

Is feeling good about oneself a “right”?



by Lev Tsitrin

It may sound like an odd question to ask – because who’s in the way of our feeling good about ourselves? No one can forbid us to do so – but on the other hand, no one is obligated to facilitate it, either.

And that’s where the problem is. Suppose that by some strange twist of your psychology, you cannot feel good unless you had a billion bucks sitting in your bank account – but you are just a recent graduate, looking for a first job? Because you are not what you feel you should be, inside of you is darkness, though you should be inwardly (and for that matter, outwardly) smiling – smiling at being young, at being full of life, and at the prospects that are ahead of you. But because you ignore what’s yours, and pine for what isn’t, your happiness rests in the hands of others. And they indeed have the power to make you happy: if everyone residing in the US contributed a paltry \$3 to your happiness fund, you can get

happy in no time. But oh well – being inconsiderate, they ignore your pain.

What can be done? Not much – roll up the sleeves, and work on your dream. You can start a great business, you can marry into money, you can win a lottery. People do find great success in this land of opportunity – why not you?

OK, this one was easy – kind of. But not everyone's happiness is rooted in the immensity of their bank account – or some other goal that requires mere hard work, good luck, or combination of the two. What if you want the truly impossible – being not what you are by nature? You are a man, but feel you are a woman. You are a woman, but feel you are a man. (I am no Dostoevsky – and not even Tolstoy – so I won't presume to describe the inner works and torments of such mind; suffice it is, that nowadays the media is full of stories about such people). On the surface, even this shouldn't pose any problem to you. You are a man feeling that you are a woman – fine, feel that you are a woman; who cares? You are within your rights to feel whatever you want to feel.

But the problem is, such people do want us to be aware, and to care. It is not enough for them to feel the way they feel – they also want us to feel how they feel. What makes them feel bad, is not that they feel that they are women, but that we – people around them – think that they are men (assuming that we think of them at all). That's what's hurting. For them to feel good about themselves, it is not enough for them to feel the way they feel – it is also necessary that we feel the way we don't feel.

And this is the gist of the conflict: for them to feel alright, we should feel creepy. We should see women where we see men. We have to feel weird, so they could feel normal.

Simply put, what they perceive as their right to feel good, impinges on others' right to also feel that way. So, something

has to give – and may be, this “something” should be the right to feel good, itself?

There can be a compromise, of course, one of the sides playing make-believe – like in the story of “[Emperor Norton](#)” – “a resident of San Francisco, California, who in 1859 proclaimed himself “Norton I., Emperor of the United States” ... he was treated deferentially in San Francisco, and currency issued in his name was honored in some establishments that he frequented. Some considered Norton to be insane or eccentric, but residents of San Francisco and the city’s larger Northern California orbit enjoyed his imperial presence and took note of his frequent newspaper proclamations. ... According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, upwards of 10,000 people lined the streets of San Francisco to pay him homage at his funeral.”

Clearly, in this case the people of San Fransisco were too good-natured, and too kind-hearted to spoil the fun. They took it in stride and humored him. No one had the ill manners to point out to Norton that the US was a republic, not a monarchy. He caused no harm, even some good – “Though Norton received free ferry and train passage and a variety of favors, such as help with rent and free meals, from well-placed friends and sympathizers, the city’s merchants also capitalized on his notoriety by selling souvenirs bearing his image. “San Francisco lived off the Emperor Norton,” Norton’s biographer William Drury wrote, “not Norton off San Francisco.””

But sometimes, there is a limit to public’s good will – and letting men register themselves as women in official documents, or use ladies’ restrooms, or compete in women’s sports turned out to be one such instance. The large portion of Americans insists on feeling good (or rather, feeling sane) – even if it means that the would-be ladies don’t.

Not everyone who would love to be a billionaire, is a

billionaire (alas! how terrible is the anguish I feel!) – and not everyone who'd rather be a woman, is. Such is life. The US Constitution gives us the right to pursue happiness – but does not guarantee this outcome. We all strive to feel good about ourselves (which is largely what happiness is all about, I guess) – but that's about it. The would-be ladies managed to convince themselves that the medics are capable of turning them into actual ladies – but this is only wishful thinking. Medical professionals should be the first to disabuse them – but unfortunately, they don't (not only I, but the doctors also want to be billionaires, I guess!). But still, if there were such thing as “truth in advertising,” it should be admitted that no doctor can turn a man into a woman, or a woman into a man. Some things are simply not doable.

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can change; and wisdom to know the difference.” The men who would be ladies try “to change the things they cannot change.” That's why they can't feel good about themselves. And no one can help (though medics try, for a fee). This unhappiness is self-inflicted – a failure to realize that feeling good about oneself is not a “right;” and no one is obligated to accommodate unreasonable fantasies – not just of the would-be billionaires (sigh, sigh), but of the would-be ladies, as well.