



Happiness: What Is It? How Do We Get It? How Do We Keep It?

Happiness is not a state to arrive at, but a manner of traveling.
—Samuel Johnson



We are becoming a nation of men and women who, in their quest for happiness, all too often fall short of achieving any kind of inner peace. We think that by always reaching higher, accomplishing more (more money, a better body, the perfect mate) that we will automatically be happy. That's an illusion. All this reaching is making us crazy. We need to rest.

—Melvyn Kinder



Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears. *The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.*

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you will find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight. Joy and sorrow are inseparable. Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

—The Prophet, by Kahlil Gibran



When one door of happiness closes, another opens. But often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.

—Helen Keller

Happiness is often defined as an overall sense of well being and a feeling that your life as a whole is going well.

Happiness has a genetic component, so some people are prone to being happier than others. Everyone has what researchers call a “happiness set point” fixed by temperament and early life experiences.

Even if many of the attitudes and thought patterns that influence happiness don't come naturally, they can be cultivated, and we can boost our capacity for happiness.

Happier people live longer, have lower blood pressure, enjoy more fulfilling relationships, have stronger immune systems that enable them to fight disease more effectively, endure pain more easily, are more productive workers, and are better creative thinkers and problem solvers.

Statistics have shown that in the last 50 years, Americans have become less happy as a people. Our quality of life has increased dramatically over that time, and we have become richer, but we are in an epidemic of depression. Depression is 10 times more common now, and life satisfaction rates are down.

Many people believe that happiness is a feeling of pleasure based on external happenings, but the things we expect will bring us lasting joy, rarely do. Money, education, intelligence, employment, material possessions, gender, age, race, beauty, fame, admiration, and life events account for no more than 15% of our happiness.

True happiness isn't contingent on circumstances, but is a sense of contentment that exists independently of the good or ill fortune that finds you. Whether you win the lottery or end up in a wheelchair, within a year or two, you generally end up just about as happy (or unhappy) as you started out.

No matter who you are, or what challenges you face, all of us have a remarkable capacity to adapt to changing life circumstances by adjusting our expectations.

Many Americans expect to live with ongoing euphoria and have a difficult time dealing with dualism: good and bad, success and setback, joy and sorrow.

Pain, sadness, and unpleasantness are integral parts of life and will inevitably occur from time to time. Even a happy life cannot be without a measure of darkness. The word “happy” would lose its meaning if it were not balanced by sadness.

The Purpose Driven Life, a book by Rick Warren, was most recently in the news as the book Ashley Smith read to Brian Nichols when he was holding her captive after allegedly murdering four people in the Atlanta area. Warren says that he used to think that life was like hills and valleys where we go through a dark time, then go to the mountaintop, and back and forth.

Now, he has a different outlook. The same year his book sold 15 million copies, his wife Kay became ill with cancer, and it became evident that she wasn't going to heal or have an easy time. Warren now feels that life is like two rails on a railroad track, and at all times we have something bad in our lives. No matter how good things are in our lives, there is always something bad that needs to be worked on. And no matter how bad things are in our lives, there is always something good to be thankful for.

Life can be difficult, and living in today's world isn't easy. In spite of life's problems and challenges, genuine happiness is still possible.

When we find someone who is happy a good deal of the time in spite of life's adversities, we should recognize that we are looking at an achievement worth aspiring to.

We hope that the articles this month at <http://www.melbabenson.com/articles.php> will help in your pursuit of happiness, regardless of what is going on in your life:

“Steps to a Happier Life”

“Finding Happiness at Work”

“You Can Be Happy No Matter What”

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