

BLISS



Andrew Marshall
June 2010

www.joyousness.org
www.fierheart.org

BLISS

Bliss is a state of joy or happiness that has such an effect on our nervous system that the body is in a state of thrill. There is, in essence, a vibration set up – so fine that it cannot be detected by instruments – which can be felt as a psycho-physical sensation. There is a state of excitation in the nervous system and brain and in the mind a state of uplifted consciousness is experienced. Whether we experience bliss or not depends on a number of factors. One of the main ones is the state of the mind and another is the state of the physical body, particularly the nervous system. In between these two apparently separate factors are a number of more subtle ones such as the condition of various subtle energy channels, points and centres of which those relating to chi (the realm of the acupuncturist, among others) are the most gross. In this article we will look at how bliss arises or can arise and also emphasise the very important point that bliss is only like a signpost that we pass on a journey; it is not an end in itself.

So how can bliss arise? Is it something we can manufacture or contrive or does it occur because of divine grace? Or might it be something that can be triggered off by some potion or pill that someone somewhere is no doubt marketing right now on the internet?

Bliss comes when there is a sufficient flow of energy of the right type under the right conditions. In the same way

that a musical instrument will only make a sound if the right energy is applied, whether by way of strumming, plucking, striking or the movement of air (or, more and more these days of electricity), bliss requires the movement of energy and an instrument through which that energy may pass. And, in the same way that without skill of application a musical instrument will only make noise, so bliss requires skill in action for the requisite energy to create melodious tones. In a way, therefore, we could say that bliss is like the music of the soul.

Let us look, first of all, at the necessary state of mind. It is said in a number of schools of thought relating to the unfoldment of consciousness in the individual that there are three basic conditions of the mind that hold back the pleasurable expansion of consciousness that we all, consciously or subconsciously, seek. One of these is attachment – the inability to let go and the desire to acquire. The second is aversion – all the negative states of mind that express dislike, anger or hatred in so many ways. Both of these tendencies are obvious when they are gross but are often so subtle that they go unnoticed. The third condition is probably larger than the first two put together and that is the state of indifference that most of us experience much of the time to so many things in life. The first, attachment, creates tension in the mind, sometimes so strong that it causes all sorts of physical problems for us. The second, aversion, similarly creates tension and disturbance and the third, indifference,

creates stagnation or inertia which, among other things, makes the mind dull. Tension and stagnation mean that the energy required for the experience of bliss and for leading a full life is hampered. Instead of melodious tones we either make no sound at all or a discordant noise.

The mind needs to be clear and it needs to be alert. If we have ever watched ballet or other graceful moves, we may have enjoyed the simplicity or sometimes intricacy of the performance but what comes across most of all is the poise and alertness that is translated into movement. The mind of the performer has to be absolutely clear otherwise there will be wavering and uncertainty. Those who practise t'ai chi to any reasonable level of competence will understand the same principle. For such moves to be executed thoroughly well, the mind has to be in such a state that it has entirely let go of all clinging and all resistance but at the same time is not sloppy, idle or ill-defined.

The mind that is able to carry bliss has to be more than in a state of relaxed or restful alertness; it also has to be ripe. Ripeness in this sense means that there is both fullness and a certain amount of spiritual maturity. Many people become excited at the mention of the word bliss, thinking that it will bring some richly-deserved mystical ecstasy. If we think like that, we should be careful as we may be in danger of becoming attached to the idea of bliss – and that will aggravate the mind. Bliss arises from serenity, not from excitement, lust or desire; and fullness can only come when there has been sufficient quietening of

the mind, normally through meditation. Spiritual maturity comes from applying that quietness and fullness to all activity and in all circumstances. The consequent ripeness we will then understand as not being an inert condition but one where the mind is in a state of dynamic readiness which spontaneously produces the positive natural qualities of love, kindness and compassion. From these, the quality of wisdom – the application of right thought, right speech and right action – automatically results. To summarise, the mind has to be ripe and tranquil, free of attachment and desire, free of aversion in all its forms and in a state of positivity in which indifference cannot find a home.

What, then, of the nervous system and the physical body? It should go without saying that for bliss to be experienced, the brain and nervous system must be in a condition that is conducive to both the generation of and the maintenance of blissful states of consciousness. As bliss is not the normal everyday experience of most human beings, we can fairly safely say that the level or quality of energy that transmits through the brain or nervous system for bliss to arise is different to the everyday norm. And as heaviness or slowness results in sluggishness or torpor, we may also safely assume that the energy required for bliss is lighter or more refined than that which is normally present. So the brain and nervous system need to adjust sufficiently in order to be able both to carry and to register the passage of this lighter, more refined energy. As they are components of the physical body,

that adjustment has to be gradual and cannot be accomplished in a wink of the proverbial eye. Normally the requirement is for meditation to be practised over a considerable period so that the physical equipment can adjust gradually as different mental states are experienced. Research has shown that regular meditation does produce changes in the brain and in its performance. In the same way that regular exercise brings positive change to the body, meditation exercises the brain and nervous system in a special and very positive way.

Training body and mind together through meditation is part of the process but there also needs to be a lifestyle that supports the energy systems which underlie the physical and which deeply affect our vitality. The rishis or seers of ancient India spoke of a substance called ojas that is produced in the body and generates bliss; but ojas is subtle and fragile and so easily lost through poor lifestyle. Sufficient exercise of the right sort, fresh air, rest, good diet and so on are all important. Placing the body in certain positions through yoga, t'ai chi and chi kung can also help to stimulate the subtle or vital energy system. Because our bodies are energy and arise from the environment and operate within it, we should respect the various cycles – diurnal, seasonal and life cycles that promote health and wellbeing at every level. It may seem that bliss can only arise from much hard work and dedication that for most people is too tall an order to contemplate, let alone tackle.

In all this it is important to understand the significance – or otherwise – of bliss in one's spiritual development or evolution of consciousness. Bliss is a natural phenomenon that can arise as part of the expression of our full nature and to allow one's full nature to express itself is the maximum that anyone can achieve in life. Some will not experience bliss and yet may still become very strong spiritual beings with great presence; others may experience bliss at odd moments and yet be of small help to humanity.

The most important thing is to follow a selfless way of life that is governed by ethical principles. If we meditate with that view in mind, we will inevitably evolve and our brain and nervous system will gradually become more refined quite naturally. If bliss happens to be experienced, all well and good, but we mustn't become attached to it otherwise our inner growth will stop. It is better to think of it as sunshine in a temperate climate – it's lovely when it happens but it is better not to expect it. In that way, we will lead a full life and contribute to making a better world.

Andrew Marshall

June 2010

Andrew Marshall is the author of a number of articles that are published on www.joyousness.org (which also gives details of courses and workshops) and www.fieryeheart.org. The articles may be copied for private use provided they are copied in their entirety and that no charge whatsoever is made for them. Details of his first book are to be found at www.thegreatlittlebookofhappiness.com

© Andrew Marshall 2010