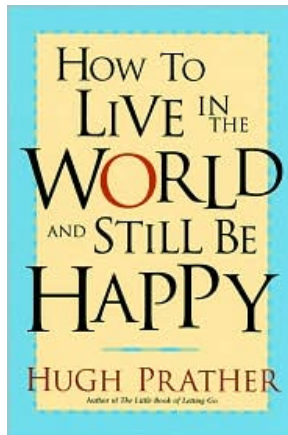


How to Live in the World and Still Be Happy



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■ The Big Idea

Dissatisfaction or unhappiness with so much in life can drag you down: your jobs, your physical appearance, problems with love, money, and health, for instance. These and other such concerns, if focused on enough and given enough importance, can often crush hope and defeat happiness.

Yet there is a flip side: situations such as these can also present powerful opportunities to choose happiness and deepen peace, if you are only sensitive enough to know how to turn disadvantageous situations to your own advantage. But for situations that are beyond your control, the best solution is often readily at hand – simply change your attitudes and be more open to being happy.

In *How to Live in the World and Still Be Happy*, Hugh Prather shows how to reverse the attitudes that hold you back from discovering happiness. He focuses on significant individual issues that serve as roadblocks that prevent many from attaining happiness, and suggests workarounds in the form of attitude changes to enable sufferers to get over them.

Unhappiness

- Happiness is easy; it's letting go of unhappiness that can be hard. The outcome of pursuing the object of our desire, even the most innocuous, is what we sometimes dismiss as "the downside."
- People can also sometimes question their own right to be happy when so many people in the world are very unhappy. There is a significant amount of guilt connected to being lighthearted and happy when there is so much misery in the world.
- You can thus carry with you the belief that you don't deserve to be happy and carefree. It doesn't help that just about everything on the media carries with it the message that the world is wringing its hands, and that you must never forget how much pain and suffering is out there waiting for you to drop your guard.
- However, what did being sick with dread ever do to protect you? Fear is mere static – and can cause its own sorts of problems and results, if you are scared enough to do desperate or stupid things because of it.
- And a happy thought – and all the goodness and kindness that flows from it – does touch everyone for the better, and does manage to improve people's lives, even for just a short while or by a short amount. No amount of fear and hand-wringing over being happy and carefree can change that.

Happiness

- People believe that there is no such thing as permanent happiness. Fleeting instances seem to be the status quo; a whole life of it seems preposterous.
- Plus it's been said that no one in his right mind would want consistent happiness. The way happiness has been set up in your minds is that it's not a state that's reachable for too long. Nothing remains the best; nothing remains better than the other, newer things for too long.
- However, it is quite possible to be happy despite everything – but only if you have a mind to. This means that you can be happy despite all the cares of the world, provided that a unifying goal dominates your mind. Children, for instance, prove that it is quite possible to be extremely active and interested in everything – and still be happy.

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- Children are this way because they have made a single decision about everything – that everything they see is there to be enjoyed.
- In order to be happy you have to learn to manage your anger. You have to realize that anger spreads to everyone around you and not just to the object of your anger.

Thoughts

- Most of you are well aware that happiness is a state of mind. Yet you consistently fail to treat it that way. You are afraid that if happiness is mental, you can be diminished by it – if it's "just" an inner state, you alone are responsible for it.
- You must be careful about harboring critical and/or accusatory thoughts about people. Venting these sorts of judgments simply spreads that energy to everyone and ensures that the problem is beyond your control.
- You must seek to deal with your emotions within yourself. Avoid stirring up other people or increasing the number of people involved.
- You have to learn how to forgive. To truly forgive, you need do nothing. It is an act of the heart, not of the body. It is to give up a narrow point of view and accept a broader, more relaxed perspective – to stop harboring unhappiness and dwelling over what happened in the past.
- The discontent, anxiety, and pointless mental chatter common to people's experience come from preoccupation with past and future. You need to be quiet and still. Focus on the steady ground and broad view of the "now" instead of what's happened and what is to happen (or what might never happen at all).

Stopping

- For many people, solutions are blocked by the failure to stop and look around. Many times you get so caught up in the day's problems that only by pausing and intentionally stilling your thoughts can you expand your awareness.
- It's very necessary to pause and calm the mind for a few seconds in the course of the day, just for an instant – that is all that is needed. Often it is

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easier to settle the mind when the body is still, so this can be done while sitting or standing quietly.

- You have to let the mind drift silently and quietly, and not allow it to get hung up on one or two thoughts. You have to access your heart – your deepest mental level, your core of stillness and peace and the seat of your wisdom.
- Everyone has the right key, but very few use it consistently – in the case of happiness, the key is nothing less than our undeveloped mental focus.
- The key to genuine progress is “Work hard, but expect little.” You cannot expect magical things to happen overnight. You must work at improving your mental focus slowly but surely, and only then will the dividends come in.

Beginning

- As long as you are preoccupied with what is outside, you remain locked in your own self-styled prison. But when you return to what you have within, you then realize that you are free.
- If you continue reacting to the world badly, you remain a victim of the world. The key is to see that your reactions are a choice – and you must choose to become heart-motivated instead of letting the world manipulate you at will.
- The ability to decide is merely the ability to give attention – you have chosen to look away at all else and focus on what ever needs your attention. This is perhaps the most powerful force on Earth!
- Only in looking at your most petty, malevolent and embarrassing thoughts – and in seeing the harm they cause – can you truly be reborn with a pure heart.

Purpose

- Before the subjective mess that most of your lives are in can be cleaned up, a single life purpose must take the place of variable conflicting goals. To reach that essential stillness, you must come to have one, whole, all-encompassing reason for being alive.

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- The exact way we approach your life purpose is not perfectible – there is no one perfect way of stating it. (It does not need to be stated in religious or spiritual terms for instance.)
- Perhaps the oldest and most universally practiced path is the thought that you should treat others as you would treat yourself.
- You have a habit of operating from a series of unconsciously set, conflicting goals (and thus having very cluttered lives); you necessarily want and need a better approach. One simple way to attain this is to decide what kind of person to be (and thus what sort of day to have) before the day actually decides this for us. You can decide before sleeping what your waking purpose will be – you can picture the kinds of things you want to happen every day, before they actually happen.

The Day

- In the early stages of reorienting your mind and mindset, it's common and easy to forget repeatedly the purpose you set that morning. Thus you have to guard against the tendency to count the day lost just because you have already made a couple of obvious mistakes. It is not a mistake per se that delays you – it is dwelling on it.
- The key is to look at how far you have gone rather than how far you still have to go. Your motivation is up to you.
- When you learn to react to every error, no matter what its degree or persistence, by simply acknowledging it and beginning again, then you have removed a big hurdle to your growth. A major help in this direction is routine; a settled daily pattern helps build your momentum because it is much less prone to being sidetracked by small troubles.
- Whenever possible, you should always take care to reduce your contact with outside influences and carefully select what you focus on. This helps you remain focused.

Side Roads

- That great common door through which most forms of negativity enter the mind is premature expectation. If you watch your thoughts carefully, from the moment you get out of bed you start deciding how each event must go in order for your day to be good. But of course little events spiral out of control and you carry frustration from one activity to the next.

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- A surprising amount of your frustration is over what you can't possibly do anything about – either the event has already happened, or it's something that may never happen, or it may happen but not today, or you may simply have no control over it at all.
- Have your heart set on peacefully doing whatever you are doing now. Because nothing will go right today according to your plans anyway – and if it does, it will only scare you.
- What you need to take care of will only be taken care of if you remain in the present. You simply have to carry on with the activity of the moment in the most peaceful way possible; your ability to be happy grows only from repeated attempts to exercise it, despite how unsuccessful you may be each time.
- You shouldn't be afraid to start your day over if you've messed up. To break the situation try to momentarily stop what you are doing the instant you realize that you are experiencing a loss of peace. Do something to symbolize to yourself that your state of mind is more important than whatever it is you're doing at that moment – and then regain it.

Letting Go

- The means of unhappiness are the accumulation and retention of a past. Which is why children are so happy – they drag very little past behind them and have yet to know anything about the implications of what has occurred.
- That the weight of the past that is taken on is an unmistakable process, even just over a few hours. Discouragements, disappointments and anger are taken into the next activity, and a mounting sense of bleakness and weariness becomes inevitable.
- To recapture a good state of mind, you can make reference to three tools, two of which have been discussed earlier (a break on your schedules in the course of a day, a pause between events) and a major period of relinquishment at the end of a day.
- Quietly review your day and then make a conscious effort to let go of anything that is least bit disturbing. Empty your mind so completely that ease and freedom are the only residue from your day.

Areas Of Common Concern: Jobs, Decisions, Money, And Possessions

- **Jobs.** It's far too common to believe that one's job defines one. The seemingly affable question, "What do you do?" really means, "Are you somebody?" But you are not what you do – but how you do it. You will know you are good when you consistently bring goodness to everything that you do.
- **Decisions.** Some people have a problem deciding how to decide. The belief that a more perfect answer is required for a larger question initiates turmoil. But regardless of how dramatic the circumstances are, all you need is an answer that comes from peace.

Some guidelines regarding how to make decisions:

- When you see that you have a question, just stop before you start considering alternatives and ramifications.
 - Settle and still your mind.
 - Look very closely at the problem; take your time to make sure that you see all parts of it very clearly.
 - Look into your heart and ask yourself if you want or need to make a decision today.
 - If the answer is no, wait.

 - If the answer is yes, make sure you are not limiting your options in any way.
 - If you see that there is something specific you want to try first, carry it out easily and happily.
 - Do not reconsider; if you worry, realize that your mental state is questionable.
 - If what you try doesn't work, just try something else; start over.
- **Money.** The central question about money is – what is it for? You believe that you never have enough, that somehow you must always get more, and that you will only rest easy when you have enough. But it is only a means, a medium, a way – and if you stop to worship, or revile, the road leading to a desired destination, you will simply never arrive at it.
 - **Possessions.** This is linked to money, as you are always tempted to let money translate into something tangible – and a more-is-better attitude must have its display. But all this – what you can see, touch, feel – is just form. It is content that matters, and the enduring inner state of inner simplicity (clarity about your purpose and way, instead of adherence to fads and fetishes) is the utmost attainment in this sense.

Body And Health

- There is a limit to what your body can give you; yet what you demand of your body appears to have no bounds. You cultivate impossible physical ideals and are left paralyzed by your inadequate anatomy.
- The body can't be perfected – but it can be changed (for better or for worse). So the only way out is to come to terms with your present body and deal with what you perceive are its shortcomings – and stop dwelling on what once was or what might be.
- A middle road should be walked whereby your body is comfortable in most important respects. They must be guided in a balanced, reasonable way to maintain their health. It is quite possible to discover for yourself what combination of foods makes your body happy, gives it stamina and allows it to sleep well.

Relationship

- In no place is your happiness sought more hopefully and dashed more consistently than in this area. But you still continue to see it as your delivery from a multitude of pains.
- This can be due to extremely high expectations and the ensuing disappointment once a person doesn't live up to these expectations. An expectation is looking *for* something rather than *at* something; you anticipate one thing and fail to see the other thing that is at hand (even if you might already have seen and appreciated it in the past).
- And you should also realize that sometimes you carry within yourself negative expectations – the expectation of abandonment or the end of love. But if you are ever to be free and present in order to have a real relationship with anyone, you have to get over those expectations.
- All relationships should somehow be stripped of both dread and anticipation, and you should look at other people as opportunities to be at peace. All this requires is awareness of how you make your mistakes in the first place, how you set yourself up for pain through your expectations.

Wrap-Up: The Components Of Happiness

- **Simplicity.** This is a stability, a straightforwardness, a purity of the mind that is often expressed in a simpler lifestyle – a simpler diet, a more orderly routine, a more intelligent use of time, less clutter, less financial chaos, fewer involvements – in other words, less world, more peace. There is nothing more to happiness than this.
- **Now.** Allowing your mind to be at ease now instead of later never entails self-conscious mannerisms or a practiced vocabulary. You need to learn to stay in the present, not dwell on the past or agonize over a future that may never materialize.
- **Gentleness.** A truly gentle mind will remain happy under even difficult circumstances. Gentleness can take up any subject without harming it or wishing it harm. It is adaptable, makes allowances, understands – and thus remains itself throughout everything that occurs.
- **Peace.** This – as it is freedom from conflict – is at the core of happiness. If you are not clear about what you are getting ready to do or say, you are on the verge of scattering your thoughts and throwing away your extremely valuable peace. It is a willingness not to rush.
- **Forgiveness.** This is a thought and not a behavior. It is an inner expression of self-respect and integrity. The grounds for forgiving are simple: Grievances are unworthy of anyone.
- **Humor.** This is a continual welling-up of happiness that many children possess. It can be pure and abundant without taking the usual or traditional forms. Be funny; relax; be a little off your guard.
- **Fearlessness.** Fear is one of the greatest depressors of happiness; the lack of fear – stepping into oneself and walking, in gentleness and peace, without it – is one of the building blocks of happiness.
- **Concentration.** Be single-minded, purposeful, focused. Know who you are and what you want.
- **Trust.** Trust your own sense of happiness, of what makes you happy and what does not. Let it spread to everything. Sit down – and know your own heart.