



## Happiness

By Wendy Marks  
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I found myself sitting in a rather sad place this week— thinking about people that I know, and ranking my feelings of happiness against what I perceive to be their levels of happiness. I thought about things like my physical, financial, and spiritual situation, and then from the outside looked at theirs, and compared. This, as we all know, is a very silly pursuit, as we could never know another's level of happiness, and the idea of comparison is really just a way of trying to make ourselves feel better by thinking that others feel worse. Not very "bodhisattva" of me! Luckily, I soon was able to laugh at myself. What a ridiculous thing to do. No one can really know how another person feels at any given time, even if you are an empath, for that only gives you an immediate read of someone's feelings, not their overall sense of well- or ill- being, i.e. what it's like to be in their shoes.

So it got me thinking, not for the first time, and I'm sure not the last, about the nature of happiness. I think there are different kinds of happiness. I would call them joy, contentment, satisfaction, and peace. All of these are, of course, my subjective interpretation, and my hope is that they will give you a jumping-off point to realize the truth about your life, and that whatever challenges you are dealing with, things are usually pretty much okay.

I think joy is the immediate feeling of transcendence: seeing something beautiful, falling in love, seeing your child accomplish something wonderful. Or even having a true "aha moment" where a concept or a feeling that has eluded you becomes all of a sudden crystal clear. These are experiences that are by their very nature ephemeral. They can be held for only a short time but can be remembered and relived over and over. Many people see joy—this extreme type of experience—as the only form of happiness. That, I believe, can cause a great deal of unhappiness, for then we are always seeking something that by its very nature occurs without our ability to will it to do so— and catches us by surprise. And that is the joy of it.

Contentment is a more generalized feeling of well-being. As I get older I find that I value it more and more. It comes from the sense that everything is basically okay, and although there will be bumps in the road, basically life is good. It is a sense of well-being rather than a sense of intense happiness; on the happiness scale, it's more the warm bath than the exciting water slide. Contentment requires that we come to acceptance with whatever truly is. It is looking things in the eye and saying okay they're not perfect but they're pretty good and I can live with that. Contentment implies that we are comfortable in our skin and we achieve the balance between What Could Be and What Is. I find that even the simple act of consciously making a delicious healthy meal and enjoying its flavors and textures makes me feel a sense of gratitude and contentment. The underlying concept of contentment implies a sense of gratitude, being grateful for what we have rather than focusing on what we do not.

To me, satisfaction seems to be a feeling of satiation. We are full of the pleasures of

life. We are replete and feel that we have a good sense of accomplishment wherever we are in our life. I remember as a young woman when I was working with disabled adults for a nonprofit organization, that at the end of the day if I had seen growth and change in some of the people who were in my charge, I would feel a great sense of satisfaction— that I had somehow moved the needle for these people, making their life a little better. I find that most satisfaction seems to come from the feeling of a job well done. Whether that job is making a lovely dinner, helping a friend with a problem, or just having a good day where everything went pretty much the way it should.

Peace seems to be the hardest to attain. I think that peacefulness comes from both being in harmony with the self and with the world in general. It is the type of happiness that is reflected not only in how we interact with an individual or a group, but also with the world. Everywhere people are talking about the difficulties and lack of peacefulness in the world. As a reader of history, I do believe that we are in tumultuous times, but historically things have often been much worse. I think we need to bring our peace with us wherever we go. There will always be troubling events in our personal, spiritual and community life. Peace requires that we do whatever we can to make things better, in whatever way that we feel we should. And that beyond that point, we let go.

I'd be happy to hear what any of you feel about all of this. I look forward to your responses. I do think we need to build peace within ourselves and others, because that is the source of the tolerance and unity we so deeply desire.

Namaste,  
Wendy