

Book review: When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough – The Search for a Life That Matters  
By Crystal Shue Ting Wong

Why do I feel that something important is missing, even though I'm rich and successful? The book I chose to do this report on, "When all you've ever wanted isn't enough – The search for a life that matters", talks about this question, one that people have been asking themselves for a long time, but finding no answer.

The author, Harold Kushner, has explained at length in this book. As he has observed, many adults with ambitious dreams work from day to night, hoping to become fantastically rich. In most people's minds, money is the thesaurus of happiness. That is a lie that the majority have been swallowing for centuries. Open your eyes, and look around, he tells us! How many of the rich and famous have family problems? How many of the rich and famous had felt so depressed that they committed suicide? The newspapers practically shout out the latest scandal every few days, but people choose to ignore the obvious, and continue believing in their fantasies.

Finally, they would make the decision to abandon their families for work, thinking that there will be time to repair that severed connection when they are rich. But, alas! Once they have done so, they have unwittingly condemned their own life. When they strike gold, no amount of cash or prospects of luxury will be able to buy back the deep love from their wives or children.

It is only then will they look back, sigh and regret about all they have done, all they have sacrificed, just to end up with piles of money and a lonely mansion. Kushner had found out about this problem a long time ago, and had nearly risked it himself, so he warns us in his book to never willingly sell out love in exchange for riches. A survey reveals that about ninety-seven percent of the people who make this decision regret it painfully afterwards.

This book tells you how to find the road to happiness, and much, much more. As Kushner quotes, "*You don't become happy when you pursue happiness. It is always a by-product, never a primary goal. Happiness is a*

*butterfly—the more you chase it, the more it flies away from you and hides. But stop chasing it, put away your net and busy yourself with other, more productive things than the pursuit of personal happiness and it will sneak up on you from behind and perch on your shoulder."*

What is personal happiness, actually? Everybody's viewpoint of happiness is different. For example, to a penniless man, wealth and riches are his ideas of happiness. To a sick, bedridden man, health and being able to walk again are his ideas of happiness. To a young child, happiness means being able to play all day and no homework. As I myself am an avid, dedicated reader, my idea of happiness is when I am able to spend hours reading without any interruption! So happiness really represents a whole lot of different things, depending on what sort of person you are.

*"If you could live without limits, if you could do anything, go anywhere, command anyone to do what you wanted, would that make you happy? Would you be able to use all that power in ways that would give your life enduring significance and satisfaction?"*

Kushner is of the view that people do not need money or power to be happy. If they were given all that, they would not be able to use it prudently. And even if they did manage to control their power wisely, they would grow bored of it after a while, and wish for even more. People are always too greedy, too ambitious, to be satisfied with what they have. As always, they misinterpret happiness as the things they don't have.

There is another important topic that this book talks about: Why do we feel guilty when we enjoy ourselves? Kushner says that it is because we believe, in some parts of our minds, that we have sinned too much in our lives, and have allowed ourselves to be too indulgent. So in return, as a punishment for the 'sin' of feeling comfortable, we never allow ourselves to truly relax. Again, Kushner speaks the truth. I have observed many people behaving like that, continuing to force themselves to go on mentally even when they are already physically exhausted.

Kushner patiently explains every reason at length, so it would be nearly impossible *not* to understand. I find that to every cynically criticizing question he asks in the book, he has a perfectly reasonable answer, which

makes me wonder how one man could manage to see so much in life. He also makes me feel a little ashamed that I, myself, couldn't have made these easy observations.

I think the best and by far the most interesting part in the book is when he says that, despite all the fancy words and difficult sentences, the message the Bible is trying to get through is "Don't do what you want to do; do what the Lord tells you to do." It is true. To obey the Lord, Jews have to refrain themselves from eating certain food, and follow certain rules all their lives, just to please God.

Why wouldn't God let us be, and let us do what we really want to do? Is this God's order, to forbid us of these pleasures? Or is it for our own good? Or more importantly, *why* do we have to please God? Is it because, deep down, we are afraid of going to Hell when we die? Is it because we believe that once we stop obeying Him, bad things will start happening to us? Do we really obey God by our own will or do we force ourselves to please Him? All these questions are stored away deep in my mind, which rises up to the surface whenever I am in doubt. But I lack the courage to actually ask them to anyone, for fear that he/she would think I am blasphemous.

Frankly, I admit that when I read about his bold questioning of the Bible, I was shocked. But later, I saw the wisdom lying behind those words. There is one thing I have learnt: When people do things, they never do it just for fun. There must be a purpose lurking somewhere behind our actions. Then what is the real purpose of being a Christian?

To soothe ourselves that we would be forever happy with the thought of going to Heaven? To be able to say that we are good people? Or, moreover, to escape from the looming possibility of going to Hell when we die? These questions are what people ask themselves when they have to choose to be a believer or an unbeliever, and many of them choose to be a believer merely because the thought of going to Hell terrifies them. I think this is one of the most popular reasons, because fear is one of the things that are able to force us to do many deeds not from our own free will.

There are many things that this book has taught me, and all of them just bowl me over. The list of wonders could go on forever without ever reaching

the end, and I would certainly read the other bestsellers written by the author of this interesting book. Oh, and I would also like to remind you that even the term 'interesting' is a severe understatement. While reading, my emotions swelled and diminished rapidly every few minutes, from shock to wonder, from amazement to delight. It was a refreshing change from the other books that I usually read, which tell you that God is good, but never explaining *why*.

All I want to say is that Harold Kushner is one very talented man with a powerful way in the use of words. This book has affected me in many ways, and has had a genuinely positive influence on my life. It has taught me how to look at life from all angles, and I now have a much better understanding of other people's point of view. There is an English proverb: *Don't judge a man until you've walked two moons in his moccasins*. I devoutly agree to it. We should be more expendable, and we should change our habit of always looking at problems from a negative view. If you do, then you'll be surprised at how much happier you'll become!

I sincerely hope that this book can help you as much as it has helped me, and will be able to guide you gently until you can find your own, true happiness!

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