

# Do you know what Happiness is to you?

**Instructions:** Read each quote and answer the following questions.

1. Which definition do you agree with most? Why?
2. Which definition do you disagree with most? Why?
3. What overarching themes about happiness do you see? Do you agree with them?

“Folks are usually about as happy as they make their minds up to be.”

— Abraham Lincoln

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

“Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions.”

— Dalai Lama XIV

“You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life.”

— Albert Camus

“Happiness is a warm puppy.”

— Charles M. Schulz

“Sanity and happiness are an impossible combination.”

— Mark Twain

“Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it, and sometimes even travel around the world looking for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it. You must make a mighty effort to keep swimming upward into that happiness forever, to stay afloat on top of it.”

— Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*

“I'd far rather be happy than right any day.”

— Douglas Adams

“Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.”

— Aristotle

“Those who are not looking for happiness are the most likely to find it, because those who are searching forget that the surest way to be happy is to seek happiness for others.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

“I am a happy camper so I guess I'm doing something right. Happiness is like a butterfly; the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder.”

— Henry David Thoreau

# Do you know what Happiness is to you?

## Definitions

Happiness is generally defined as subjective well-being, which is to say, an experiential state that contains a globally positive affective tone.

Meaningfulness is both a cognitive and an emotional assessment of whether one's life has purpose and value.

## Meaningfulness vs. Happiness

Meaningfulness and happiness are positively correlated, so they have much in common. Many factors, such as feeling connected to others, feeling productive, and not being alone or bored contribute similarly to both. Yet the two are distinct, and the focus of this investigation has been to identify the major differences in correlates of happiness (corrected for meaning) and meaningfulness (corrected for happiness). Correcting highly correlated variables for each other can reverse effects, which may contribute to some inconsistency in the literature. Future research should distinguish happiness from meaningfulness, because many ostensible contributors to happiness are in fact mainly associated with meaning and have little or no direct contribution to happiness except by way of increasing meaning. For example, helping others may actually increase happiness because it increases meaningfulness, which in turn contributes to happiness, but when we corrected for the effect on meaningfulness, the pure effect of helping others was if anything the opposite: a reduced level of happiness.

Our findings suggest that happiness is mainly about getting what one wants and needs, including from other people or even just by using money. In contrast, meaningfulness was linked to doing things that express and reflect the self, and in particular to doing positive things for others. Meaningful involvements increase one's stress, worries, arguments, and anxiety, which reduce happiness. (Spending money to get things went with happiness, but managing money was linked to meaningfulness.) Happiness went with being a taker more than a giver, while meaningfulness was associated with being a giver more than a taker. Whereas happiness was focused on feeling good in the present, meaningfulness integrated past, present, and future, and it sometimes meant feeling bad. Past misfortunes reduce present happiness, but they are linked to higher meaningfulness — perhaps because people cope with them by finding meaning.

## Questions

1. Underline three key words of each definition.
2. What is the difference between happiness and meaningfulness?
3. How are happiness and meaningfulness connected?
4. What is more important, living a meaningful or happy life?
5. What might it take to live both a meaningful and happy life?