



What makes you happy? How does one define happiness actually? The second United Nations World Happiness Report released recently ranks India at 117 in the list of the happiest nations in the world and experts consider it a matter of great tragedy that India lags behind Pakistan and Bangladesh. So is there any formula or master key to attain happiness. Experts, saints, psychologists and others try to demystify this elusive thing called happiness

# How Happy is Happiness

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**“My life has no purpose, no direction, no aim, no meaning, and yet I'm happy. I can't figure it out. What am I doing right!”**  
- Charlie Brown, Peanuts.

Is happiness the mere absence of sadness? Is it a purposeful stride towards a goal or the blissful idleness of doing nothing? Is it a momentary flash or a sustained state of mind? Is it a euphoric high or a quiet buzz deep inside?

The answers to these questions would be innumerable and varied. What makes Mugambo khush may not please Mungerilal. While those who cannot figure out happiness are blissfully ignorant, those who think they have it all solved have their

own merry definitions. Neurophysicians would call it a neurochemical spurt, a combination of chemical processes in the brain. Spiritualists would call it a soul state that one achieves with effort and vouch for its eternalness. Boozers would certify oblivion in liquor-induced clouds as the only happiness and poets would dreamily wax eloquent. Of course, Bhutan's former king would ground all those thoughts into reality and call happiness is that what makes for development.

The more the research on happiness, the more confounding the concept becomes. The second United Nations World Happiness Report released recently listed out the happiest nations in the world and experts consider it a matter of great tragedy that India stands 117th in the list, lagging behind what we pompously perceive as hells on earth - Pakistan and Bangladesh.

In the globalised world, as definitions of success and rewards change, as individuals tumble through volatile social transformations, reasons for happiness are also changing, say social scientists. Living in a complex world has, on one hand, increased the tension and strain in meeting expectations, but on the other hand, enhanced the ways and means of finding solace, even joy.

Money can't buy happiness may be a jaded and faded truth now. The younger generation swings in tune with the shifting priorities and says money can, indeed, buy a certain amount of happiness.

“I think money can't buy happiness but it can give you courage to pursue your dreams. Help you do at that instant what you desire to do. For instance, travel and food mean happiness for me and money is a means to attain that happiness,” says Prajwal Reddy, who works with Fox Home Entertainment at Los Angeles. “I don't mind working hard for money as it means getting something that gives me satisfaction,” the young technocrat says.

Revathi Turaga, International Happiness Trainer, decodes this thought process. “It is a cycle. One who excels, succeeds. Success brings happiness. A happy person works more and excels more. Thus the cycle of happiness today continues. Be it for peace of mind or for healthy interpersonal relationships, today individuals strive to find that corner in their life that gives them happiness.” The source thus could be friends or time alone, hobbies or work, learning to achievement, from positive self talk to kindness from others.

The corporate sector has found that this mantra can be a crucial touchstone for its HR strategies. “Organisations take proactive actions to create

happiness among their employees. It could be for profitability or for employee engagement, but the bottomline is that benefits, recognition, motivation, new roles to training new skills, rewards and appreciation are all directed towards this end,” says Revathi, who is also the CEO of India's first face-book-commerce company called Gifting Happiness.

Happy employees are productive employees but this also extends to individuals, adds Prashant Jain, founder of Gifting Happiness. Rewards are no longer only intrinsic but can be induced externally. “Today's generation is fast turning out to be one of wall-wishers. There is a need to replace the likes and tweets, comments and messages with a tangible gift. I believe connecting the virtual world with tangible gifts will fill a gap in happiness-sourcing.”

And this new tangible source of happiness is something that Prajwal Reddy would identify with. “I would work harder for extra income so that I can buy a special gift for my mom. And foregoing some quality time is no issue as all this is part of what ultimately makes me happy,” he says.

Then there are some more who are on the fringe between tangible happiness and internal quest for peace. Sneha Vardhani, a student of NALSAR University, reasons that saying it with cards and flowers and gifts is certainly not passé. But that she is more inclined to look inwards. “My hectic schedules at law school leave no time for emotions and expressions. So I have moved on from café sojourns and shopping trips to finding joy in small things by myself.” Sneha finds that doing new things, doing a bit of service by way of educating street kids near her campus gives her a lot of satisfaction.

For 19-year-old Abhilash Maruvada material things are important but he says he still needs his family and friends to share them with. “I think real

**The World Happiness Report 2013 reveals fascinating trends in the data judging just how happy countries really are. On a scale running from 0 to 10, people in over 150 countries, surveyed by Gallup over the period 2010-12, reveal a population-weighted average score of 5.1 (out of 10). Six key variables explain three-quarters of the variation in annual national average scores over time and among countries.**

- Real GDP per capita
- Healthy life expectancy
- Having someone to count on
- Perceived freedom to make life choices
- Freedom from corruption
- Generosity

## Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index

Blame it on the serene mountains, but it was the kingdom of Bhutan that first came up with the concept of happiness as a measure for development. It was in 1972 that the then king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, evolved this concept to indicate his commitment to combining modern development parameters with Bhutan's Buddhist values. The concept has been used as an official metric in Bhutan until 2013. It is defined as an indicator that measures quality of life in more holistic terms than mere measurement of the economic gross domestic produce (GDP). The Bhutanese survey that measured happiness took about seven hours each but was later modified. Though it lacks mathematical precision, the survey, it serves as a unifying vision for Bhutan's five-year planning process. All proposed policies in Bhutan must pass a GNH review based on a GNH impact statement. The concept requires that all plans answer eight different parameters - physical, mental and spiritual health; time-balance; social and community vitality; cultural vitality; education; living standards; good governance; and ecological vitality. Although the GNH framework reflects its Buddhist origins, it is solidly based upon the empirical research literature of happiness, positive psychology and well-being.

happiness is when you are in trouble and your loved ones stand by you,” the Commerce student declares.

All the traditional things that made people happy are still there but not in adequate amounts is what appears to be the problem. Stressful work schedules, career blues, long commutes, urban travails, relationship complexities and fragmentation of the family structure have made people less happy than they should be. And yet, whatever the external inducements, it is the internal environment that is important, say psychologists. “We are all in a confused state of being. That explains the need for external sources. But still, the reward system is within you and the intrinsic factors are what finally make you happy,” says Dr G Padmaja of the Centre for Health Psychology, University of Hyderabad. Even when the factors are seemingly outside, they serve only as stimuli and the emotion still has to be from one's own psyche, she says.

Watching horses run makes some people happy as does fighters bloodying each other's faces for some others. On the other extreme are higher order inducers such as finding a home for a destitute or serving a needy soul. Most people lie in between, seeking satisfaction in things, thoughts and ideas that impinge their consciousness. As both the definitions and sources of happiness stay in a state of fluidity, individuals and collectives struggle with new dynamics. And, the biggest industry, the sharpest strategy, the keenest teachings, the deepest quests are for finding that simple yet elusive material called happiness.

## What is Happiness?

**HAPPINESS** is indeed materialistic. Disappointing as it is to know, happiness, as pleasure, happens in the brain. Not in the throbbing heart we attribute all wonderful thoughts to. Or elsewhere. Four neurochemicals cause happiness. Endorphins, dopamine, oxytocin and serotonin. Each one has its own function and combines with others to produce that pleasurable state of mind called happiness. Endorphins are chemicals that mask pain and help us to survive through severely stressful situations. Oxytocin is the neurochemical that evokes trust in human beings such as a newborn's affinity towards her mother, which is born out of oxytocin release as soon as the baby is held. Dopamine is the booster, that chemical that gives us a pep and a perk and helps us to get a surge of energy. Dopamine is the neurotransmitter that activates the reward system in the brain and thus makes us happy but can also lead to addictions. Serotonin is the well-being neurotransmitter and is largely concentrated in the gut. It acts as a suppressant of aggressive stimuli and thus creates a feeling of peace. A large part of psychiatric treatment involves giving these supplements from outside though the popular school of thought now is that of positive thinking that enables natural dopamine and endorphins to kick in and heal a sick person from inside.



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