


A person is standing on a rocky shore, looking out at the ocean during a sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange glow and a long, shimmering reflection on the water. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The person is silhouetted against the bright light of the sunset. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Happiness Is Found in the Present

ELIZABETH M. LYKINS
Awakening Happiness Within



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~Joseph Campbell

Being Who You Are

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When we are very young children, typically too young to have any conscious memory of that time in our lives, we are in awe and wonder about everything. Everything is new, exciting, and captivating. We trust our instincts and are entertained by our individual creativity and desire to explore. As spiritual beings with a newly acquired mortal body, everything is an adventure.

One of my favorite memories of my daughter's infancy, is when she first discovered her feet. She laughed over and over as she held onto them, touched them, tasted them, and studied them while holding them in her hands in front of her face. It was magical to watch and a reminder to me that the happiest moments of life are found in the little things.

As our development progresses, we begin to absorb the opinions of others about us...

"Don't touch that!"

"You are too loud!"

"Don't talk back to me!"

"Be quiet!"

"Good girls don't..."

"Good boys don't..."

"Grow up!"

"Don't be so stupid!"

Once we start school, we are exposed to all manner of commentary from teachers, classmates, school rules, expectations at home, church, and wherever we are, we are given expectations and critiqued. We become conditioned to think small, to live quietly, to be like everyone else, to fit in, to be what others expect of us.

For many, who we really are, what we really want, and how we choose to show up in the world, becomes dimmed by the expectations and social conditioning of others' expectations and perceptions of who we are. We stop trusting our instincts, our intuition; we stop listening to the voice within to guide us. We start looking outside of ourselves for answers, for comfort, for a sense of being.

Once we succumb to the whims of whoever is currently in our life and the desire to please them, we become even smaller and smaller. Unhappiness sets in and at that point, we only experience brief moments of happiness from external events, substances, or things. We are surrounded by a society that teaches us that the perfect wife/husband/partner, the perfect job, making millions of dollars, and having a vast amount of material things, will be all that we need to be happy. As we come to believe this, who we are becomes even smaller.

How can we be happy then; truly happy?

The answer can be found in a most unlikely place...

The key to your happiness lies in who you are BEING; who you are at your very core; being in alignment with your spiritual self. If you are living your life to please and confirm to others' expectations of you, you will never experience lasting happiness. There is no lover, job, spouse, amount of money, or material things that will be coming to save you. Only YOU have the power to create your happiness.

The past has no power over you now and is only a memory; the future is only wishful thinking. Only in this present moment right now, can you find out who you really are at your spiritual core. In moments of silent reflection, you can begin to feel and know with absolute certainty, the observer behind your thoughts; the spiritual essence of YOU.

I promise you that if you take time to connect with your BEING, all the DOING that needs to be done, will fall into place for you, at the very moment that your life is being directed by your BEING. You will stop living small. You will no longer see yourself as others see you. You will KNOW yourself again. From that place of BEING, you can begin to create the life that you really want. The life that only you can lead. The contributions that only you can give to the world. The authentic, unique, amazing YOU.

BEING yourself, is the privilege of a lifetime.

Who will you BE?



The Problem with Future Thinking

As a mindset coach, mentor, and medical provider in urgent care/emergency medicine over the past few decades, I have worked with a parade of people struggling with anxious thoughts. In my work in a clinical setting, anxious thoughts are often extreme enough to cause physical symptoms and mental illness.

The physical body is designed to survive and save itself from danger. This built in safety mechanism is commonly called the "fight or flight" system. When faced with a dangerous situation, thoughts of perceived danger, send a signal to our autonomic nervous system, causing us to have a rapid heart rate, sweaty palms, and other signs of feeling ready to either run or fight to save ourselves. This is life-saving when we are about to be attacked by someone attempting to rob us (or worse). It is not so great when this same "fight or flight" system is activated from worrying about paying the bills, if our child will graduate with honors from college, or what to do about a cheating spouse. It is exponentially worse when this fight or flight mechanism is chronically activated.

Whatever we think about, the physical body will respond to with an appropriate response for those given thoughts. If we are thinking anxious thoughts, our body will respond with activation of the "fight or flight" hormonal response. If we are thinking that all is well in our world, the body will be in the "feed and breed" mode, which is a state of calm... our natural state.

Since the human brain is like a sophisticated computer with billions of gigabytes of stored data and conditioned responses about how to react to the recall of that data, we simply cannot control what thoughts pop up in our head or what triggers those thoughts. However, we DO have control over how much attention we give to those thoughts. This is very powerful.

When you are feeling unsettled and anxious, if you are not in any imminent danger, pause for a moment and reflect on those thoughts. If the thoughts are propelling your mind into future, "what if" scenarios, recognize them for what they are... imaginings of a future that has not and likely will not ever happen.

Then, take a look around your immediate surroundings. Notice the sounds, the smells, the colors, the temperature of your surroundings, how the chair feels under you. This will bring you back to the present moment, where all is well in that moment... the moment of right now. As you do this, you will begin to feel a moment of calm, even if it is a very brief moment at first. Within that calm, you can receive direction about what to do right now, stepping out of the hamster wheel of future horrors that will likely never happen.

Taking life one moment at a time is living life as it is, not as we wish it would be. When we go with the flow of life as it is, as if we have chosen it, we develop insights on whether to walk away from a situation, tolerate it for now and change what we do about it later, or challenge the circumstance at that moment. Decisions made from a sense of calm, are usually the correct ones. Impulsive decisions made from fear or anxiety, usually do not turn out well.

Coming back to the now and pausing for guidance from within, will also allow those anxious thoughts to pass through you, bringing you back to your natural state of calm and well being.

If you are feeling anxious, irritated, or unsettled, this is either future thinking or past memories about grievances or loss doing the talking. When you are feeling calm in spite of your circumstances, your life is being directed by your inner wisdom.

The next time that you are swept away by anxious thoughts, stop what you are doing and look around at your immediate surroundings.. and what is around you right now. Chances are, in this moment, you are safe and sound. The future will take care of itself if you live in the now, with ongoing direction from within as difficult circumstances arise, when they are actually occurring in the present moment. As Eckhart Tolle describes in a variety of ways in his books, this is the power of NOW.



Happiness is Not Dependent on Your Circumstances

“Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.” ~ Carl Jung

Just what is happiness and how do we achieve it? The answer is not where you may have been conditioned to believe it to be.

Have you ever watched a young child at play? They live entirely in the present, not concerned about what happened an hour ago or what will happen 2 months from now. Children under the age of 3, have very little concept of time. This is really a blessing in disguise. Because of this lack of understanding about the manmade construct of time, they are entirely free to just BE.

When I am providing medical services in urgent care, examining many small children goes with the territory, especially during this pandemic. When I enter the exam room in full personal protective equipment looking like some weird spooky astronaut, children under the age of 5, typically are very cautious and frightened of me. They already do not feel well and may have memories of receiving vaccinations or other unpleasant procedures from prior visits to their pediatrician in the same building.

During that visit, the child will go through a gamut of emotions which may include distrust, fear, fighting me vigorously as if they are fighting for their life during my exam, then quickly forgiving me while resuming their playtime. Usually, by the time they leave, they are back to playing, often waving goodbye and smiling as they go. Children at this young age, live in the present moment and let emotions move quickly through them, not lingering on any one thought; that is until they are older and conditioned to do so.

By the time we reach school age, we start looking to others for how to behave, how to react, what to say and do, to fit in. This is reinforced by our parents, caregivers, friends, and teachers. Little by little, we surrender our own wants and desires for the affections and praise of others; looking outside of ourselves for fulfillment. While we do need to adjust behaviors somewhat for a group learning environment, much of this structuring, becomes internalized and merged with who we believe ourselves to BE. Who we are at our core, becomes smaller and smaller to please those around us, so we can fit into what is expected of us. Before long, we no longer recall who we really are, having surrendered ourselves to the external world.

We are conditioned throughout our lives to look to others for happiness and love, to complete us; for pleasure, for entertainment, for learning how to function in the world. We are further indoctrinated to believe that a good looking, sexy life partner, a job, a career, a 5 bedroom home on the beach with a commanding view, a 6-7 figure income, a luxury car, a summer home, luxury world travel, and many of the latest and most expensive “things” will bring us happiness. We complete advanced degrees, get high powered jobs, marry and have children, acquire thousands of connections on LinkedIn, and thousands on Facebook and Instagram... while we may have brief, moments of pleasure, alas they do not last for long. Then, off we go to look for something else to bring us happiness.

In my own life, I searched for many years for happiness in various philosophies, religions, and spiritual practices; travel; career opportunities; and much more. While I felt that my consciousness was gradually raised from what it was previously, I still struggled with feeling happy and fulfilled. I had become a human “doing” and was no longer a human “being”. I was not content to just BE. I was so detached from who I was at my core.

During my extensive search for happiness in the external world, I came across the teachings of Eckhart Tolle, Don Miguel Ruiz, Sydney Banks, and others, who all pointed in their various ways, to happiness not being something that is external to me, but something that can only be found within me. That understanding changed the trajectory of my life and who I was BEING.

To really understand how to be happy and to live a fulfilled life, you would first need to understand who you really are. You are a spiritual being, housed in a mortal body with a computer-like mind that constantly makes associations and interprets the world around you, to give you a perception of what life is. All of us are subject to this limitation of mortality vs the Spirit that animates the human form that houses our being. The thoughts that the human mind generates, can seem so very real; but they are not real. They are interpretations of the world through the brain's perception of it. You are not your brain or your thoughts. You are the observer of the activity of your brain (the wizard behind the curtain). You do not have to accept all of the thoughts that your brain automatically generates. (You may want to read that twice and let it sink in...)

You will only EVER find happiness and fulfillment by looking within and connecting with the Universal Spirit inside of you; the Spirit that gives your body life and connects you with all other beings. This is a ponderous statement, but if you let this penetrate you to your core, you will recognize this and know it to be true. You are FAR more than your mortal being, your job, your career, your spouse, your house, or whatever possessions you may have (or not have). You are the Universe experiencing a mortal life.

Understanding this, allows you to view life as the observer of your thoughts, without identifying with every thought that pops up, as being who you are. Happiness is only found within; by being who you are at your deepest level. While you may enjoy most of what mortal life has to offer, you will no longer NEED them, to feel fulfilled. Happiness can then rise up from within you and spill out into your life. With the understanding that your life experience can only be from the inside-out, you will be able to tap into how you felt as a child again, filled with wonder about the simplest things: a blade of grass, a sunset, a puddle of water; you can be more forgiving of yourself and others for not being perfect, realizing that we are all connected as Universal Beings. Underneath the mortal trappings, we are all the same - Spiritual Beings.

Happiness is not a destination. Happiness and love are who you already are. Reach inside of you and connect with your deepest self. That is where you will find happiness. As you do, it will no longer matter what others think of you, because you will KNOW with certainty, that you are the Universe. You are enough... just as you are. Your fellow beings are in need of what only you can offer them.

I am reminded of the words of Anne Frank, who only reached the age of 16. She was born in the same year as my mother. I find great wisdom and inspiration in her words and in the exemplary, brief life that she lived under the most extreme circumstances:

“The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature, and God.”

~Anne Frank

Happiness is not dependent on your circumstances. It can only be found within you. Once found, your external circumstances will not be as important. Your view of the world will be larger and filled with wonder as you remain in the present, savoring who you are. Everything that you have been searching for is already inside of YOU.



~ by Elizabeth M. Lykins

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