

Happiness is a Thought Away!

by Michael Lantz
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What is happiness? It may mean different things to different people. The dictionary defines happiness as a feeling or showing pleasure, contentment, or joy. It also has been described as a feeling of satisfaction that something is right or has been done right. Others use the word in connection with an expression or feeling of gratitude. Do you notice the connection with all these definitions? They are connected by a state of being that is joined together by a feeling. For this discussion let's refer to that feeling, however defined by different people, as "a high mood".

What causes someone to be in a high mood? Can this high mood be turned on or off whenever one wished to? Can it be maintained consistently over time?

I think it is safe to assume that everyone wants to be in a constant state of high mood. It has been said that the objective of every person alive is to be happy.

Certainly you will know when you are not happy. You will most likely do whatever is necessary to rid yourself of the awful feeling of unhappiness, or low mood. You may try different approaches such as spending money on something new, or perhaps you will seek out certain friends that are in a state of happiness so that their high mood rubs off on you and makes you feel better. You may just want to "get away", traveling somewhere to distance yourself from your problems, to forget the cause of your unhappiness.

What happens after trying to achieve happiness by means outside of you such as those described above? After the feelings of excitement wane, the low mood usually returns exacerbated by the disappointment that occurs after these outside activities fail to change your circumstances. This cycle may repeat itself, resulting in frustration making the low mood even worse. This is what may appropriately be called insanity; doing the same thing repeatedly but expecting a different result. Let us then explore a different method of achieving happiness.

I will make the argument that objects outside of yourself; people, places or things, can't help you achieve a permanent high mood. These three things are connected to happiness; however, they are not the key to lasting enjoyment because they themselves are temporary. For example, people change, places lose their savor and things become old, unusable or broken.

Perhaps you know people who lack one or more of these three variables in their lives, yet they are very happy in spite of it. How do they accomplish this?

First, let us focus attention on a variable that exists during both high and low moods; belief in the thoughts behind the mood. We all have thoughts; we are thinking all the time. The characteristics of those thoughts are different during states of happiness and unhappiness, but in both cases we believe in the thoughts we are having.

Let's say you are in a low mood and believe the negative, low quality thoughts you are having. Possibly you think that another person that means a great deal to you doesn't care for you. You may think that someone is upset with you for something you did or did not do. These thoughts are associated with feelings of unhappiness.

If you have money problems, perhaps you believe that having more money would make you happy. Thoughts of not having enough make you also believe that you are not worthy or good enough to have more. These thoughts may make you feel guilty for not being able to provide an adequate lifestyle for your family.

Do you believe you are being criticized because you are overweight, unattractive or have outdated clothes? These thoughts may make you withdraw from others or you may become judgmental of other's looks because you are trying to justify your low self-image. Usually, unhappiness is associated with those that are judgmental of others.

The ironic fact is that when you are happy, you also believe the thoughts you are having. You believe that other people in your life, people that you genuinely love and care for, also care for you. If you are happy with the material things you own, the feeling comes from believing you are blessed with everything you already need.

When you are in a high mood about your work, you believe that you have good skills that they adequately deliver value to others and that others are appreciative of you.

When you are happy, you believe good thoughts about yourself. You probably don't think about others looking at you and passing judgment about your imperfections, or the alternative, you don't care if they are passing judgment because you have thoughts of security and esteem. When you are happy you don't seem to worry as much about situations that you can't control.

Now, consider your beliefs in your thoughts as the link between being happy or unhappy. Understand that you have a constant supply of thought and your choice of which thoughts to believe or not believe will determine your state of happiness.

During a counseling session on this subject between a skillful counselor and a patient that suffered from chronic depression, the question was asked, "Have you ever been terribly miserable and in a very unhappy state when something happened to cause you to snap out of your bad mood?" Upon reflection, the patient said, "Yes. After a day at school where I feel like no one cares about me, I'm usually in a very low mood. I love to play video games, and my brother will call me up and invite me to come over to his

house and play a game with him. I stop thinking about how much I hate myself and my life.”

What do you think the patient discovered from the answer to this question?

He discovered a very important truth; that his state of happiness was determined not by circumstances but by how he thought about those circumstances. His circumstances were exactly the same during his unhappy and depressed state as they were during his happy state. The only difference was his belief in his negative thoughts. He discovered that he could control his thinking and turn his mood from low to high instantly by thinking and believing positive thoughts.

Thoughts constantly run through our minds. Some of those thoughts will be of high quality and some will be of low quality. The universal truth is that we can be conscious of those thoughts, choose to dismiss the bad ones and grab hold of the good ones. Over time, and with practice, you can learn to control the thoughts that run through your mind. You'll begin to see the direct correlation between your mental state, happy or unhappy, high mood or low mood, and the quality of your thinking.

I would submit that you can change how you think and that happiness is only a thought away!