

## HUMAN BEING

Back in the avaricious eighties an advertising campaign for a credit card promised that it could 'take the waiting out of wanting'. Instant gratification was yours for the asking, with just the swipe of a piece of plastic. Health, wealth and happiness, so long as you didn't go over your limit.

In my personal pursuit of fulfilment and happiness I find myself searching for answers and testing my assumptions about, well about almost everything. Last week's article on money and its limitations seemed to have struck a chord with many readers. It seems that many of us are on the same page when it comes to agreeing that money, paper or plastic, does not solve our problems. So that wrecks the urban myth that you can never be too rich or too thin... and because I dealt with the 'rich' part last week, today I'll tackle the 'thin' issue or at least what it symbolises....

I took the liberty of taking a straw poll this week (albeit not a very scientific one as it only involved the people in the office) to see who was happy with their weight, body shape, physical well being etc. I guess it was hardly surprising that no-one was even remotely pleased with how they were looking or what results they were getting from the gym. Even the most sorted of my consultants admitted to being dissatisfied in the physical looks department. Everyone unashamedly admitted to thinking that their life would be better if they looked better. A rather dismal and depressing assessment of self worth, then, was the consensus. Despite the fact that my office is made up of educated, knowledgeable and hopefully deep-thinking staff we have all succumbed to and bought into the philosophy that physical beauty is of the essence whilst character has been reduced to a secondary role. However intuitively we understand that we are what we do and not how we look, despite us consciously knowing that beauty is only skin deep we are still punishing ourselves at the gym every day, applying the anti- wrinkle cream at night and looking for any shortcuts to instant and eternal beauty and youth. But unless you have bottomless coffers and a high tolerance for pain a la "The Swan"/"Extreme Makeover"-type of reality shows that transform "ugly ducklings" into stunning beauties via plastic surgery, liposuction and the like, there is no quick fix for your physical imperfections.

Is it really possible to like the way we really look? To like the body we were given with all its qualities and flaws? Most of us don't because we have a preoccupation with being physically perfect which is derived from many sources. It usually starts with the early judgements we received in the playground when we were called fatty boom boom or one of those other cruel soubriquets that kids take such a delight in taunting each other with. Later we're subjected to apparently physically perfect and stunningly beautiful models on the covers of magazines but what most people do not realise is that the photos are almost always digitally enhanced by a few clicks with a mouse. Unfortunately it's not so easy to airbrush ourselves.

It's all an illusion - what money can give you and what better looks can get you. So what's behind this constant thinking that we want what we haven't got - more money, less fat, a better partner, to live in a different country, higher status? It's the mindset that what we have is not enough nor will it ever be. We look for answers in all the wrong places, always presuming that happiness is just around the corner - 10kg, P1 million or a promotion away. Turning our back on the present and putting our happiness on hold for some target date in the future. It's exhausting. Rich, poor, fat, thin, now, then.

Carl Jung tells in one of his books of a conversation he had with a Native American Chief who pointed out to him that in his perception white people have tense faces, staring eyes, and a cruel demeanour. He said "They are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something. They are always uneasy and restless. We don't know what they want. We think they are mad." Philosopher Eckart Tolle refers to this undercurrent of constant unease as being so prevalent today but in fact this was around in Biblical times. 'Why are you always anxious?', Jesus asked his disciples. "Can anxious thought add a single day to your life?' And Buddha taught that the root of suffering is to be found in our constant wanting and craving. If we are to find real happiness we need to forget about the world of possibility somewhere in the future where we might have bags of money, and a body like Pamela or Arnold. We need to spend more time appreciating the now, not saving it up for the then, to value the inside more than the outside. I know it has become fashionable to devote some 'quality time' to ourselves, but like any fashion this devotion tends to remain very superficial. As Tolle says, for us to become really happy, we can't be partial. We cannot devote partial time to us today and at other moments fall back into our old ways of dreaming of future prosperity. We have to remain always, every moment of the day, being what we are and comfortable with it.

Most people are ill at ease and restless because they can't stop thinking. There is no inner peace and calm. They give the impression of being haunted by something. Their emotions give rise to new thoughts and their thoughts give rise to new emotions and a constant non-specific yearning. So they are fettered to this vicious chain of cause and effect. This is what makes them so unhappy, because they seem not to be able to let loose of their thoughts and enjoy the happiness of the day. All the time their thoughts take them adrift - to a thinner, richer and more successful place.

Is it possible to let go of all mental images, all judgments, all memories, anticipations and evaluations about everything, including our self? Can we live in the Now where we are fatter than the ideal and poorer than we'd like? "Sure we can", says Tolle, "for beyond our mind and our thoughts there is the blissful world of Being." We only have to identify ourselves, with this world of peace. Remove the wanting as well as the waiting, stop worrying about the future and live for today. Good idea - I'll start tomorrow!

