

# If I Were a Rich Man

Those of us old enough to remember that song title and lyric from the 1964 Broadway hit and later movie 'Fiddler on the Roof' will recall it as the impassioned plea of a poor milkman living in Anatevka, a small village in Tsarist Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sung by the lead character, Tevye, it begins with his listing of the useless material goods that he would buy 'if he were a rich man'. His desires then progress to the things that he might procure to make life better for Golde, his long suffering wife. As we men still say, 'happy wife, happy life!'



As the song draws to its conclusion, Tevye laments his inability to devote time to his faith because of the hours demanded by his work and realises wealth would, most importantly, free his time to practice his faith and consider the important things in life. As we well and truly move into the twenty first century, the vexed question of wealth, success, time, freedom and liberty is still as relevant as it was back in the confines of tsarist Russia.

The more I experience life and learn from the successes and failures of others the more I observe that financial success and wealth are not measured in the dollar value of someone's bank account and accumulated assets but rather they are anchored to a person's attitude

towards what they have and a general sense of gratitude. I know people who live a modest life, taking joy from the simple things provided by our natural surroundings and striving to minimise consumption. They seem to be extremely grateful and content with their lot. I also associate with people on occasion who feel hard done by because they can't make ends meet on an income of several hundred thousand dollars a year and truly believe that 'life just isn't fair'. For them, there is little pleasure in a night at a fine restaurant or the opportunity to spend the day on a yacht. Hard as it is for most of us to imagine, some people reach the point where there is no longer any joy to be had from material things.

Happiness and satisfaction seem to be derived from what we are doing or have done, not what we have. We tend to forget this and wind up doing what we believe we have to do rather than doing what we want to be doing. Now don't get me wrong, I'm all for accumulating wealth, but not for the sake of having a big bank account, but rather so we can give ourselves options. With a few dollars in the bank or a passive income I have the choice to take a few days off, or do volunteer work or work in a job where the money is not the primary consideration. In simplest terms, wealth equates to options.



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Knowing this in theory is all well and good but how do we translate this into a better lifestyle. That's a question that I think I might just have an answer for. The starting point is to really understand what would make us happy and satisfied with our lot. What job would we have? Where would we live? What things would we enjoy having. What activities would we pursue outside work? Once we are able to quantify our options then we can do a reality check and make a plan to achieve the life we desire.



I think it is useful sometimes in this hectic life that we lead to stop every now and then and do a bit of a 'satisfaction check'. It might just be that we have become so busy doing what we're doing that we've forgotten to spend time building a life we are satisfied with. That can be a trap in the consumption driven world that we find ourselves in these days.

Finally, I think back to our embattled milkman Tevye and ponder that if I were a rich man I'd think 'pass' on the yard full of turkeys and geese and the stairway leading nowhere just for fun. For me it might be a unit at the Coast and a slow trip through Europe with a few days in downtown Anatevka. I guess some things have changed since Tevye's simpler life.

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