

DISCOVERY OF HAPPINESS



BY A B MEHTA

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PREFACE

Who doesn't want to be happy? All our actions are oriented towards this goal. However, most of us struggle during our entire life trying to be happy. Probably the highest level of happiness is experienced when we become free of an illness or get relief from pain. We also feel happy when we receive some good news or when our boss, friends or family members compliment us for something we have achieved in our life. But most of us miss simple day-to-day opportunities to experience happiness.

My childhood was generally happy with caring parents and a reasonable school and college performance. The only period that could have given unhappiness was during my long illness as a child. But I would not have, probably, realized it, as it is the parents who undergo tension and worry about our health in the childhood.

The first real testing period came during my adult life in 1963 when my son had an attack of polio. He struggled between life and death under life support system as a six-month old child. My wife and I found our selves helpless. When he survived and was discharged from the hospital the happy feeling we experienced could not be described in words even though all his four limbs were paralysed. The very fact that he was alive was enough to give us happiness. We never thought even for a moment as to how we will look after him. Today he is 47 years old, largely confined to his bedroom but we feel unmitigated happiness by the simple fact that he is with us.

I am an engineer and a soldier, having served in the Indian Air Force. By nature I derive great satisfaction when I am able to help someone even at the cost of some inconvenience to myself. After retirement from service, I decided to settle in the city of Bhopal. The availability of my two brothers-in-law, who are doctors there and could attend to my son, was the main reason for this. The city, being the capital of the state of MP, has provided me a lot of opportunity to be usefully occupied in tune with my nature. I joined the local Senior Citizens Forum whose activities are oriented towards helping the less fortunate elder citizens and bring happiness in their life.

While searching for information on topics of interest relevant to the senior citizens and sharing the same with our members, as a part of forum discussions, I became

aware of the problems of elders, how they can remain useful to the society and what makes them happy. This led me to think about compiling the information in a book form to cover most of the topics of concern to elders. I felt very happy when my book “60+”, the first written by me, was printed and released during the 6th National Convention of Senior Citizens held in Bhopal on 8th October 2006. A friend asked me that if one followed the suggestions and took precautions as given in the book would one lead a happy life. While my answer was that the book only tries to tell one how to get over the problems that we are likely to face after we cross the age of 60, it did trigger the thought process in me to learn more about what causes us to be happy.

I critically observed people who seemed happy, particularly those with no clear reasons for their happiness. I studied what is happiness from different viewpoints and in different situations. I read a number of books, browsed through Internet articles, read stories in the newspapers covering incidents causing people to be unhappy or making them express their happiness and discussed these with my friends. I also tried to find out the reasons from those who looked unhappy although superficially having all the comforts and no known reason for unhappiness. The result of this introspection is this book. The book primarily covers those aspects of happiness that are universally known but are ignored or forgotten, hence I have given it the title “How to Discover Happiness”.

The objective of writing this book is to share with the readers as to where and how in our day-to-day life could we find happiness through our actions and responses to situations. It is however for the readers to find it in their own way within their environment. In my earlier compilation ‘Dialogue with God’ I had made an attempt to present an imaginary ‘friendly dialogue’ with God based primarily on the contents derived from Gita. Gita is the most read spiritual text of Hinduism that has also been analysed by many non-Indians. I wrote it tailored for Indian readers in the style of a series of three books by Neale Donald Walsch titled ‘Conversation with God’. In addition books like ‘The Monk who sold his Ferrari’ by Robin Sharma, ‘Awaken children’ by Swami Amritaswarupananda of Mata Amritanandmayi Mission and many more provided me the input for the contents of this book. The messages contained in these books continue to be the cornerstone for understanding what constitutes happiness, particularly spiritual happiness. More words of wisdom by many learned persons and contents of numerous submissions by surfers of the many Internet Forums also provided me with

inputs for the book. A few of these I have included without modifications. **These are all acknowledged with gratefulness and included in the Reference chapter**

I will derive happiness if the suggestions contained in the book trigger the readers to view life in a way that makes them, as well as others with whom they interact, **HAPPY**.

Anand Mehta

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A UNIVERSAL DESIRE

Swami Chinmayanandji said... The tragedy of human history is decreasing happiness in the midst of increasing comforts.

How to be happy and contented in life? Can we find happiness when there is so much poverty, illness, death and destruction in this world, so much evil, murders, rapes and hatred. One is usually advised to not watch TV news or read newspaper if one wants to live a stress free life. But can we avoid these? Day in and day out we have to face personal problems, family concerns, job related disappointments, unjust society and nation wide corrupt environment. We just can't run away and hide. Within ourselves there are conflicts and emotional experiences, (both positive and negative) anger, hatred, jealousy, sadness, resentment, love, elation, excitement and so on.

Among all this confusion and chaos, we are often advised to remember that life on earth is a temporary existence. Yes one fact that no one can deny is death. Death is the only thing in life that is guaranteed. No one is going to live forever. Life is a journey we all take, for some it is short, for others long, but ultimately it is a journey that will one day come to an end. What happens after that can also be debated and discussed, but not the reality of death. But as long as it lasts we have to face the ups and downs in life. So

the only course left to us is to catch the instances of happiness, make conscious effort to avoid or quickly get over the negative moments and deliberately search for experiences that can give us happiness.

George Bernard Shaw said, “Life is a splendid torch which I have got hold for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generation”.

Most of the religious scriptures define the path to happiness through prayer of God, doing one’s duties in the best possible way, being truthful, detachment from desires and above all through love of every living being. Hence happiness and religion and/or spirituality are interrelated. Even the Atheists have some ethical considerations to derive happiness from their daily activities.

It is also important to keep in mind those aspects of our daily behaviour and reactions to situations that could make us unhappy or happy. Many of our acts that may give false sense of happiness can make us unhappy in the long run. Similarly many of our acts of omissions and commissions that we may find troublesome or unimportant could make us happy later on. Simultaneously the impact of our actions on others has also to be taken into account before we embark on those actions. There could be conflicting situations where either we or the other person would become unhappy. It would be individual decision in such cases to choose the path that may be of larger family/community/national interest.

What is Happiness?

Every person defines happiness in the context of a situation. We all have different goals at different times. In early student life these can be in relation to our performance in studies, our job as an adult, meeting the needs of our family, our financial security for future and finally our search of enlightenment if we are religious. But the reason why we want to reach these goals is ‘because we want to be happy’. A similar action or reaction may cause happiness at one time but may not do so at another time. Since everyone wants to be happy but is unable to find it all the time, the learned men when approached have given practical or philosophical definitions for the guidance of

common people. I have given below a few of these to enable us to appreciate the meaning of happiness in different context.

Happiness is when what we think, what we say, and what we do are in harmony. **(Mahatma Gandhi)**. Vashi Ram Chandi puts it across simply as “This is being in harmony with ourselves; being in harmony with the environment; being in harmony with nature; being in harmony with the universe”.

Just material things or comfort alone do not make us happy. We may have a good bed but may be unable to sleep. **(Sri Sri Ravishankar)**

Happiness is not getting what we want but it is in wanting what we've got. **(Albert Schweitzer)**

A feeling of contentment created when all of one's physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual and spiritual needs have been gratified. **(Mark Twain)**

Happiness is not in having or being—it is in the doing. **(Socrates)**

The best way to cheer you up is to try to cheer somebody else up. ~**Mark Twain**

Nobody really cares if you're miserable, so you might as well be happy. **(Cynthia Nelms)**

Happiness - state of well being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. Happiness - emotions experienced when in a state of well being. **(Thesaurus Definition)**

People are as happy as they decide to be - **Swami Sukhbananda**

Many others have identified happiness, as they understand from their experiences of life. All of us go through such experiences and we can benefit by knowing how they have interpreted them.

- Happiness is an inner state of well being that enables us to profit in our life from our highest thoughts, wisdom, intelligence, common sense, emotions, good health and spiritual values.
- Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.

- Happiness is not a thing in itself—it is only a contrast with something that is not pleasant.
- Happiness: An agreeable sensation arising from contemplating the misery of another!!
- Happiness is mostly a by-product of doing what makes us feel fulfilled.
- Happiness is not a destination we arrive at but a manner of traveling.
- Happiness is a state of the mind where the individual feels that “life is good”. Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking.
- The dictionary definition of happiness is “feelings of joy and pleasure mingled together”
- Happiness is not merely a life lived by accumulating moments of pleasure. On the contrary, happiness is a long lasting and enduring enjoyment of life; it is being in love with living.
- Happiness is more a state of health than of wealth.
- Happiness is not a reward-it is a consequence. Suffering is not a punishment-it is a result.
- Happiness is not in our circumstances but in us. It is not something we see, like a rainbow, or feel, like the heat of a fire. Happiness is something within us.
- Until you are happy with who you are, you will never be happy with what you have.
- You cannot get happiness just by following others like sheep.
- Happiness is based on the will to change from a situation that is making you unhappy.
- It is not a goal to be gradually achieved; you are either happy or not.
- You have to be tolerant, learn from mistakes, active, focused on your strengths and aware of what is good for you.
- You have to learn to say NO for being happy.

(Some of these are taken from <http://lifehappiness.org/>)

A practical concept of happiness

Happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random chance. It is not something that money can buy or power command. It does not depend on outside events, but, rather, on how we interpret them. Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control their inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy. *The inner life and the practice of its skills are the keys to living happily.* –Tony Wilkinson

Rational approach tells that Happiness is probably the balance of pains and pleasures, fortunes, sacrifice, love, cooperation, harmony, justice, truth and decency. Happiness stands for forgiveness and justice. Without happiness, life is dry and meaningless. With happiness, life immediately becomes fulfilled and wonderful. Happy people keep themselves happy because they know how they tick; they know the little ways to appreciate themselves and to see the humour and magic in each moment.

True happiness lies in the rough road between wishes and their fulfillment, and not in the absence of struggle for satisfying wishes (**Swami Sukhbodhananda**).

Happiness is the name of compromise with unpredicted life. Happiness is the name of struggle and courage. Happiness may be founded in seeking of true knowledge and rule of wisdom. Happiness may be shared in service and duty. Happiness is also the name of success; happiness may also be founded in the progress of humanity. Happiness may be seen in the laughs of small kid, tears of a mother, and genuine concerns of a trust worthy companion. This life is combination of joys and sorrows and honest efforts should be made to make this life a journey of happiness, love, peace and harmony because LIFE could be a play/game of one innings -**Mehmood-Ul-Hassan Khan**

PERCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS

It is unique for each

Each one of us has his own set range for happiness, which is largely inherited but subsequently modified through his experiences and influences in life. When we identify our highest strengths and virtues, the things we're best at, we are better prepared to achieve lasting happiness. It's a discovery within us. It's not doing something external. It's finding what we're really best at and doing it more. Unfortunately Most of us spend our life physically, intellectually and morally utilizing only a small part of our potential. As soon as we become slightly happy, we become lazy and do not follow up our dreams and thus waste a large portion of our life. To live life to the fullest, we have to throw away 'garbage' of data and actions and allow only the best information to enter our mind and take up only meaningful actions. Even a single negative thought can lead us to a path that would make us and/or others unhappy. Instead of being consistently miserable one should be habitually optimistic.

Inaction can never lead us to happiness. When we are inspired by some great purpose, all our thoughts break their bonds and expand in all directions in search of a new, better and wonderful world. Dormant forces and talents become alive and we discover a greater person than we ever were in the past. Mind is a wonderful servant but a terrible master. Exercise it the right way; use it all the time under our ethical control so that it follows the right path and does not become our master.

There's been evidence for a long time that people who are seriously religious are less depressed and more optimistic and hence happier. This is because they do not spend that much time thinking and striving for meeting their physical desires. Secondly, people who are seriously religious are at a tremendous advantage if they choose to lead a meaningful life. They use their spiritual strengths in the service of something much larger than they are, and that is a tried-and-true route to satisfaction in life. By seriously religious we mean a person who does not consider religious rituals as everything but who practices ethical living and has true faith in God.

Some of the many misconceptions or **Myths** concerning the pursuit of happiness are:

(One) Money brings happiness. False. It may help or it may hinder. Some men have sold their happiness, but no one was ever able to buy it.

(Two) That pleasure is the same as happiness. False. You can wear yourself ragged in pursuit of pleasure and still wake up in dull despair.

(Three) That fame brings lasting happiness. False. They may not show but it is true that most of the famous people were not really happy all the time.

(Four) That happiness must be found in far places. False again. We carry the seeds of happiness within ourselves.

(Five) We should renounce the world to be truly happy. False. We must carry out our duties with efficiency participating in the progress of the world and welfare of our family and friends and search for happiness.

Changing Perception with age

The perception of happiness changes with age. A child can be happy as soon as his guardians attend to a few of his needs. As we grow older we want to get many more things, many more successes and independently try for them. The following paragraphs indicate some of the changing perceptions with age.

As a Child

When you were born, you were crying
And everyone around you was smiling.
Live your life so at the end,
You'll also be smiling.

Very often, we consider childhood days to be a period of happiness. In reality, as children we do not understand what happiness is. Under the protection of our parents, we pass our days in a perpetual round of enjoyment, which undoubtedly gives us pleasure. It is a common sight to see a small child crying and the grand mother telling the new mother to feed the child as he has become hungry. The moment his hunger is satisfied with mother's milk, he gives out a satisfied belch and either goes to sleep happy and

contented or shouts out in pleasure ('kilkari'). The child's needs are limited but these must be met immediately to make him happy.

What makes slightly grown up children happy? 'That's easy,' you might say, 'a new toy, an ice cream or a trip to the amusement park.' While these things bring an immediate smile to many children's faces, they are probably not the things that will keep them happy day by day, or turn them into happy adults. After all the elders control what is supposed to be 'good for them'. When they are happy playing we call them back for studies, mud that they enjoyed playing with has to be washed off. They must have their glass of energy drink whether they like it or not. Every time they are being prevented, interrupted or corrected in the name of good behaviour! "We believe the behaviour of happy children is a result of unconditional love and straight, consistent, caring parental instructions and demonstrations of how to think and solve problems." **We give many "don't" messages to them but very few "do" messages to them.** (From the famous book 'Staying OK')

As we enter adolescence, changes take place in the mind and physical body causing us to become aware of the existence of the opposite sex and we begin to experience a new kind of attraction giving rise to disturbing emotions. At the same time, curiosity drives us to find out about the facts of life, through peer discussion and book reading.

What makes Children Happy?

Even though we might all like to know the key to happiness, there is actually relatively little psychological research on this topic. In the past psychologists have tended to focus on how disorders involving negative mood can be prevented rather than how happiness can be achieved. However, more recently psychologists, notably Professor Martin Seligman, have developed what they call 'positive psychology': the study of happiness and well-being.

Research, time and again, has shown that good relationships are necessary for lasting happiness. This brings us directly to children, because children's relationships with their parents (or other primary caregivers) are the starting point for happiness. Professor John Bowlby, a pioneer in the study of parent-child attachment, believed that

this relationship has enormous influence in shaping a child's self-esteem, his/her expectations of other people and view of the world in general.

Professor Mary Ainsworth was the first to develop a way of formally classifying the different types of relationships that exist between parents and children. Her test, called the 'Strange Situation', involves observing toddlers' reactions during a series of separations and reunions with the parent. Securely attached toddlers protest when the parent leaves but are quickly comforted when they return, whereas insecurely attached infants continue to cry or avoid the parent when they return. It is seen, as can be expected, that securely attached toddlers typically go on to have more positive, less troublesome relationships than insecurely attached toddlers, including relationships with friends, with romantic partners, and even their own future children. A happy note is that having a bad childhood does not necessarily doom children to repeat the same negative pattern with their own children. If a parent has reflected on their own bad childhood, attempting to make sense of past events, they are less likely to repeat the same negative pattern on their children.

While relationships are extremely important for children's happiness, another important ingredient is called mastery. This means that children are happy when they have something they are 'good at', and when their family and other important people in their lives notice and appreciate these skills. However, children should not be so focused on goals that they feel their happiness depends directly on achieving them. For example, a child who enjoys playing football for the game is likely to be made happier by the experience than one who can only feel happy if the team achieves a win. The tendency to feel that happiness is dependent on achieving particular goals is called 'conditional goal setting'—'If I score a goal in the game, then I will be happy'.

Genetic and Physiological Factors

Up until now we have been considering how life events and circumstances contribute to happiness. However it is important to keep in mind that a large part, perhaps even more than half, is dictated by genetic factors. For example, studies have found that children of the same parents who were raised in different families show striking similarities in the level of happiness, whereas unrelated children living in the same families do not. These types of findings may partly be attributable to the link between personality, known to be quite heritable, and happiness: people with extroverted personalities tend to be happier than those with more introverted, 'neurotic' personalities.

Research does show that some basic aspects of the brain circuits involved in emotion are in place from very early in life. Professor Richard Davidson, an expert in the brain bases of emotion, has shown that people whose brains are more active in the left frontal area tend to be more positive, outgoing, and smile more; by contrast people who show the opposite pattern of more activity in the right tend to report more negative thoughts, be more shy, and smile less. While this basic pattern can change as people's feelings change from moment to moment during the day, it is estimated that about 60% of the variation between adults reflects the stable characteristics of the person.

Professor Davidson and his colleague Professor Nathan Fox have shown that a similar relationship between brain activity and emotion is seen even in newborns. They gave newborns either a sweet taste or a sour taste to induce positive or negative emotions, and then measured brain activation using the electroencephalogram (EEG). Newborns showed greater left frontal brain activation while smiling for the sweet taste but greater right frontal activation when showing disgust for the sour taste. Studies of older infants show the same type of results: at 10 months of age infants displaying right frontal brain activation are more likely to cry when their mother leaves than those displaying left frontal activation.

Do these types of studies mean that a child's level of happiness is 'set' from the very beginning of life? The answer to this question seems to be 'no'. Life events and circumstances contribute as well. Moreover, particularly during development, the aspects of happiness reflected in the EEG measures are changeable. While this study does not tell us what factors led some children to remain very shy and others to become less shy, it does suggest that it is possible to change a child's basic emotional outlook. What, then, makes children happy? In the long term, the basic ingredients that make children happy during childhood seem to be the same ones that help them to become happy adults: a secure relationship with parents gives the base to confidently explore the world and develop a sense of mastery and recognition, all important components in the recipe for happiness. However, in the short term, the new toy might provide a smile too!

Forcing Children for Your Happiness

When someone says "happiness?" Usually, what comes to mind are things, or outcomes. Happiness can be in owning an independent bungalow in the suburbs, a high-paying job, an expensive new car, or a child who becomes a successful professional. We have a tendency to externalize happiness. It becomes something intimately involved in a

thing or event. It becomes a goal. Unfortunately, the path to that goal is often ignored. The new car could only be purchased if you denied yourself simple pleasures over two years in order to afford your new status symbol. And what about your child? What would he be required to do in order **for you** to feel happiness about what he or she achieves academically, socially, or professionally?

Once you associate happiness with goals, both you and your child are primed for a fall. The goals, many of which are unobtainable, become traps; if they can't be reached, neither can your happiness. And by focusing on the goal, the path is often ignored. Often we want our children to achieve those aims that we could not achieve. Everyone wants his son to be Sachin Tendulkar in cricket or Abhinav Bindra in shooting. Who would not want his daughter to be Saina Mahiwal. We force him or her without taking into account his interests, capabilities and environment just to satisfy our expectations that may be only linked to fame and fortune.

“I love my kids dearly and genuinely want the best for them. But already I have ideas about what I think is best for them. So even without intentionally wanting to... as they grow up, I'll be influencing them to do the things that I think will be best for them. Unfortunately I really do not know what is really for their best, as I do not know what is best for ME!” - Most parents.

Radhika Nagrath describes how difficult it is for us to live like a child. “To live like a child and be happy like him, one should forego the obsession to please others. Everybody appreciates truthfulness as compared to superficial ways of impressing others. Experiencing chilled like joy has unfortunately become a rarity. A child is a born optimist and experiences joy in every act, as he is oblivious of the result. He is always in the PRESENT and enjoys simple joy of ‘being’. We tend to brood over the past or worry about the future, letting slip the present moment that is lost forever. Let us be happy like a child with less inhibitions, spontaneous in laughing heartily and taking the life as not a burden or chore but as a journey of discovery and the resulting joy of coming to know and experiencing new things.”

As a Teenager

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