first time that leads to a person starting to pursue other things in life in an addictive manner.

The understanding that the Cosmos is manifested by a single ‘Consciousness’ leads a person to realise that all that they yearn for, all that they strive for, is manifested by the ‘Cosmos’. So one may see that all that comes into one’s life is not for one to possess, but is on loan from the Cosmos. It is also obvious that “what the Cosmos gives, the Cosmos **will** take away”.

Through the process of life and death, creation and renewal, everything in life is transient. Everything that is not-self, including one's body and one's life can be, and eventually will be taken away. If one becomes addicted to anything, not only will such a state of mind divert one from living life well but one will eventually suffer when it is taken away, and will probably have suffered in one's efforts to possess and keep it.

Addiction is inappropriate attachment.

It is appropriate to love one's spouse and so to be attached to them – that is what marriage is. It is a formal process of a couple declaring that they are appropriately 'attached' to each other in accordance with the 'marriage contract'. Love should not be a declaration of possession.

Possessiveness leads to jealousy, abuse and all sorts of other actions that will kill off any love that there is. Through an inappropriate attachment to a partner one will cause pain and will suffer pain. Through the appropriate attachment, whereby one is aware that one's partner is not one's possession but is 'on loan' from the Cosmos, one will live for what the relationship brings to one's life within the Experiential Moment always knowing that what one has 'on loan' can be taken away at any time.

One can live in hope for a future with one's spouse, but for one's own sake and for the sake of one's partner one must accept that that future may not happen.

With life lived in the Experiential Moment, what one has in the Experiential Moment is all that one has. One has this moment with one's loved one. One has one's memories of one's time with one's loved one in that this is an aspect of the unchangeable past. One does not have a future with one's loved one for the future does not exist, so it is always best to make the most of the present moment while still planning for the future. If one loses one's loved one, provided one has loved them for their sake, and not as an addiction (that is selfishly) one will be able to let them go with love. One will still miss them, but one will not undo the happiness one had – no loved one would want you to suffer over their loss. They would want you to celebrate your time with them while wishing them well on their journey.

And what applies to a loved one, applies to all that comes into our lives.

'Appropriate attachment' is to care for that which one has in one's life while accepting that life is a process of change. Through 'inappropriate attachment' one could spend all of one's life trying to hold onto what one has on loan, only to then lose it all by dying. Living so, one would not have lived a life in enjoyment of what one had – a journey that one can appreciate, a journey shared for some of the way with one's loved ones, a journey free of addiction so that one can make the most of one's life.

At all times, regards all that is in one's life, one should look to ensure that one has not got into an inappropriate attachment:

Does what you have in your life and how you think of it affect adversely your performance of your life roles?

Have you put anything, including your faith, on a pedestal whereby it is diverting you from performing your life roles to the best of your ability?

Is a role you have taken on diverting you from more important roles such as being a spouse, a parent, a family member, a citizen of the Cosmos?

Are you seeing anything through rose tinted glasses and not seeing its real effect on you and the rest of the Cosmos?

Are you 'selling' your very Self, your honour and judgement, in order to possess something?

Are you ready to let go of anything that you have on loan, including your life, should the Cosmos choose to take it back by whatever means?

(Always remembering that where you have care of something, in matters such as theft, it is acceptable to try to prevent the loss, but if you are unable to, if you had an appropriate attachment to what is lost, you will be able to move on with life without undue regret.)

These are all examples of the sort of questioning that will highlight as to if your attachment to what is in your life is appropriate or inappropriate.

Just as one would not abuse drugs in the first place and so get addicted to them if one had foreseen how they would adversely affect one's life and had realise just what cost they would have regards one's rationality and judgement, by seeing things for what they really are, by seeing the appropriateness they have to the performance of your roles in life, and by accepting that nothing is worth enslaving your Self, so one will be able to have an appropriate relationship to them and be able to let them go when it is necessary or appropriate.

You always have a choice – a life of freedom or a life of self-imposed enslavement

Emotions

Just as a rider will sometimes let the horse roam as it chooses, at other times will gently guide the horse by means of the reins, and at others will take full control of the direction they are moving in, so a person should be to their emotions. The emotions

are part of our nature and so have to be accepted. But we also need to try to ensure that the emotions serve us and do not 'bolt' like a spooked horse, leaving us to cling on for dear life.

We should at all times try to ensure that our emotions remain relatively calm, while observing what the triggering of heightened emotions is telling us. We are advised to try to avoid our emotions running wild and so reducing our self-control. The threshold at which an emotion is triggered and the degree to which it will make itself felt can in most cases, if needed, be controlled by practice and training.

Just as a rider takes a wild horse and tames it, so we should take our wild emotions and tame them.

The problem when addressing emotions is that they are not a singular phenomenon. They are the coming together of many aspects of the mind and instincts in various combinations, and in some cases the release by the Body of 'chemicals' into the system.

Not even the experts can agree on the details regards the nature of emotions, so we cannot be expected to fully understand them either. It might help to remember that the original root of the word 'emotion' suggests a meaning of 'the outward signs of an inner stirring'.

Certainly there are some emotions that are perfectly acceptable in almost any circumstance but what we are looking to tame are those emotions that lead to or are caused by addiction, and those emotions caused by our ancient instincts that seem able to swamp our brains and to drive out all rational thought. We are trying to prevent the 'emotions' becoming 'the outward effects of an inner storm'.

If we are lucky our parents and educators will have helped to train us during our youth through teaching us self-discipline, manners and a sense of right and wrong. They will have tried to dull the less desirable aspects of our burgeoning character through appropriate discipline. They will have tried to enhance the more desirable aspects of our burgeoning character through appropriate encouragement and even reward. They will have tried to tame us rather than leave us as feral animals. Not to have tried to do so is tantamount to child abuse.

At a point it is necessary for each of us to take over the ongoing taming of our emotions, for not all emotions retain the same power during one's lifetime. The development into adulthood and the aging process affects the nature of the emotions. Circumstance and any overload on the triggering of our emotions can change the effect that emotions have in our lives. The training and guiding of the emotions is a lifelong process aimed at ensuring that, in an appropriate manner, the rational mind can take the reins and keep the emotions under a reasonable level of control.

There are some very well tried practices for taming the emotions – all that is required is some willpower – that is we need to be willing to put in the effort needed to habituate and see through beneficial decisions.

As soon as one becomes aware that an emotion is stirring one ought to check it out by use of the rational mind – if it is pleasant and unlikely to cause harm go with it if such is appropriate. But beware that the ‘judge is not bribed’. If an initial cursory check sees something as ‘pleasant’ it may be because the emotions have already taken control of one’s mind or that it has become an addiction. With practice we can develop an aspect of the conscious mind whereby, even when the emotions are taking the lead, the conscious mind has an ongoing role as an ‘observer’ – an ‘observer’ that is ready to step in and take back the reins at any time.

The ‘observer’ is most useful when the emotions are not very desirable ones. As with all emotions the ‘observer’ will be looking at the facts of any given situations and not just the view the emotions are suggesting. The emotions are often the results of some initial simple trigger buried in our ‘programming’ – our built in animal instincts and our experiences. We may just be seeing some similarity between a current event and a past experience that involved an emotion and this link in the mind may stir up the emotions. We may be seeing an incomplete picture being based only on an initial subconscious ‘glance’.

It is the job of the ‘observer’, the rational mind, to take a second look and to decide whether to go with the emotion’s suggested course or if to use the ‘cold light of day’, that the rational mind can shine on an event, to stand the emotion down. Even when it has been decided to run with the emotion, the ‘observer’ must be ready to take the reins again if needed – both to temper and guide it or to divert it and dissipate it. Consider the old saying, *‘Too much laughter will lead to tears.’*

Training oneself as above on the little things will help one to keep control when the stronger emotions, such as anger, rear their heads. Over time if left unchecked, that which will trigger a heightened emotion will need less and less ‘power’ – in an ‘angry person’ the failure to attempt to control their anger will mean that they will lose control and in time will let anger take control for the least of reasons.

In extreme situations ‘blind emotions’ may give one the power to do what one would or could not normally do. The emotions are there for a reason – some of them are there as part of our survival tools. But because we do not live in a natural animal way anymore we often find our emotions being triggered inappropriately. So we need to have some level of rational control at all times – then, if it is really appropriate, we can temporarily relinquish control and leave the survival instincts to do their job.

However when we find that a survival instinct has been triggered it is probable that the Body will already have pumped chemicals into the system to enable the Body to act in ways that will ensure the Body's survival (or even, at the risk of death of one's own Body, the survival of one's family or perceived 'tribe'). If the rational mind is able to retain control and prevent the mind being swamped by the emotion, or even if it may have lost but regained control, in order to help the emotion to stand down and in order to keep the Body healthy the person will need to dissipate the 'chemicals' that have flooded their systems.

Usually the 'chemicals' are aimed at some form of action and so almost any activity will help dissipate or use up the 'chemicals' and so bring the Body back to an even keel. Sometimes, especially in the early stages of an emotion being triggered, the energy used in rational thinking will be sufficient to switch off the supply of energy inducing 'chemicals' and to use up what has been injected into the system. But usually if the emotion is aimed at producing a particular form of activity, such as fight or flight, then as soon as possible it is advisable that one diverts the heightened energy into some more benign and appropriate form of action – such as using a punch bag, going for a long walk or having a cold shower. Each person will in time find what works for them.

Just living in a modern society gives cause for the emotions to be constantly trying to trigger some form of action – this is why physical activity is so desirable. Something as simple as regular walks can be sufficient to work any build-up of the triggering chemicals out of the system. Certainly some triggering of the survival instincts is desirable so as to keep the body in good shape – hence sports and other forms of risk taking. However one has to be careful not to take matters too far – if one is to retain a level of rational control one does not want to become addicted to adrenalin and the like

As with everything, when it comes to the emotions it is all a matter of 'all things in moderation'.

With a horse, in order to get a good ride and to be able to bring it back under control if it gets spooked, one needs to ensure that it has been properly tamed and that it will trust your decisions as the rider and so will obey your commands.

So it is that the emotions need to be tamed and need to be able to trust the decisions of the rational mind. The more the rational mind successfully exercises control, the more the emotions will work with it and do their jobs correctly. The more the rational mind ensures the less desirable emotions are not triggered unnecessarily the greater will be the trigger needed to set them off – so leading to a more pleasant contented life.

And where a person finds a particular type of situation always triggers an emotion such as anger it will probably be because at some time in the past a traumatic situation has

'tied' the emotion to that type of activity. Such will need careful handling to try to untie the link of emotion to event or even, in extreme cases, the avoidance of any activity that is known to trigger the emotion no matter how much one tries to rationally act otherwise.

We cannot suppress all emotions – we can only tame, educate and guide them so that they serve us rather than control us.

Indoctrination

Much regards our beliefs, our traditions, and our very character is the result of indoctrination. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It helps us to fit in with the rest of society, and also to be able to have a framework of ideas that will guide us in living our lives without having to think out every aspect of our actions and interactions.

A core influence on our nature as individuals is based on the human species' animal nature, but within each individual, in some aspects, this animal nature will be more or less emphasised, or may even be 'damaged' due to fluctuations and faults in the genes. All part of what makes us 'individual'.

Another influence is the early experiences while still in one's mother's womb and the first couple of years as a child. During this time the brain is developing at an extraordinary rate, and all that is experienced is effectively hard wired into the thought processes as such experiences are affecting the development of the brain by emphasising certain connections within the brain.

From then on, throughout childhood, our own experiences, influenced by our developing character, will reinforce or weaken various aspects of our nature according to what we believe to be apparently our best course through life. The influence of others, especially respected family members or friends, as well as events, will affect our opinions on life and how to live it. We will be subjected to cultural and, usually, religious influences. The nature of our games will have an influence – it is said that a child's play is their work. It is part of their learning process, and the nature of the play can have a profound influence on our view of life.

Basically life and everything in life is a process of indoctrination, in so far as indoctrination is us being influenced by experience or people in a way whereby we are not necessarily in control of the effects it is having on us. This is why child abuse is such a horrendous crime, bearing in mind child neglect and neglect as to the influences that a child is being subjected to can be as much child abuse as is physical abuse.

Into the teenage years, and a person has to cope with the changes in their body and the resultant rampaging hormones. For some this will be a fairly gentle process, for others it will almost tear them apart. Their early years will have an effect as to how a

person copes with their puberty and continued brain development, the brain usually only stopping physical growth at about the age of eighteen to twenty one.

So by the age of twenty-one a person's character, as a result of 'nature and nurture', will have, for the most part, become fairly set within the 'hardwiring' of the brain. However further 'indoctrination' can take a hold even after this.

Clearly it is desirable that as a child one's parents should have guided one to such influences that would develop one's character, strengthening the good points, while 'dulling' the less desirable points, especially the aspects of character that came with the genes. (Without such influence a child is liable to remain a 'feral animal', which will detrimentally affect their adulthood.) Positive 'indoctrination' (including both appropriate praise and appropriate punishment) is a desirable aspect of one's early learning years, it generally being recognised that most good, or even harm, can be done in the first seven years, and that what is learnt in the first thirteen years will help one through the years to maturity. But from thirteen, if one's hormones will allow it, and certainly from the age of twenty one, it is for the individual to control the nature of any 'indoctrination' they may be subjected to.

So we are encouraged to look at our character and our nature and to understand how it has developed to the stage we are at. There is much of one's character that one has to accept, for as was said, much will be effectively hardwired into one's brain. However, there is also much that is down to the indoctrination of one's early years, and this can be 'corrected' if needed by counter-indoctrination – self-indoctrination through understanding and training or retraining.

We need to become our own indoctrinator. We will examine our character, and will try to moderate its extremes by training ourselves to stop and think when it comes to areas where our character might normally lead us into paths that are against our chosen path. We will look at the habits of thought and action that our past 'indoctrination' has set in place and, where necessary, will set about changing or adapting the habits in order to be in better control of our lives.

Where a person's parents have not trained them properly in childhood due to neglect or just a lack of understanding, or where circumstances have had adverse effects, as an adult, as and when they become aware of the negative effects on aspects of their characters or indoctrination, the person is encouraged to stop and take time to retrain themselves in such aspects.

To try to control what outside influences we take on board we will try to avoid situations where individuals or groups are trying to indoctrinate an audience or such like, or at the least we will ensure that we do not get caught up in any group excitement by retaining a critical observance of all that is being said and the manner in which it is being presented – we will ensure that our 'observer', our conscience, our

'Jiminy Cricket' is sat securely on our shoulder. Only after due consideration ought we to take on board or reject the influence of others.

If we spend all of our lives examining moment by moment what we are thinking and doing we will not be able to get on with life. We need to live much of life on 'autopilot' – we therefore need to be sure that the 'autopilot' is properly programmed and that there is a 'pilot' ready to take back control as and when necessary. Our 'observer' needs to be on hand at all times.

We are also encouraged to spend time honestly reviewing our lives since the last review to see where we may not have come up to the standards of thought and action we have set ourselves, so that we may practice in our mind how we could have acted better so as to train ourselves to do better next time where appropriate. And where we have got things right we can pat ourselves on our back so as to encourage future proper thought and action. Such a review ought to be carried out at least once a day, preferably last thing at night while matters are still fresh in the mind.

Awareness

Addictions, emotions and indoctrination can all lead to life problems – the solution is awareness. Awareness is ensuring that one's 'observer' is awake and on the job.

Lack of awareness is typified by the child/mother game whereby the child asks the inattentive mother a number of questions that would all elicit the answer 'yes' if the mother were being attentive. Having started to get affirmative answers the child then asks what they are really interested in – can they go out to play, can they have a sweet, can they stay overnight at a friend's place. They believe that their mother would normally say 'no' if she were being attentive. But they are using her lack of full attentiveness and, by creating a norm reaction to the earlier questions, they hope to get the answer they want – yet another 'yes'.

Try to be aware of what is going on around you and within you. One is never going to be one hundred percent aware, but one can be sufficiently aware not to run through life continually on autopilot. Our attention is more geared to noticing things that change suddenly than it is to that which has become a constant within our lives. Because of this we can start to 'take things for granted'. We may not see a situation where it has crept up on us slowly. One may not notice 'the wolf in sheep's clothing' if one has become used to seeing sheep all around.

Awareness is to examine what is really going on, as against what one believes may be going on. Look under the clothing to see if one has a sheep or a wolf.

What appears to have been a good idea on a number of occasions may not be the next time. We need to live as much as we can in a state of awareness. In particular we

need to be aware as to where our thoughts are leading us or have led us into inappropriate situations. And where our lack of awareness has led us into turning a thought into an inappropriate action, we need to review what has happened in our lives – all part of our ongoing training.

As said, one cannot be aware at all times, but with practice one can learn to be aware as much as possible so as to avoid slipping into addictive ways, to have as much control over the emotions as possible and to ensure that one is not allowing others to have undue influence over one's thoughts and actions.

Just as the tightrope walker should have a net ready to catch them, so spontaneity needs a cool, calm and wise 'observer' ready to take control if needed.

The person going bungee jumping may believe that they are being adventurous, but they would be foolish to try it if they did not know that the equipment had been well designed and safety checked, the site had been well chosen and that there is someone there to ensure everything goes as it should.

Spontaneity really does need a lot of planning.

Preparedness

People are advised to use their imagination and to prepare themselves so that they are ready to cope with future events.

A classic Stoic example is that of going before a powerful man – we are advised to practice in advance in our mind how the 'interview' may proceed. Consider the man – see that he is only a man; see that the man and his position are two different things; consider the respect the man has earned and the respect that his position should be given; consider his power – against proper training and forethought this is nothing. Practice imagining being at ease in his presence; consider possible scenarios as to the progress of the meeting. By such preparedness one is liable to be better able to maintain one's composure, and so will therefore be most liable to get the most from the meeting.

And this applies to many aspects of life. One should be prepared not just for the normal events of life, but for any sudden changes in fortune. To suddenly come into a lot of money a person will be pleased, but they should not let such affect their inner contentment. To suddenly lose all that one has – one should be equally unaffected for one will know that due to the vagaries of life such can happen at any time. One may be sad at the loss of loved ones, but such will be kept within bounds and one will quickly return to one's inner state of contentment, for one will have practiced the possibility within one's mind in advance and will be ready to accept such and so the event will be no more than a brief shock.

Faced with a flood or an earthquake, a person will use all of their self-training to try to remain calm and to look for any opportunity to serve the greater good – if possible attempting to save the lives of those around them, even at the risk of their own life. This does not mean that every person will be courageous – rather that they will overcome their fears, and make the best possible judgements regards the situation.

Obviously untimely death is often considered to be a calamity, especially to the one dying. So a person is advised to prepare themselves as best as possible to accept their own death no matter when it comes. But they will not throw their life away needlessly. Circumstances will mostly dictate. For example to stay behind and die that others may live or to calmly take the lead and to lead others to safety – the prepared person will know their strengths and weaknesses and will decide accordingly.

While it is not possible to prepare for every event, using the imagination to see oneself being calm and collected in the worst of possible situations will help one when faced with real situations to actually remain calm and collected.

To this end the most important aspect of being prepared is summed up in two words – a classic quote – ‘Know Thyself’. A person is well advised to look honestly at themselves and to know their own strengths and weaknesses. A person is advised to try to be the ‘craftsman’ when it comes to life, and as such they need to know how to use the tools they have to hand. The individual person’s tool is their own self.

All of the self-indoctrination, study and learning, attentiveness and preparing is the honing and care of the tool they have to work with. The actor will spend a lifetime developing their skills in order to become and remain the great actor.

Reasoned Belief

What is ‘real’? What are ‘facts’? What is ‘knowledge’?

Unfortunately there is no definitive answer as to what is real, what facts are and what knowledge is. All that we can ‘know’ is at best an approximation. Even scientific knowledge is simply the best rational ideas for what it is that the scientist is observing – or at least it ought to be. But what is scientific fact today will be improved on or rejected as the skill of the scientists moves scientific belief forward to, hopefully, better understandings.

Everything that we think we know is just opinion and belief.

There is a fun philosophical challenge: Consider the suggestion that the whole Universe was created and ‘switched on’ just two hours ago. The normal challenge to such an idea is ‘But I can remember what happened three hours ago, a day ago and so

on, so it must have been around for more than two hours.’ To which comes the answer, ‘All of your memories that appear to suggest a life before the Universe was switched on are false memories – they had been built into you as part of the Creation that occurred just two hours ago.’

In this mental game, it does not matter if the Universe was created two hours ago or if it has always been. Even if our memories and acquired understanding of life never actually happened, it is reasonable to assume that these were built in for a purpose so it would be rational, indeed advisable, to pay heed to what we believe and to treat such as true.

For instance, in assuming that the Cosmos was not created two hours ago, but is eternal, it is reasonable to pay heed to what we believe we know and to treat such as true until such time as we discover otherwise.

When it comes to science, many ideas hold sway for years, even decades, before being challenged or improved. When it comes to the Religions, while these appear to have been around for hundreds of years, they also have been challenged or ‘improved’ – often leading to them splitting into sects. In some cases religious sects have been so called ‘improved’ to the point whereby they have ceased to follow the faith that was the foundation to their existence. The evolution of the Conway Hall Ethical Society is just such an example where it moved from being a protestant religious group to being an organisation promoting secular humanism. We even have groups who claim to be Christian Atheists.

So when it comes to what it is reasonable and rational to believe the Wisdom of the Ages is trusted as a guide. Such wisdom is that which is the wise belief to be found across all ages, cultures and faiths. Those beliefs that have stood the test of time worldwide over thousands of years.

It is through looking behind the differences in wording and visualisation and seeing the common ground that the manifestation and the nature of the Cosmos is to be discovered.

This thinking is both reasonable and rational, in part being based on a statistical approach, but also as it is based on experience.

Freedom of Mind, Right Living and Contentment

Freedom of mind and right living are all down to thinking for oneself and living according to one’s knowledge and beliefs in light of the awareness of the metaphysics that states that we are all part of one living conscious Cosmos – that is, that we are manifested out of the body of God.

Many see the solution to many problems as seeking 'happiness'. But if they are not careful they can be led astray and find themselves looking for something that cannot be controlled. The root from which the word 'happiness' comes is 'hap' - a root word associated with luck. 'Haphazard' - left to chance, with no control. 'Hapless' - unlucky. 'Happening' - an event that has little or no planning. 'Happenstance' - something that happens by chance, coincidence.

So the word 'happiness' clearly is associated with luck, and so is not something that can be planned for despite many a book trying to offer a plan that will supposedly lead to 'happiness'. There is the popular guide to finding happiness - 'Happiness is like a butterfly. The more you chase it, the more it will fly away and evade you. But just sit down quietly on a rock, and it will come and settle on your shoulder.'

Happiness in this context is usually the coming together of events whereby a feeling of pleasure and completeness sweeps over one. However, for most, happiness is the elation that is triggered by the release of hormones within the body as the result of some event or action where the body feels it needs to alter the mind set in order to cope with the situation. But such elation is usually followed by a negative state of the emotions - leading to the ups and downs of life that it is preferable to avoid.

One can go on with example after example, and all would prove that the word 'happiness' is not a very good feeling to aim for. The present day idea of 'contentment' is a more appropriate feeling to try to develop, its root being associated with completeness, that which is contained, and that which makes up the whole. 'Contentment' is associated with calmer emotions than 'Happiness'.

So what would characterise the person who achieved a more or less constant state of contentment?

The contented person will have stable emotions, they will be at one with the whole of existence, and they will accept their situation within the whole, while striving to ensure that they play out their roles in the play of life to the best of their ability. Contentment is being at one with the whole and being at one with oneself.

And all of this is within a person's control. Emotions can be trained to be calm. An understanding of the whole and one's place within it can be learnt. An understanding of what life is liable to bring one's way, and what of this is within one's control can also be learnt - so helping one to know what one should accept as it is, and what one should accept and then work towards changing - if it is one's role to bring about such change. And the choice to fulfil one's roles to the best of one's ability is certainly within a person's control, provided they have a sound awareness of the nature of life, and a sound life philosophy.

This is the Stoic science of the psychology of a contented life.