

# Happiness

Stop looking. It's exactly where you are.

By Samantha Thomas

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Happiness, for most of us, is the complete confluence of all circumstances, at any given moment, such that these circumstances appear to be consistent with our expectations of how life should be. In other words, if everything turns out the way you want it, you're happy. And if things aren't the way you want them to be, you're not happy. The problem with happiness, in this paradigm, is that your happiness is based on present circumstances, which are generally considered to be external to you, and over which you clearly have no control. (Right now, what can you do about the way things are right now?)

You may think or believe or know that you're in control of your life, but that's not being in control of your life. That's thinking or believing or knowing — not being in control. A moment's reflection will tell you that there are billions of people, trillions of other creatures — large, small and microscopic — and all the unquantifiable forces of Nature and the Universe working on the production of this present moment. You are not — even in your finest, most powerful moments — in control of your present circumstances.

Remember also that circumstances change from moment to moment. Everything changes, even the rocks and mountains. The only thing that one can count on consistently is that things will change. Change is a constant. Change is conserved. If you are happy right now, with the circumstances right now, there is some bad news on the horizon. Things will change. Even if you are not happy, things will change. They might get better. Or worse. It will certainly be different.

Trying to get happy, or at least happier, has never produced happiness. Whether or not you get the circumstances you desire, the pursuit of happiness inexorably leads to something, but not happiness. In fact, it might bring you to almost anything *except* happiness. It can lead to anxiety, depression, anger, fear, embarrassment or surprise, but *never* happiness. True happiness is the product of something you can't control, no matter what you think or believe or know about it.

Real happiness, true joy, is found when one is willing to give up his or her expectations of how life should be, in the moment of confronting the circumstances, exactly as they are. So in this paradigm of happiness, there is the choice to recognize that everything is as it should be, coupled with the willingness to give up the inauthentic belief that it should be some other way than it is.

In Paul's epistle to the Philippians, he writes: 'Εγὼ γὰρ ἔμαθον ἐν οἷς εἰμι αὐτάρκης εἶναι. (*Ego gar emathon en hois eimi autarkes einai.*) **I have learned** (*emathon* indicates learning by practice, experience or through the acquisition of a habit), **in whatever condition I am in, to be satisfied** (*auto* is self, and *arkeo* is satisfied, and the word *autarkes* indicates a satisfaction within oneself, independent of external circumstances). Note that he doesn't infer that this happiness, satisfaction and

contentment was a gift from some benevolent deity, but instead he indicates that he learned it through practice or inquiry.

We can “learn” this also.

In the moment of giving up one’s expectations or preferences, in favor of what is possible in the moment, a miraculous thing occurs. The course of life alters. The universe bends to your willingness. Your willingness in that moment creates a new future, and you get to declare it. Paradoxically, it is precisely and only your willingness to give up the pursuit of happiness that produces real happiness.