

Is acceptance the key to happiness?

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What is happiness? Modern society would have you believe it magically appears when we lose 10lbs, nail that promotion or marry a hot banker. Maybe you'll experience it when you finally slide into the seat of the convertible car you're coveting. Or maybe it happens when you can hold a headstand away from the wall.

When we attach our happiness to external sources, often projecting into the future, we miss the opportunity to experience happiness in the present moment. After all, we can never control what happens from here on out ... the only thing that is certain is this very moment. By living in the future (or the past), we miss the chance to be thankful for what we have right now ... a capable functioning body that works, that breathes, that has the ability to hug, to kiss, to laugh, to cry, to express itself through movement. And that, my friend, is a miracle indeed when so many people don't have that freedom.

Gratitude is one part. But how to experience happiness when things really aren't that rosy right now? What if life has dealt us something truly shitty and we're struggling to be 'happy'.

Happiness is a state of mind, not an event or an object. A new dress doesn't make you happy, getting a new job doesn't make you happy. Think about it ... we all know someone who seems to be happy even when they don't have much money, or their car breaks down or they face some form of adversity. These people somehow accept that life is not always sunshine and rainbows ... maybe they even find the 'silver lining' in the cloud. They are more content because they understand and that life is full of ups and downs ... this

is the duality of all of life – yin and yang, light and dark, birth and death., and something that is understood on a deep level by all animals. The issue for us as humans is that we are socially conditioned to want everything to be nice and comfortable all the time.

For me, it helps to understand what it is with this wanting to be ‘ comfortable’. As human beings, we have created so many distractions to medicate us from the natural and unavoidable difficulties in life. We lose ourselves in glossy magazines selling idealistic images of what a ‘ happy life’ should look like, we drown in reality TV shows and heavily filtered Instagram accounts that often don’t represent reality at all. We become addicted to alcohol or drugs or look for the happiness in the arms of other people. I read an amazing quote today by Victoria Eckerson that goes “ are you feeling a bit shaken, maybe stirred, maybe fearful and doubtful and completely utterly, wildly terrified? Good. Keep going”.

We spend our whole lives running away from the things that challenge us when in fact it is precisely the things that make us feel uncomfortable that provide the biggest opportunity for learning about ourselves and our patterns. We think that if only that person changed, or if this situation wasn’t happening then we would be happy. I’m sorry to tell you, but you will never be able to control the outside world. You can’t change your partner’s control freakishness, the fact that the dog is barking through your meditation. You can’t change the neighbors playing music on a Sunday morning or the fact you lost your job this week. When things happen in life to push your buttons or challenge you, you have two choices ... resist and run away or lean in and

listen. What is the lesson? How can I turn this into an opportunity to live in harmony with the world, to let go of my preconceptions and judgments? Where am I focusing my energies?

So next time a relationship brings up emotional challenges or that work promotion just isn't happening, notice where your mind goes. Notice where frustrations and expectations arise. Allow life's challenges to teach you about your patterns. The first step is awareness, the next step is to practice letting that shit go and appreciate the miracle of each moment, each breath, how it feels to be alive. Being present teaches us the temporality of all things ... sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't, sometimes it's up, sometimes it's down – c'est la vie.

As we practice gratitude and acceptance in each moment, it begins to filter down into all aspects of our existence. We become calmer, softer and more grateful for who we are and what we have right now. And what a lovely kind of happiness it is.