

What Is It To Be Happy?

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Happiness has to be prepared and cultivated by each individual by means of coming up with challenges that are a test of one's abilities

We spend a lifetime seeking and sustaining that experience of satisfaction, pleasure or happiness, but are never satisfied! So, perhaps we pursue it wrongly, looking outward into things and relationships, whilst ignoring inwardly experiences associated with it.

Understanding Happiness

It is indeed difficult to describe this complex experience called happiness, but we first must understand the differences between pleasure and happiness. Pleasure is perceived through the senses and is dependent on food, objects, circumstances and people, whereas happiness is a feeling that is independent of the senses and to some extent of external events.

The world is dynamic and ever-changing. So, when the above things are taken away then one experiences displeasure, which gets equated with unhappiness. This means if we

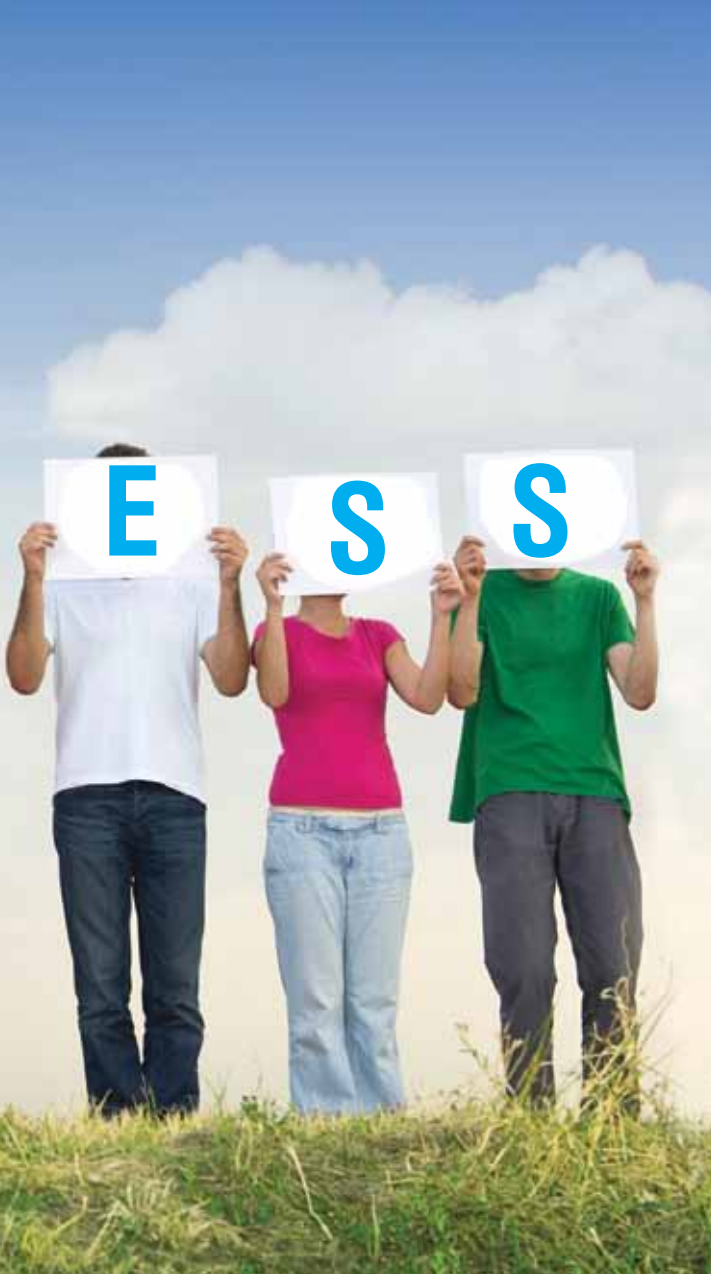
attach ourselves to certain situation or objects or things, we are bound to experience unhappiness sooner or later.

However, great thinkers of the past have stated that happiness comes from within oneself and we have attempted in vain to find happiness by assigning power to things outside of ourselves. Thus, perhaps we should invest our psychic energy on knowing ourselves and this will lead us to a happier state- one that will last longer!

In simple words, happiness is having a sense of purpose and meaning in life which brings satisfaction and contentment. Also, it is a well-known fact that happy people experience and report an inclination to feel positive emotions and a have an enhanced capacity to understand and recover from negative emotions.

Can Money Buy Happiness?

We all hope and believe this to be true, but decades of research has revealed that acquisition, money and privileges



do not bring happiness. It may bring momentary pleasure and satisfaction, but this wanes soon afterward. Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman's study noted that emotional well-being rises with log income, but there is no further progress beyond certain annual income. He concluded that high income buys life satisfaction but not happiness.

The Recipe For Happiness

The basic recipe for happiness includes a directed investment of psychic energy and effort to achieve optimal experience which leads to a status of harmony and flow.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, psychologist and pioneer in the field of studying happiness in a scientific manner, claims that happiness simply doesn't happen. It has to be prepared and cultivated by each individual by means

of coming up with challenges that are a test of one's abilities. The challenges shouldn't be too simple or too difficult. He also states that the finest times in an individual's life are not the receptive, passive or relaxing moments but the ones where the individual's mind and body voluntarily stretches its limits to achieve a difficult yet worthwhile goal.

'Flow' And A Goal

Mihaly learnt that individuals found genuine satisfaction in a certain consciousness state known as 'flow.' One can attain this state when completely involved in a given activity and consciously focus attention on the specific goal. A state in which everything else ceases to matter, making it a thoroughly enjoyable experience!

Harmony And 'Flow'

A similar experience is described by musicians, sport persons and bikers. For example, runners report a sense of harmony and flow while running. Though the beginning of a run requires effort, but as one's pace, breathing and heartbeat synchronizes running becomes effortless.

Musicians experience flow at the time of creating a harmony when the self disappears and nothing else matters. This is a blissful state. Likewise, bikers report that when they set out on a long ride, they harmonize with the bike and the road. After hours of riding, biker reports a feeling of uniting with the bike and experiencing a state of alertness, harmony and flow.

Happiness And Harmony

Mahatma Gandhi believed that one can attain or experience happiness when one is in harmony with themselves, their words, thoughts and actions. He said, "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony."

A Journey Not A Destination

The other noteworthy recipe for happiness is the ability to form connections with other individuals, to concoct meaningful and desirable relationships in a community. Studies over the years have reported that people who are truly happy are known for their strong and healthy relations with the community and other people.

Additionally, it's important to keep an eye on your destination but not at the risk of ignoring the process and/or journey of getting there. Importantly, once you arrive, there has to be a perennial appreciation of the fluid state of happiness and willingness to pursue it again. Hence, it is safe to say that happiness is a journey, not a destination.