



It seems it is easy for us to be dissatisfied, whether with ourselves or with others. Brother Toby addresses the issue of dissatisfaction in this revisited reflection from 2014. Perhaps you will find more reason to feel satisfied after reading this reflection. You might even smile, at least in your heart.



It Is Enough To Leave The World A Bit Better

In recent years you probably have a lot more experience in "people watching" than I do. I have a lot of opportunities for sitting on a bench and watching little creatures at my feet or birds in the sky or any number of things on the horizon. But I don't very often just sit and watch people passing by. There was a time when I loved sitting at an outdoor table in some exotic location, nursing a glass of wine, and just watching the faces going by — and perhaps inventing stories of the lives behind those faces. But for me those times are now mostly memories.

However, a few days ago I found myself trapped, as I at first considered it, in a supermarket parking-lot for half-an-hour waiting for a friend. Resisting the temptation to reach for my iPod or cell phone, I decided to look at the faces of folks passing by. People were just getting off work and maybe that was not a good time for some of them. But I was shocked to find that not a single happy adult face passed in front of the car window. I'm not exaggerating — every adult seem troubled, or angry, or sad, or fearful.



The store windows were gaily adorned with Autumn colors and scenes. There were great bins of pumpkins and many of the children did seem cheerful. But not the adults. I was in a working-class district. Maybe prosperous neighborhoods exhibit more satisfied faces but I somehow I doubt it.

Have you ever heard of the “*World Happiness Report*”? It is a complicated evaluation by an international group of social scientists in cooperation with the United Nations. Among other things they attempt to measure the sense of well-being of citizens in all the worlds countries. In the latest report the United States did not make the top 10. We came in 17. How is that possible? Don't we have the greatest wealth? Aren't we the strongest nation? Are not our leaders the most powerful people in the world, our entrepreneurs and innovators the most creative, our TV shows the most entertaining, our sports teams all “Number One”? Maybe those things don't matter much when it comes to individual contentment.

Does our unhappiness have to do with satisfaction — or rather the lack of it? We all seem to be dissatisfied about something: money, prestige, accomplishment, etc., etc. Maybe at some point we took the wrong fork in the road.

Back in the 19th century, even after the horrors of the Civil War, many people would have agreed with what Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) suggested should make us satisfied with life,

To laugh often and love much; to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; to earn the approbation of honest citizens and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give of one's self; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—this is to have succeeded.



Well, what did old Emerson know about the challenges of modern life? Perhaps more than we realize. What if all those people I watched pass by, and you and I, really understood that it is enough *to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—this is to have succeeded.*

It might just make a difference.

Brother Toby