

Happiness

(a set of criteria, an equation, and an implication)

1.

The Dalai Lama teaches that the purpose of life is happiness.

The American founders declared that the pursuit of happiness was an inalienable right.

Both are revolutionary ideas.

Understandably, the leaders of the American revolution found it unnecessary to specify exactly what they meant by happiness.

Better that we, as individuals and society, find out for ourselves.

The subject of happiness has inspired anecdotal accounts, reports, descriptions, and stories told and retold throughout history. Although, admittedly, they are few compared to those related to misfortune, grief, and tragedy.

Endless philosophical discussions, treatises, and more recently scientific studies, polls, and questionnaires on the subject of happiness are routinely prepared, evaluated, and analyzed.

Subjective and objective attempts to qualify, quantify, and generally reach a consensus as to the true nature of happiness tend to be dismissed, maligned, marginalized, misunderstood, accepted without qualification, or relegated to the mystifying or the unattainable.

Given the desperate search for true happiness, world-around, clichéd as the subject may be, I offer a set of criteria for defining human happiness.

Here are three elements, taken collectively, that may describe the state of true happiness.

Adaptability (the secret of life): the ability to adapt to one's immediate surroundings; to be flexible under a variety of circumstances and situations; to adjust, without necessarily inviting compromise

2) *Realizing individual potential*: the ability to maximize one's intellectual, emotional, and physical capacities

3) *Knowing that you are fundamentally loved* and appreciated by family or friends; accepted by society

These three simple criteria for happiness, easy to describe, are clearly outside the grasp of many, and extremely difficult for most.

2.

I distinguish happiness from pleasure as a measure of duration. Happiness is experienced over a longer time than pleasure, which is more short-lived. Joy is also short-lived, similar to pleasure.

These are *my* distinctions.

Levels of serotonin, dopamine and other neurotransmitters operating in the brain are associated with degrees of pleasure, joy that determine the intensity of our everyday experience.

I don't know of any clinical definition for happiness.

Along with the set of criteria detailed above,
1. adaptability, 2. realizing potential, and 3. being loved,
I have a simple *equation* for happiness.
(Try to write that in a sentence without blushing.)

Here it is.

Happiness (contentment) is inversely proportional to the amount of pain + stress + disappointment in our lives.

The less pain (emotional and physical, including disappointment) and stress (due to any cause including fear, anxiety, frustration), the greater the overall contentment.

Stress may be caused by intellectual or emotional confusion, by anger, and by short-lived forms of depression not based on a chemical disorder, such as personal loss or the inability to act effectively in a critical situation.

Seems simple and obvious.

Eliminate unnecessary pain and stress, minimize disappointment.

You're left with contentment. Perhaps even happiness.

Easily said. Hard to do.

3.

When things in our life don't work, when things fall apart we become stressed, angry, disappointed, depressed.

The result is often loss of pleasure, joy, and as time goes by, contentment or happiness.

Figuring out how to make things work is essential for our success and happiness.

When we are able to satisfy enough of our needs and dreams, pain and stress are diminished and contentment fills the void.

The implication is that humans are genetically predisposed toward a state of contentment, that most people are 'hardwired' to be happy. Decades of research in child psychology have shown that healthy babies are content until a basic need goes unsatisfied, or when pain or discomfort intervenes.

We are born into an initial state of well-being. only later do we allow pain and stress to block natural wellsprings of contentment and happiness.