

20 Ways to Find, Sustain and Share Happiness

By Megan McDonough

The Dalai Lama says that we all share one common aspiration: we all want to be happy; no one wants to suffer. This universal desire binds us together. At some point the realization dawns that no matter how big the paycheck is, no matter how many degrees we get, no matter how nice the house and the white picket fence is, none of it can assure happiness.

What is it that does bring lasting happiness, no matter what the circumstance? The ancient poet and mystic Rumi gives us a clue when he says, "Work in the invisible world at least as hard as you do in the visible." The invisible world is within you, and it's where lasting happiness resides.

Here are some suggestions for working in the invisible realm:

1. **Look closely at what causes lasting happiness.** Buying a new sweater might feel good for a moment or two, but looking closely you see that that sooner or later all new stuff loses its appeal, growing old and mundane. Reinforce in your mind that happiness is not the result of accumulating goods.
2. **Savor the moment.** When your child gives you a bear hug, live that experience fully, noticing every little detail. The same holds true for the boring meeting that's putting you to sleep. As Leo Buscaglia, the author of *Love*, says, "Braille your world." Being mindful doesn't mean things will be good, just that you are aware of them as they are, without judgment.
3. **Expand your awareness.** See new perspectives by challenging your own beliefs. Expand your horizons by asking yourself, "What if...".
4. **Play.** Between work, family, and grocery shopping, finding time to play can be just another chore. Forget picking up that gallon of milk on the way home from work today. Instead, tickle your children.
5. **Practice gratitude.** Focus your mind on all that you already possess, relegating that feeling of "needing more" to its proper place. If it works for Oprah, it can work for you.
6. **Follow the yes path.** Margaret Wheatley, best-selling author of *Leadership and the New Science*, says that when events call out yes, follow that path. It's certainly easier than banging your head against the wall.
7. **Take time for self-reflection.** Since childhood, we've been asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" A much better question to ask is "How do I want to be?"
8. **Choose to live your values.** After reflecting on your personal values, instill them in your everyday actions.
9. **Experiment.** Philosopher Nietzsche said, "Life is a thousand times too short for us to bore ourselves." Give yourself permission to try something different, without obsessing over the outcome.
10. **Listen.** Get your mind off your own problems by lending an ear to hear others.
11. **Stay present.** As the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn has recommended in his many books, when you wash the dishes, just wash the dishes. The mind's habit is to rehearse what the future holds or re-run life by mulling over past events. This moment is where life actually is lived.

12. **Smile.** It's such a simple way to change your inner landscape and connect with others.
13. **Know that life is finite.** You are not guaranteed a tomorrow. Your life is precious. Live it fully.
14. **Happiness is here, in this moment.** George Bernard Shaw said, "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." Know that there is nothing to magically "find" for happiness; it's created through you.
15. **Notice your breath.** It's not difficult to simply notice the air entering your body and then watching it exit, but it has a powerful effect. Use it to re-focus from the hectic outside world to an attitude of mindfulness.
16. **Give.** Whether you gift the gift of time, money, or knowledge, sharing transforms the mind.
17. **Your path to happiness is uniquely yours.** Thomas Merton said, "Looking for God is like seeking a path in a field of snow; if there is no path and you are looking for one, walk across the field and there is your path." It's the same for happiness; you make your own path.
18. **Drop the guilt trip.** Go ahead and have a night out with a friend. See the sappy show that your husband wouldn't be caught dead at.
19. **Spend time in nature.** Get out of a world lit by fluorescent lights and divided by cubicles. Take a walk in the woods. At the very least put a plant in your office.
20. **Go to bed early.** Never underestimate the power of a good nights sleep.

Joseph Campbell, who's best known for his forays into Mythology, cited a Polynesian saying to describe the state of humanity: "We are standing on a whale, fishing for minnows."

What you are looking for—what we are all looking for—is as close as your own self. Happiness is the whale right under your feet.

Megan McDonough helps you get clear in body, mind and spirit so you can get the results you want. Along with teaching yoga, she's the award-winning author of *Infinity in a Box*, a marketing consultant for mind/body organizations, and a corporate trainer. She's taught at the famed Kripalu Center, the largest site for yoga and holistic health in the United States and is on the faculty of the Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy Advanced Training. (www.ugetclear.com)