

The Art of Happiness – Words from His Holiness the Dalai Lama

AT a fundamental level, all humans are the same – we aspire to happiness. Evidence shows, that happy people are more likely to find a mate, be healthy, live longer, have greater resilience and capacity to deal with adversity and trauma, be more creative, perform better at work and earn higher incomes and have a stronger sense of self-worth. Cultivating happiness brings tremendous personal rewards but also benefits one's family, community and society, so the question is, how can we be happy?

In this article, I would like to share with you some suggestions from his Holiness the Dalai Lama, on how to be happy.

Compassion

Science has identified that the home of happiness is in the left prefrontal cortex. This is the area that lights up when a person is happy. Surprisingly (or not), of all the participants studied, the happiest are Tibetan Buddhist monks. This has led to the understanding of the inextricable link – between personal happiness and kindness and compassion for others. So it seems, the practice of kindness and compassion is a powerful strategy to increase personal happiness. The very act of concern for others' well-being creates a greater sense of well-being in oneself. This is something the Dalai Lama practices and recommends.

Discipline

Dalai Lama says happiness can be achieved by training the mind. By bringing about a certain inner discipline, we can undergo a transformation of our attitude, outlook and approach to living. Happiness is determined more by state of mind than external events. Identify and cultivate positive



mental states, identify and eliminate negative mental states.

This may not be simple.

You need a variety of approaches and methods to deal with and overcome the varied and complex negative mental states. You need a toolkit of techniques to practice that gradually build up positive practices so the negative behaviours slowly diminish. Systematic training of the mind – the

cultivation of happiness – changes the very structure and function of the brain. Practicing new ways of thinking, we can reshape our nerve cells and change the way our brains work. This is known as plasticity.

Doing wholesome deeds may not come naturally, but we have to consciously train towards it. The Dalai Lama emphasises the importance of sustained effort and determination, the real secrets to happiness.

Comparisons

Feelings of contentment seem to be strongly influenced by comparisons. We tend to compare our current situation to our past to decide if we are happy or not. We also compare ourselves to others. Thus, we can increase our feelings of life satisfaction by comparing ourselves to those who are less fortunate than us and reflecting on all the things we have. To achieve inner contentment – appreciate what you have. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.

Self-centered or socially-concerned?

Is seeking happiness a self-centered, self-indulgent goal? Dalai Lama says No! Research shows that unhappy people are most self-focused and often socially withdrawn or even antagonistic. Happy people are found to be more loving and forgiving, more flexible and creative, more sociable.

By Shazia Omar

Shazia Omar is a well-being psychologist and yoga instructor. To join her classes, please email shaziaomar@gmail.com or join her on facebook/yogilates in Dhaka.



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