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MORAL MATTERS

New year, new you? This guide is all you need

WELCOME to Dooley's Survival Guide 2014. You will have read much about how to keep the body in shape throughout the New Year. As persons, we also require a guide to the good life, one that guarantees true joy.

The key to happiness, writes Aristotle, is moderation. Unlike animals, we can temper our appetites and instincts. We can resist our basic impulses in favour of higher values and ideals. This means that true contentment can never be found in extremes. The excessive person is an extremist who makes life miserable for himself and others. In contrast, the virtuous life demands we choose the middle road between excess and deficiency. Not too much or too little and happiness will be yours.

Start each day with a prayer of thanksgiving. Even if you don't believe we are destined for eternity, it is wise to give thanks for a healthy existence. We can never know at which hour the 'eternal footman' will call, so consider each day a blessing. Make each hour count. Far too many of us waste time worrying about what may happen in the days and months ahead. Think only about what you must do in the next hour and watch those wretched worries drift away. And then, live that hour as if it were your last. There is no limit to what you can achieve when you take one hour at a time.

Never be hasty or impulsive. There is a wonderful line from the Prophet Isaiah which reads: 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' To rush is to lay the foundations for a fall. Before acting, consider all things carefully and avoid making quick decisions. It is much better to sleep on something than to regret it.

Don't be afraid of silence. In a world so transfixed on technology, where conversation has given way to useless chatter, it is imperative to rediscover silence. Find a few minutes each day to sit alone in quiet contemplation. Listen to the sound of silence and experience the peace which surpasses all understanding.

The greatest capacity we possess is the ability to withdraw from the moment. Both mind and body require rejuvenation. Taking time out of the daily swirl is the best remedy for a tormented soul.

Don't dwell on tragedy. The world is full of disaster which, however appalling, is beyond our capacity to control. We should be mindful of those less fortunate, but never to the point where we become obsessively preoccupied with catastrophe. The best we

can do is to use our talents and resources to make our little patch of earth a better place. Each one of us can serve as a beacon of light and hope for those we live with. We can contribute to the welfare of the community, ensuring peace and security for family, neighbours and friends.

Listen to music. By this, I don't mean the so-called music to which the modern world has become accustomed. I mean the heavenly music of Mozart, Chopin and Bach.

If pop music promotes individualism, great music softens the senses and cultivates character. It is a simple truth that those who listen to Lady Gaga share no moral similarities with those who listen to Beethoven. That is because the type of music you listen to defines the type of person you are.

Choose a new composer each month and listen to his greatest works. As evening falls, sit back with a tincture of your favourite brew, close your eyes and let the sweet sound do the rest. Soon, you will notice a difference in the way you look at others and the surrounding world.

Never neglect ceremony and celebration. The year provides ample opportunity to mark those occasions which matter most. Birthdays, Christmas, Easter and the solstices are just some of those magical moments when life can be truly savoured.

CEREMONY matters because it shows you care. In decorating your home, hosting a meal or raising a toast, you elevate existence above the mundane. You prove there are golden moments which defy the transience of human life, memories which shine like the stars until journey's end.

I don't know what 2014 has in store for us. What I do know is that much of what happens will be outside our control. Like it or not, we are all vulnerable to 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'.

Dooley's Survival Guide will do nothing to control the random tide of time. What it will do, however, is help you navigate that tide with greater ease. Hopefully, it will enable you to see that each day contains multiple possibilities for true happiness.

For this is the wisdom of the Ancients, wisdom formed in the cradle of civilisation. And if it has survived through the ages, it is because we humans are no different to our forebears. From time immemorial, we have desired the secret to lasting joy.

As it happens, the answer to that secret is the same in 2014 as it was for Socrates. Avoid excess, don't rush, keep calm and make any excuse for a celebration. Do that, and it will indeed be a very happy New Year.

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