

Happiness

The one thing that we are all seeking in life is happiness. We might say that we are seeking fame, fortune, success, sex, excitement, adventure or spirituality, but all of these things are just strategies to find authentic happiness. None of these things actually make us happy; it is the value we put on them that makes us feel happy or not. If, for example, we put a high value on relaxation, a weekend at a luxury spa will make us feel happy, but if we put a high value on excitement a spa weekend will feel very boring. If “things” were genuinely a source of true happiness, the effect would be universal (i.e. everyone would enjoy the spa weekend). But it doesn’t work that way – happiness from “things” is not objective; it is subjective, it is based upon the value that we assign to them.

Life is a constant search for happiness but we rarely find anything that lasts. We are all looking for the same thing but we are going about it in different ways. We are all looking for happiness in different places, but all the different places share one thing in common – they are outside of ourselves. When we look outside of ourselves for happiness, our level of happiness will go up and down like a rollercoaster in response to external events. We can never achieve lasting happiness while we continue to look outside of ourselves because we can’t control what Life sends our way.

Throughout our evolutionary journey we have tried just about every strategy imaginable and searched almost everywhere in our quest for true happiness. We have had some great experiences and learnt a lot along the way, but we have never found what we are searching for. Eventually, we grow tired of searching and turn our attention to the one place we haven’t looked so far – inside ourselves.

True happiness is not something that can be sought and acquired; it is our soul’s natural state of being, and we can only connect with it by going within. We cannot connect with our inner happiness while we are busy looking for happiness externally. We cannot connect with our inner happiness while we are trying to do, achieve, feel, heal, fix or change anything. We can only connect with our inner happiness when we drop all that doing and just “be” (abide in the inherent joy of our true nature). We discover a deeper, longer lasting and more fulfilling kind of happiness when we stop trying to make ourselves and our lives different, because authentic happiness is not dependant on external conditions or feeling good emotionally.

We will not find authentic happiness by making it our goal (destination happiness); we will find it by appreciating the journey (our present moment experience of life). Life is a journey, not a destination. So we need to slow down and enjoy the ride rather than madly rushing to get “there” (wherever we mistakenly believe happiness can be found). True happiness can only be found right here (within us) and right now (in the present moment).

Even if our present moment circumstances are not particularly pleasant we can still connect with our inner happiness, but only if we don’t allow ourselves to get carried away (from here and now) by external circumstances. Authentic happiness is all about being present; it is not necessarily about being emotionally or externally happy. Authentic happiness is experienced when we embrace everything that life sends our way. We can never attain lasting happiness if we are always screening life – clinging to the “good” and rejecting the “bad”.

Our lives will not transform just because we read something inspiring or have a peak experience. Such things may change our thoughts and beliefs about life, but a new life cannot manifest until we address the deep-seated conditioning of our ego structures. A new life may begin in the mind with a new outlook on life, but until it filters down through our heart and into our body, nothing much will change. A new life requires a new way of being – being in our body and feeling life fully (good and bad). It requires us to feel our reactions to life in our bodies in the present moment, without any judgement or agenda. Instead of trying to eradicate our flaws we must embrace them, because developing an intimate relationship with every aspect of our being is our only hope of reintegrating our being and awakening to wholeness.

I Am Entitled To Be Happy

We all generally believe that we should be happy, we believe that we are entitled to be happy, and we believe that something must be wrong if we are not happy. If we feel sad we do things to stop ourselves from feeling the sadness, and if a friend feels sad we will try to cheer them up. The ego does everything it

can to try to control life in the hope that we can always feel good and avoid feeling bad. If the ego's strategies fail, it will blame the sadness on some external cause and wallow in victimhood. The ego can feel justified in believing it has been wronged (even if this increases our suffering), because any amount of suffering is better than being judged a failure (by our self or others). For the ego, failure is not an option because it invalidates the ego's reason for being.

While we remain identified with the ego, it is inevitable that we will sometimes feel a victim of life's circumstances. This is a false view of life because we are actually agents of Life – we are agents through which Life flows. This involves embracing (not resisting) everything that Life sends our way; be it “good”, “bad” or indifferent. We must learn to take responsibility for everything that Life sends us, because it is what our soul needs for its development.

I Would Be Happy If...

There is no doubt that many subjective experiences in life do make us feel happy, temporarily. The ego extrapolates this view into a (false) belief that if one good thing in my life makes me a little happy, then lots of good things in my life will make me very happy. This eventually develops into a belief that if I can make everything in my life “just perfect”, then I will be very happy forever. The only flaw with this ego strategy is that it cannot control everything in life! It can't even control its own thoughts, so what hope does it have at controlling the whole world and everyone in it?

Holding onto the false belief that “I would be happy if...” gives the ego hope. Hope that one day all of its striving and struggling will eventually pay off, but it never will. The ego has followed this strategy for countless lifetimes, and dropping it would mean that the ego is a failure for wasting countless millennia on a futile strategy. So the ego holds onto the hope that things will be better in the future, rather than actually living the life that we have right here and now.

After the ego has tried all the material and sensual paths to happiness, it will eventually try the spiritual path. Not because the ego is spiritual, but because all the other paths have failed and spirituality or religion are all that remains. So the ego wastes many more lifetimes searching for happiness and fulfilment from some external God or saviour (there are plenty to choose from). During this period, the ego holds onto the (false) belief that “if I pray hard enough or meditate long enough, then I will be happy”. This ego strategy is just as futile as all the others because once again the ego is looking in the wrong place. It is not until we look within, to the very core of our being, that we will discover the true source of authentic happiness.

False Beliefs and Expectations

Our authentic happiness is blocked by our (false) belief that life is not how it should be; i.e. how we want it to be. The unfulfilled false belief gives rise to negative emotions – the negative emotions make us feel uncomfortable – the ego equates the discomfort with unhappiness – so the ego tries to alleviate the discomfort by seeking happiness elsewhere. But the discomfort is only a symptom; it is not the root cause – the root cause is the false belief that life must be how we want it to be. The expectation that accompanies this false belief sets us up for failure, disappointment, frustration, anger and unhappiness.

Our expectations of other people also affect our happiness. Let me give you an example to clarify the point. If we had a partner who took us for granted, we would probably feel a bit sad. But if our partner was very loving and attentive, we would probably feel very happy. It is not our partner's actions that make us feel happy or sad – it is our beliefs and judgements about their actions that determine how we feel:

- We believe that our partner should demonstrate their love. When we see evidence of their love, we feel loved. When we feel loved, we feel happy.
- We believe that our partner should demonstrate their love. When we don't see evidence of their love, we feel unloved. When we feel unloved, we feel sad.

It is all too easy to blame our partner for our sadness, but the common denominator in both of the above examples is “we believe that our partner should demonstrate their love”. If we dropped that false belief we could be happy whether our partner demonstrated their love or not.

When we create expectations of other people and they fail to live up to them, we feel disappointed, sad or angry. People rarely live up to our expectations because they are our expectations, not theirs. They are our standards, not theirs. We are expecting them to live their lives according to our standards – standards that we may not have even communicated to them. If we really loved them, we wouldn't impose our standards on them; we would give them the freedom to be themselves. That is true love; that is unconditional love.

Some other common false beliefs that block happiness include:

- Believing we have to control everything in order to be happy.
- Believing we have to change in order to be happy.
- Believing other people have to change in order for us to be happy.
- Believing other people are responsible for our happiness.
- Believing external circumstances are responsible for our happiness.

Initial Judgements and Secondary Attacks

We often compound our suffering by judging unpleasant emotions as bad. By equating an uncomfortable feeling with suffering we become a victim, and victims suffer. For example, if we are feeling anxious we will judge it as unpleasant (the initial judgement), then we will identify with the unpleasantness (the secondary attack), which adds to our suffering. So we double our suffering by negatively judging our feelings.

With conscious awareness we can catch the judgemental thought and prevent the secondary attack. If we don't buy into the thought that anxiety is bad, the secondary suffering cannot manifest.

Is It Happening Right Now?

The mind loves to rehash the past and worry about the future, but this can adversely affect our happiness in two ways:

1. We can't access our true-Self's inherent happiness unless we are fully present, and we can't be fully present if we are rehashing the past or worrying about the future.
2. Our inherent happiness is masked by the unhappiness that we create through moaning, judging, blaming, worrying, fantasising, regretting, over-analysing and over-planning.

It is almost impossible to stop our mind from thinking because thinking is its nature, and it is difficult to change what our mind thinks about (e.g. past or future) because our thought-patterns are often deeply rooted in our subconscious. But with conscious awareness we can screen our thoughts and decide whether to buy into them or not. So when we are afflicted by unpleasant or unhelpful thoughts about the past or future, we can consciously decide to not buy into them and remind ourselves that it is not happening right now.

What Is Blocking My Happiness Right Now?

Happiness is an inherent quality of our true nature. Happiness is always present within us, but our perception of it is blocked by psychological material, in much the same way that clouds block our perception of the sun. The sun is always there but we can't always see it, and happiness is always there but we can't always feel it.

We can ask ourselves "What is blocking my happiness right now?" Don't put too much emphasis on the mind's answer; instead focus on how your body is responding. Scan your body for anything that feels unsettled, unnatural or uncomfortable (e.g. pressure, pain, blockages or emotions) and allow yourself to feel it fully, without trying to change it or make it go away. Surrender to it and relax into it, without any resistance. If there is physical discomfort, breathing into that area may help (i.e. imagining your in-breath flowing into the area). Doing this simple practice for a few minutes a few times a day can have a profound effect on our lives.

Cultivating Happiness

The secret to being happy is to be happy; to actually embody happiness. Just smile and notice what happens – you are instantly happier. Being happy requires us to be happy with everything just as it is; right here and now. If we can't be happy now we can never be happy, because now is the only time there is. Our physical body might live for 100 years, but the only time we actually live is in the present moment. Life is a seamless series of present moment experiences, and it is up to us to live them. To be happy in the present moment we must stop resisting life and stop trying to make everything the way we think it should be. When we embody happiness, express happiness and keep choosing happiness, it becomes our natural way of being and connects us with our true nature.

It's Not Personal

The ego-self is in the habit of taking everything personally. It over-identifies with everything it perceives, and in doing so it confuses its sense of self with the "object" it is perceiving.

Emotions are the most polarised aspect of our being; i.e. they carry the most charge. So the more emotion we experience the more difficult it is to keep things in perspective and remain objective. The more emotion that accompanies an experience the more we identify with it and the more we take it personally.

Our thoughts and emotions feel very personal and very unique to us, but actually we all have similar things going on inside of us, so they aren't really that personal or unique. We all have similar exiles and ego structures, so we all see things in broadly the same way. We are all living in the same world, walking similar paths, having similar experiences and reacting in similar ways. So is life really that personal? From an objective point of view it all seems pretty generic and universal.

We can learn to take things less personally by expanding our outlook and seeing life as an integrated universal process, rather than a purely personal experience. Life is a vast, impersonal, universal process that doesn't belong to any one individual. Life happens and we are simply someone experiencing it. Seeing life from this impersonal viewpoint gives us the space and perspective that can help us to avoid getting caught up in personal issues.

The more we can de-personalise our experiences, the more we will dis-identify with our ego. A simple way to do this is to not think "I am happy" (or sad or angry or whatever), but to simply notice "I am experiencing happiness". By not identifying with the emotion we are not confusing our sense of self with it. By simply noticing that we are experiencing an emotion, our experience is less personal and our sense of self remains clear. Our experience doesn't change, but our relationship to the experience changes radically. We change our perspective from the feeler (ego-self) to the witness (true-Self).

When we cultivate more accepting relationships with our experiences (i.e. they become less personal), we will also find that we are better able to cultivate more accepting relationships with other people.