

DEFINING HAPPINESS

What does it mean to be happy?

DON'T YOU THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME TO REDEFINE HAPPINESS? Driven by our false expectations, we cannot be happy until all of the circumstances of our life are handled—our life is in order, everything is working perfectly, our 2.8 kids are grown, have a 3.6 grade point average, we are the perfect weight, our IRA is fully funded, everyone likes us, and we can afford to sit and sip margaritas on some sunny stretch of beach somewhere. It's not a wonder that we loose sleep and sit with varying degrees of disillusionment and fatigue instead, rather than with salt on the rim of our glass.

We set ourselves up for failure. We never reach our intended destination because we impose limitations and conditions on our definition of happiness. What if we discovered that happiness already is? What if we have just blocked our vision or taken a bit of a detour? Happiness is ours now when we clarify our definition, making it more accessible from a new perception.

Contrary to what we are told often, the journey of life is not about getting 'there.' The real truth is that there is no 'there' there. Now is all we really have. Our adventure is about changing our focus. It's about finding our way home by looking inward more than we look outward for what we are looking for. It involves taking the wheel and steering our way back to the main road of moment-to-moment joy. Blending together one conscious moment after another, we realize a deep sense of peace even on the occasions that the road we travel is rough or slippery. We get a glimpse of knowing that the most important things in life aren't things.

What a relief it is when we recognize that happiness need not be limited only to when life is going as we planned. It can exist simultaneously with sadness, change, and disappointment



by changing our viewpoint and expanding the way we look at life, placing our attention on now. With an open mind and a willing heart we discover that joy can exist—even amidst detours and less than perfect times. We really can be happy regardless of our circumstances. Trust me, it's possible.

Why should you trust me?

Children in innocence often ask insightful questions. When I was a kid I began to notice the evident number of unhappy people. Everyone seemed too anxious or too busy to experience joy and recognize the things I saw as wonderful about life. My questions of why were never met with a clear answer. It didn't make sense to me. I couldn't understand why people would over-and-over make the choices that had already proved to lead them to greater stress and unhappiness. It didn't seem like it was meant to be that way. Hmmm, choice. Most of us don't believe that we really have a choice.

This childhood curiosity prompted my attempts as an adult to unravel this mystery. My investigation was channeled into my psychological training and private practice for over twenty years in the field of stress management. Though I was clinically trained as a stress expert, and had plenty of my own stress to prove this true, it only took me fifty years to gather the courage to declare myself an expert in happiness instead.

All my studies, degrees, credentials, and work experience have served me immeasurably; however, they offered me only limited clues and guidelines for how to be happy. They outlined and belabored the severe complexities of unhappiness. Life was not defined as a natural state that was occasionally interrupted by a painful experience. Instead, the pain of life was the expected state that was occasionally relieved by moments of joy. Of course, happiness caused suspicion and was criticized as a way of avoiding 'real' issues.

The focus was on the negative, and the message was that life is hard. The conclusion is that mental and emotional health is



inaccessible or arduous to achieve. It is an involved pursuit for which we just don't have time. So why bother?

Without a doubt there are serious psychological disorders that require more than the strategies offered in this book. However, most of us are fortunate enough to enjoy basic emotional stability. All we need are specific directions for how to calm our negative thinking and and change our focus from the things in life that aren't working. We need a cheering section to applaud us as we redirect our energy to all the things that are working. Despite our fears, we are not broken. From time to time we forget that we are essentially magnificent. Happiness is ours when we remember our wholeness, and consciously channel our attention from chaos to calm.

It feels like a bold step at this point in my life to make happiness a priority and teaching happiness my career choice. Many are still focused on dysfunction and use the degree of struggle as their measurement device for success. Effortful living has been our identity for far too long. It's time to head in a new direction.

The key is to be willing.

Has life been driving you crazy? We regard ourselves as victims of life—we whine, complain and blame, unclear how to do it any other way. Most of us would prefer not to see ourselves as victims of life even though we react as if we are at the mercy of it. Setting our fears and disillusionment aside, I believe people are really willing and hungry for relief from the pain of their victimization and negative perception NOW. We all long for a more peaceful, balanced, and meaningful life. Although a bit road weary, we're compelled to make an authentic contribution. We're eager to renew our hope and motivated to learn the practice of living with joy by climbing back in the driver's seat on the journey of life. But, how?

Life is not always easy, but it can be simple even when things are tough. The key is to be willing—letting go of resistance,



analysis paralysis, and the need to be right. Life is hard when we feel lost and focus on what's not working. It becomes simple even when it's not easy when we have a clear direction and place our attention on the things that are working. The road is smoother when we muster the courage to take a small step while daring to make the mistakes necessary for our growth. With willingness, love and support the door of limitless possibilities is wide open. We have the ability to remember our wholeness, see our strength, and find our way back to our state of natural joy.

Perfection is not a prerequisite for joy.

To declare expertise in the art of being happy is not meant to imply that we experience unwavering high moods and uninterrupted joy. Contrary to another common myth, perfection is not a prerequisite for joy. Let me be the first to admit that I have moments when I let the circumstances of life get the better of me, causing me to feel totally isolated from my wisdom, compassion, creativity, and confidence. Like almost everyone, I occasionally experience a melt down. I have my fair share of heartbreak, mistakes, and emotional baggage to declare. The reassuring news, even though we resist it, is that setbacks are an integral part of teaching us what we are here to learn to expand our success and personal excellence. We all have them. Living a purposeful life of self-acceptance is what life is all about.

Even with and expanded by life's inevitable highs and lows I consider myself to be a happy person. It is because I have detoured into sadness and disillusionment that I have become a more credible guide. Because I steadfastly hold joy and simplicity as my compass even when at the bottom of one of life's potholes, I can offer you a personally tested road map to more consistent happiness regardless of your circumstances. I can also offer you the assurance based on experience that you will be all the stronger for your off-road experience.



None of us look forward to periods of great effort and challenge. Many of us have perfected avoidance and denial. Over time and with patience, though, I have learned the benefits of embracing rough times rather than resisting them. Like it or not, there is always a valuable lesson and all things have a deeper significance.

There is always a gift. When we are open to this, all facets of life become easier. We can welcome and integrate them to our benefit. Our self-confidence expands when we willingly face each situation with courage and curiosity, rather than fighting or sidestepping life's obstacles immobilized by our fears and consumed by doubt.

Happiness as a priority.

Happiness is easily discounted as a subject of substantial value in face of serious corporate decisions or the world's social problems. Yet, we no longer can ignore the impact of the increasing number of people disconnected from their joy. Unhappiness continues to be dramatically demonstrated by fits of road rage, school shootings, job dissatisfaction, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and other social symptoms of pain and despair. It may seem too simplistic, but it is our disconnection from happiness that feeds the problems we face.

Estranged from true happiness, we are suspicious of and even irritated with anyone who seems content with life. Perhaps they are in denial, on drugs, or wanting to sell us something. We conclude that if they are smiling they're up to no good. Our suspicion disguises our true jealousy. We feel that if we cannot be happy, no one can! What we really wish is that we had their sense of optimism. Instead, we resign ourselves to feeling alone.

To fill our emptiness we seek out those who will commiserate, taking odd delight in the competition of seeing whose life is more complex. As the saying goes, "Misery loves company."

Fear has a loud voice when it raises doubt in the strength of



love and the power of happiness.

What if...“Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. No one was there.” —*Old English Proverb*

The pain of the world has been enough to lull us into resignation. We need to shift our focus away from what is not working and retrain our attention on how good it will be to live in a world where happiness is operating at full capacity. We must then move step-by-step in that direction with relentless and resilient conviction.

I have chosen happiness as my priority. I invite you to do the same and see what miracles happen. It is because happiness is my direction even though I fall off course from time to time that I regard myself as a trustworthy driving instructor for your refresher course in learning how to *DRIVE YOURSELF HAPPY*.

Life on the road to happiness.

My commitment is to teach about happiness until those who have forgotten remember that we are already whole and complete. It will remain my purpose until we all can rest in self-acceptance, greater consciousness, and dare to love others and ourselves to full capacity. All of us will experience a better world when we are certain of our unique gifts without being distracted by self-doubt.

The “C” word.

Many of us have developed an allergic reaction to commitment. We regard it as something irreversible, restrictive and painful as a result of our own distorted experiences of the truth. But, it’s gotten a bum rap. Commitment is a promise to willingly remain conscious about having our words and actions match our values, to admit and amend when we fall short, and to renegotiate with integrity when we must. It invites us to be who we really are. That’s a good thing.

One of the ‘funny’ things about life is that when we make a commitment to something specific, we can expect any number



of opportunities to test our level of commitment. The publication of this book has been a lengthy process, and I honestly considered giving up more than once. I questioned at each apparent roadblock if it might be too big a dream to create a way for happiness to be believable and applicable for those who are weary from their travels.

Every strategy and belief has been tested. Self-doubt crept in, hooked up cable and ordered pizza more than once. Somehow finding the energy when I thought there was none left, doing my best to ‘walk my talk’, and having the encouragement to start one more time than I stopped is what finally brought this book across the finish line.

I sincerely hope this book will be one of those treasured resources on your shelf that you visit often, as you would a dear friend. However, I did not write this book only for you. I wrote this book as a handy reference guide for myself, as well, to remind me of the things that are truly important. Like you, I will reach for it when I need a reminder of the wisdom I know, but have forgotten. It will assist me in redirecting myself back to the road of happiness, helping me remember that love is what fuels the adventure we face.

I offer you within the covers of this book some simple directions for maneuvering more happily through life, making it possible for us to fully experience each day—each life of days—as a little more satisfying and simple, regardless of our circumstances.

So, how do we realign with happiness?

How do we create simple ways to remember our commitment, day-in and day-out, to a life of joy when we are tested and tempted to forget? How do we shift from apathy to anticipation? From fear to excitement? From criticism to compassion? From sarcasm to hope? How do we find the courage to prioritize what is important to us and dare to live boldly according to what we believe? That’s what this book, this adventure, is all about.



There is no magic formula. There are many variables and unknowns. The journey is more fun when we venture along this road of discovery with a flexible sense of where we are going, willing to make mistakes and open to learning from them. When we travel with love as our ultimate goal we refocus our perceptions. Gradually we decipher a more efficient and enjoyable way of life that is more than just making a living. This new awareness provides us with the ability to recognize the signs of happiness along the way that affirm what we have known all along—that love is always the answer, being happy is a choice, and both are possible regardless of our circumstances.

Please pause and linger long enough with your renewed wisdom to see new possibilities well after the pages of this book are closed. If so, I will have done what I came to do.

Fasten your seat belt, put your hands on the wheel, welcome aboard, and remember to...

Travel lighthearted,

Rhonda Hull

