

Taro Gold ~ A Happy Man Who Wears Many Hats

By Alan Bennett Ilagan

The goal of life for most of us is a simple one: to be happy. How we get there and what constitutes true happiness is a question we will spend our lives trying to solve. Some will delve into empty substitutes for happiness ~ drugs, liquor, meaningless sex and similar vices. Some will look to religion and spirituality in an effort to find a loftier realm of contentment. Others may search for happiness in art and beauty. The one place where we never think to begin our search, however, is within ourselves. Like Dorothy, we are forever trying to find the elusive Oz ~ that magical place of true happiness and joy, and more often than not it is closer than our own backyards.

Taro Gold writes of happiness, and how it is inside each of us, in his latest book, "Open Your Mind, Open Your Life: A Little Book of Eastern Wisdom." According to his view, we need to discover the way to access and reveal the happiness within. Such inspirational writing is clearly meant to propel us to find our own happiness and work towards bettering ourselves in order to better the world around us. Delicate drawings of bamboo, carp and natural landscapes are sprinkled throughout the pages, offering respite for both the eye and the mind. For Gold, a positive outlook and way of life will be contagious ~ a case of joy breeding greater joy. Through openness will come happiness, and it is a fitting theme for Gay Pride Month.

These writings are of particular relevance for gay youth, who often find themselves lacking happiness, and hiding that pain with substitutes like alcohol and drugs. Drinking, smoking and other vices are ways to fill our emptiness, and a little book like Mr. Gold's may go some way towards mending our ache.

This sort of inspirational new-age writing is often the target of criticism and pessimistic attacks. It is easy to deflate the rather abstract outline of finding the happiness within ~ but much more difficult to actually give it a shot and see what happens. Mr. Gold doesn't always sugarcoat though ~ he acknowledges the trials and tribulations of life ~ even a life of happiness.

"There is always a piece of fortune in misfortune," one of the included Japanese proverbs reads, touching on the oft-misunderstood adage that without the dark there can be

no light. Gold continues this train of thought by explaining how, "The lotus flower blooms most beautifully from the deepest and thickest mud." While he doesn't delve much deeper into the misfortune and mud, he acknowledges their presence and necessity.

Some of the passages do tend toward the cheesy: "Do something today to improve someone else's life," he writes. (Okay, but I thought this was about *my* happiness.) Or this simplistic one: "You are what you believe." (So how come no one else has mistaken me for Madonna?) To his credit, Gold reigns in the hokey moments with some perceptive observations and important philosophies. It may be easy to boil it all down to a simple "Stay Positive" mantra, but Gold's words go beyond that, managing to lull the reader into a genuine state of peace and serenity. Such smart execution is the stuff of a rather worldly young man.

Taro Gold is someone who has searched for his own happiness around the world. Having lived in Australia, Japan, Spain and Southern California, he has literally traversed the globe, and what he has discovered is that his journey was always within. Gold seems to be taking his own words to heart. His biography reads like an exciting travel journal, and his passion for living indicates an exuberance tempered with an inner peace.

"A dynamic life is a constant struggle against complacency," he writes, and that complacency would seem to have very little place in his own life. A jack-of-all-trades, Gold is a performer, writer, model and singer who has lived in places as varied as Australia, Japan and Spain, as well as his current residence in Southern California. Performing in musicals like *Evita*, *Peter Pan* and *March of the Falsettos*, Gold exhibits a thirst for new experiences, and is even now working on a pop CD for the Japanese market. He is always pushing his mind ~ constantly growing and adding to his knowledge and history.

Keeping him grounded throughout all of his travels and experiences is his strong background in Buddhism. Eastern philosophy weaves its way through much of this work, not only in the form of Japanese and Chinese proverbs, but in Gold's own voice. He has written extensively on Buddhism throughout his career, and it invariably surfaces in "Open Your Mind, Open Your Life."

There may be nothing earth-shatteringly new or original in these age-old proverbs, but in today's world we all need a little reminder of them. For that alone, Mr.

Gold has done us a grand service, and his own search and discovery is its own story of inspiration. It's also a much-needed evocation that there are more important things for us than the perfect denim wash or punky hair color. Superficial concerns have fallen by the wayside for many people, and this pocket-sized book has a way of re-ordering priorities. It's the perfect companion for the crowded subway or a never-ending bus-ride ~ those moments when we can use a bit of peace and calm. Mr. Gold has crafted an experience of tranquility ~ and that state may very well be the beginning of true happiness.