

Love Begins With Me

By frank ra, Dharma instructor and AmAreWay.org blogger

We all want to be loved, to belong, to flourish. We all want to be happy. What makes for a happy life? Based on personal experience, and also on what I see from other people, a good life has its root in the choice of living a meaningful life, loving all beings at the benefit of all beings. I summarize an approach to living a loving and happy life, using the acronym **AmAre**, which stands for "being": **A**ware and **A**cepting; **M**eaningful and **M**otivated; **A**ctive and **A**ttentive; **R**esilient and **R**espectful; **E**ating properly and **E**xercising. Amare in Italian means... to love.

I had a sudden shift in awareness as a teenager: things were not working the way I wished, and wanted to change them. First step was to understand we usually do not get different results by acting as we always did: new results often demand new course of action. Before acting, I needed to understand what to change and what to keep, and to love it all. So, by being more **Aware**, I started to clarify goals and see what was necessary to do to get there, noticing that too much focus on outcomes brings paralysis, and too little focus results in depleting energies on too many sides. I also learnt to being **Accepting** of what's too hard to change, and transform what can be transformed; the wisdom to be able to differentiate among the two every time is still not here, and maybe I'll never fully achieve it, still "good enough" proved to be an advisable approach.

By opening my eyes more, I understood what is **Meaningful** and what facilitates me in being **Motivated**. We can be happy all together, it is not realistic to aim to be happy in a vacuum, people near us need to be happy as well, in their own way. Sharing time and energy in ways which are meaningful both for the "sharer" and the "sharer" is one great motivator. It starts from me, from personal choices, and still it is much more than me.

Armchair good intentions do not really count for tangible results. Being **Active** matters a lot. I started to act and understood the need of being **Attentive** about people's feelings, ideas and feedback, to leverage the flow instead of moving like an elephant in a small room.

Most of the times things worked out much better than expected, however sometimes I had to face serious setbacks. With every major geographical move I made, I had to start from scratch. The support network available in the places where I previously lived is still there, but physically too far to make a difference in daily life. That is where being **Resilient** gives a push to come back on one's feet, in a reasonable amount of time. Sometimes resilience may mutate into becoming hard-skinned, but knowing that we all have similar basic needs for recognition and care (despite external differences which can make us think otherwise) I experienced the importance of being **Respectful** of people, beings and the context. Being tuned with the context around us is especially important, once we are in harmony, then satisfactions come to us; if we are on a different wave-length, than everything takes so much energy!

When I was at home in Italy, eating was not really an issue: my mother and grandmothers always took great care of this. When I was in my early 20s and understood one way to learn about the World was to leave my country and bring my journey to the next step, then **Eating properly** became one of my priorities. Considering I liked to think I was too busy to exercise in a formal way, my opportunities to **Exercise** regularly were embedded into daily tasks: not using elevators; shopping for food from a store about fifteen minutes away from where I lived and then walking home with the heavy bags; no using public transportation on Weekends, as long as the distance to walk was reasonable (within one hour); etc.

This journey took me around North America and Europe, not only as a visitor but often with work-

obligations to support myself, and also studying to improve knowledge. It also allowed my wife and I to meet, and to start building our life together.

One recurrent question I often hear: “is happiness really an inside job”? As an answer, now I suggest to think in terms of degree of facilitation. Some events are like a weight, making harder for us to fly; some are like a lift, facilitating our happiness. But, at the end of day, considering even the way we discern between weights and lifts is subjective (same event can be considered in various ways, and especially with different degrees of effect, by different people), we can say that happiness is about attitudes, it is not a place to reach through external factors.

Looking from here, I understand this journey dates back to long time ago. It started at least with my grand-parents, who showed by example to my parents what love and having a family means. My parents brought this lesson to life, and took care of me. Then, I started to grow, with my happy moments, fun, doubts and mistakes. Learning from the lessons my ancestors gave passed along the family, and from personal experience travelling, I decided the only way to consolidate my happiness – to make it durable, not only a short spree – was to live happily and stop mixing happiness (the attitude) with happiness (temporarily states of pleasure), and to share it with my partner and everyone who wants to be part of this journey. The merit for what has been learnt and achieved belongs to my relatives, friends, and other people with whom I crossed path, at least as much it belongs to me.

The love starts with you, here and now! Peace and metta,

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