

# A Week of Happiness

March 12, 2008 by [lifeshifting](#)

Good Morning folks! Here's the question that I'm pondering these days: When was the last time you spent an entire week just being happy? Sounds simple enough. Maybe this week? Or last? Or is it more like a day here and there? Or even more likely, you might say that you have a "happy life" or had "great year last year"...but seriously, take a look at just one week: do you experience happiness for whole weeks at a time?

If you are like many of my clients...and I always include myself as my most complex, and stubborn, client (!), then the truth is very likely: not often. Recently, I led a wonderful yoga/meditation retreat for 16 amazing people in the spectacular coastline jungle of southern Mexico. About four days into the retreat, it dawned on me that I was *smiling all the time!* ME? Smiling all the time...wow! Known as a committed "frowner" — interspersed with a healthy dose of smurks, chuckles and occasional broad grins...I hardly think of myself as smiling all the time. But here I was, more than halfway through a week of relatively hard work, albeit in a very special place...but still, I was amazingly happy.

Now back in the emergent sunshine of spring-on-its-way New York City, I'm committed to replicating that experience. Why shouldn't I/we be happy all the time? We certainly have plenty to be grateful for: plenty of food, clothing, shelter, and good friends/family. These things are no small feat in a world where a large percentage of the population goes to be hungry every night. Yet, that truth can sometimes feel abstract, distant from our everyday lives.

I have a client who struggles with day-to-day happiness. We have tried working with various journal projects—gratitude journals, vision journals, fantasy journals, etc. Even his dreams are remarkably "happy" and eerily joyous in their rich imagery and narrative. Yet on a day-by-day basis, happiness often eludes him. Stress, duty, overwhelm, sadness, anxiety, these are the emotions that will often haunt him as he gears up for his day, even has he dutifully jots down a few things he is grateful for in his "gratitude journal". If nothing else, he is a good student. And so are we all.

The issue here, as far as I can tell, is that he (and I can relate to this to a certain extent..what about you?) has a very difficult time drawing that fateful distinction between day-to-day "needs" and day-to-day "wants". For example, when I ask him to state what would make him happy—in life—he responds immediately: more love in my life, a great partner, more collaborative and pleasant colleagues, more money, more free time, etc. But when I ask him to start each day by writing down just ONE thing that he wants to experience, that will bring him happiness **TODAY**, he flounders. The list quickly takes on the tone of a "to-do" list. He writes down, without thinking, what he needs to do that day, mistaking getting stuff done, with creating happiness.

Happiness is a lofty concept for most of us, and an elusive one. It is probably not an accident that many other languages just forgo having a word for happiness. The Germans, French, Chinese and others stick to more specific experiences like joy, ecstasy, fun and good fortune. Yet, here in America, with our ubiquitous sound-bite use of the English language, “happiness”, it seems is here to stay.

Witness the latest tome on the subject to hit the Amazon shelves in full force: “Happy for No Reason” by [Marci Shimoff](#) of Chicken Soup fame. Having succumbed to the catchy title myself, I have to acknowledge that it is a good read. She very adroitly captures what I do consider to be the major ingredients required for a life filled more with happiness than that other stuff (anger, grief, anxiety, etc...). She writes about mental, emotional, physical and spiritual practices that need to all work together in a synthesis to complement and integrate the full human experience. You go girl! Especially the emphasis upon the physical—exercise, yoga, movement, dance—these are crucial aspects of human happiness, that in our overly cognitive psychology-stuffed culture often get ignored or denied by the cerebral “talking heads” that make up much of the psychotherapy-world.

Yet, here is the rub: Marci—and me for that matter—may emphasize all the right components that are needed in the mix for a high happiness quotient, yet on a minute-by-minute, day-by-day basis, lots of people still struggle with feeling happy. To be sure, much of this syndrome can be laid at the doorstep of our paradoxical big picture (e.g. fantasy) culture that has a two-second attention span. We seem quite capable of momentary highs and long term visions, goals, and fantasies...but maintaining even one short (or is it long?) week of just plain old happiness is tough.

### **So here’s a test for you:**

Every day this next week, wake up in the morning and do this one thing first, before ANYTHING ELSE: Write down in your journal, or on your refrigerator (or more likely in your iphone (that’s where I do it), one thing that will bring happiness into your day that day. Just one thing. Examples: “I will bring happiness to my client meeting this morning.” “I will be happy during a business meeting.” “I will bring joy to my dinner with the kids tonite,” etc.

Use the words that work for you: happiness, joy, fun, enthusiasm, playfulness, care. BUT be sure that whatever it is you commit to do, it is something that will bring you happiness. In fact, if you do this right—and here is my nod to those left-brain cognitive folks—*just thinking about it may make you happy.*

So give it a try. One week of happiness. The world needs your joy...and you deserve it. Let me know how it goes!

Happy Days Are Here Again...The Sky Above Will Clear Again...!!!?

Dr J

