# Inner Peace and Friendship

## by Esteban Yañez

This country is suffering immensely. This country, even with its great potential to come back at being the leader of the world in many aspects is currently suffering from an ulcer-like state that impedes its progression. This suffering is present amongst many American people, but they are either too busy or too disillusioned to recognize and accept it. This parasite eats people from the inside, makes them think irrationally, and encourages them to grasp onto negative thoughts. This parasite is called sadness, depression, discontentment, misery, and sorrow, or whatever you may want to call it. It is the state of not being happy. The United States is ranked as the 14th happiest country in the world, but it has been steadily falling every year to countries like Denmark, Iceland, and Switzerland. How? The United States has many of the biggest celebrities in the world, the best rated television shows, the best athletes, and many things and people other countries don't. So why is it that other countries that people don't really talk about or know much about beat us in the index of happiness? We can get into the politics and economics of it. They may have better healthcare systems, better public education, less income inequality, better fluidity in their justice systems, less corruption and more transparency for their elected officials, but putting all of that aside, a big reason why it is hard to find happiness in this country is because of the things Americans put first. The abstracts and people we place on a pedestal rather than making it a priority to work on ourselves. To shape our best selves and focus on the things we think are of most value to us. We let products, television, and many other things modify what we think counts more in our lives rather than living in the moment.

It's easier said than done, really. Live in the moment, seize the day, those are things we always say but find difficult to actually do. Many times, we actually know how to live a more fulfilling life, but either can't find the energy or the meaning in it to actually do it.

I didn't have a rough childhood or anything. I have both my parents' support for anything I'd like to do for my career, which is to either be a salesperson or writer or both. They back me up on it. I have a roof over my head. I am fortunate enough to eat food every day. I am grateful for the things I have in my life, but this parasite took over my mind and body at the age of sixteen. I started to have a completely negative outlook on life. Although I was great at analyzing situations, I would feel down because I overthought big mistakes that I regretted. This gave me tremendous fear about my future. I often set incredibly high standards for myself and when I fail to do something I wanted to do, I fall into a pit of disappointment. For example, I am very self-critical about my weight because of the bullying I went through as a child and very self-critical about my intellect because of how much I have to learn about current events, legislation, and economics. If I fall behind, I start to put myself down and tell myself how I will never make any positive difference and consider changing my major, which I love, to something that that is easy. I am also overly ambitious. This is a gift and a curse. My analytical mind gives me the ability to always seek something bigger and better, but this prevents me from enjoying everyday life. I think about things

that are stimulating and incredibly idealistic that cannot be found anywhere in the world today. This makes it hard for me to accept the present moment as I end up feeling like everything could be better in the world when it's not. Many of the vibrant colors and enthusiasm in my eyes have been greyed out.

My first two years in college, I was pretty good at meeting new people and getting along with almost everyone I encountered. I joined clubs and reading groups and played sports and had my own circle of friends who I would meet up with every single day. There is one moment that I had with some of those friends that stuck with me ever since. We all met up and talked and shared experiences and I realized that I would know many things about them, but they wouldn't know much about me. I knew about their deep interests, their opinions on many different issues, who their families were, their core values, but one of them told me she knew absolutely nothing about me. Sure, they knew that I wanted to major in political science and wrote political articles on the side, that my favorite sport was soccer, that I had a sales job selling car assurance, and they knew where I was from. They knew just really basic, surface level stuff. After having that realization, I recognized that I was really good at doing one thing, hiding my emotions. I'm really good at it. That same person who told me she knew nothing about me called me mysterious, and everyone else kind of agreed. They all trust me to this day and support me, but it was like they didn't know whether I felt the same way.

I was called mysterious, and I didn't think much of it at first. After hanging out with them, I walked home alone, but the farther I got from their place and the closer I got to mine, I felt more and more lonely.

How could I feel lonely when I know and have many people in my life who care about?

Maybe a week later, I spent the night in the library at school. I was studying a lot for the exams I was going to have throughout the week, and I was sitting in an area where you had to be completely silent. I was really tired and started to put all my things in my backpack, so I could leave until someone sat down a few seats away with a large book containing the words "Greek philosophy" in the title. I was never into philosophy growing up. In high school, they'd have us read Greek literature and I always thought it was boring. Too much reading, just too much everything. So, I associated that boredom with Greek philosophy and got my stuff and left. On my way out, I was thinking why would someone read that kind of stuff in their free time? Why is it such a big deal? So out of curiosity and with the goal to in the end say to myself, "See? Boring." I went back in the library and got on one of the desktops and googled Greek philosophy. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were the first ones on the results page. I look back at that day and wonder what my life would be like if I hadn't have turned around to do more research. I honestly don't know how my mental state would be right now.

I would spend nights just reading different works, trying to understand the different ways many of these philosophers tried to crack life and how they tried to look for meaning and purpose.

One night I came across a philosopher who I didn't know about at all. Books and videos about him said that only 300 of his written texts exist while it is believed that he wrote many more. His name is Epicurus.

Epicurus was a simple man. He owned only two cloaks and his diet consisted mainly of olives, bread, and, for a nice treat, a slice of cheese. What Epicurus was concerned about was how people could live happily. When I read that part, I instantly wanted to know more about him. Happiness? "There is a philosophy based only on happiness, and I haven't come across it?" I thought. Epicurus, after studying for many years, set up a school of his own where anyone could go to learn no matter their gender, status, or whatever; he encouraged everyone to try out his new formula for happiness. It's pretty long, but I'll share what helped me the most. Many times we feel like we need the newest things out there – shoes, jewelry, cars. I'll share a quote from one of my favorite Houston based rappers, "Don't spend your life tryna chase a million. Take some time to go hug your children. Cars and jewelry won't hug you back. I had to learn that with an ugly feeling." Epicurus observed how obsessed people are with luxury and things. He concluded that people looked for happiness in other things rather than in themselves. We want our minds pure and filled with positivity, but that parasite keeps pushing that away from us. He and those in his school said that people need to spend time on their own to read, reflect, write, meditate, and keep busy. How can you find happiness in other things, when you haven't even found any in yourself? As another one of my favorite rappers Greydon Square says, "We grow too old soon and too late wise." In order to get the most out of life, we have to be happy with ourselves. Love ourselves and genuinely want to do things for the better. We cannot worry and fear tomorrow because we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow and the past does not exist anymore, only its outcomes. So, all we can associate our energy and time is now. Right now is the most important time of your life, like Mr. Vinnie says in his chapel talk.

What helped me out the most was one thing was the immense importance Epicurus put in his formula and arguably what he wanted to express in his works the most. It's friendship. He enjoyed how good friends were so unpossessive and understanding, and he also knew that it was important to see and spend time with your friends often because they're there for you when you need them and correct you on your mistakes. So, this is what he did. He bought a big house and invited all of his friends to live with him. Everyone had their own rooms and spaces, but there were also many shared areas. Everywhere he would walk, there was always someone pleasant to talk to. It's important to let go with friends and trust them. We remain so much in our heads that we find it intimidating to share what we think, but friends are there for us. Friends can hold us up in our hardest times and enhance our lives significantly.

Where do we wake up every day to see our friends and other people who care about us? When I thought of that, I started to laugh. I laughed because a key ingredient to my happiness and well-being was already within almost every summer of my life since I was twelve. Epicurean philosophy didn't' teach me anything new, rather it reminded me of a place I hold very dearly in my heart, a place that is so familiar. Epicurean philosophy consists of being humble, focusing on

a person's personality rather than status, treating people how they want to be treated, service, kindness, and carpe diem. All of that is rooted here at camp, so why did I just stand up here talking to you about a philosophy that all of us are already familiar with? Because it's I am reassuring you that it is not impossible. This kind of thinking has been alive thousands of years. Think about this, Epicurean schools and communities were constructed all around the Mediterranean from Spain to Palestine. More than four hundred thousand people had the pleasure of directly learning this philosophy themselves. It is more than just a hundred boys at a camp on a New Hampshire lake.

These values have been tested and practiced for so long that it only makes me have more faith in this place. Camp Pasquaney doesn't change. We may get new activity shirts or an extension to Mem Hall, but the values remain the same. Trust this place. These last two weeks, it's your chance to truly test Epicurean philosophy yourself, to test camp's philosophy yourself, to understand that we find peace within ourselves, and that a faithful friend is the medicine of life.