

Creating A Better Neighborhood By Creating A Better "Me" **Happiness Is a Way of Traveling, Not a Destination**

How many of us constantly search for happiness? Thinking that it lies within our grasp once we “get out of school,” “find that new job,” “marry the right person,” “make lots of money,” or “buy that dream house in the perfect neighborhood,” we equate happiness with some external goal. The problem with that logic is that happiness is not an external event and if an external event leads to a sense of happiness, it doesn’t last long. If, once we get out of school, we feel happy, it quickly is replaced by a desire to get a good job in order to be “really” happy. Then when the job comes around, it’s the perfect marriage that will do it, then the car, house, family...on and on until ultimately we spend more time chasing happiness than actually experiencing it.

Why is that? Well, if we equate happiness with an external goal and feel a temporary sense of happiness when that goal is achieved we buy into the thought process that the more we get, the more we will experience that temporary sense of happiness. For many, temporary happiness is better than no happiness at all. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Temporary happiness can be just as addictive as alcohol or drugs because it hints at satisfaction and then frustrates you (“I got that great job, but why am I not really happy? Maybe I need to find someone to share my life with. That will make me happy!”). The result is that we keep going back to that “external goal = happiness” type of thinking hoping for better luck next time. (Just as the drug addict keeps getting high and feeling good, coming down and then getting high again in hopes of finding that same feeling once again.)

The key to finding lasting happiness is to realize that, like love and kindness, compassion and caring, it is not a “thing” that can be found. Lasting happiness is an active process that usually results when we put the needs and desires of others ahead of our own. Think about it. Were not the times when you felt the deepest sense of happiness the times when you did something nice for someone else? And wasn’t that happiness achieved in the PROCESS of giving instead of being the PRODUCT of having gave? During the holidays we buy gifts for those we care about and we experience happiness in that giving. However, it isn’t just when the person opens the gift that we feel a sense of happiness, doesn’t it exist throughout the entire process of finding the right gift, acquiring it, wrapping it, and waiting to give it? Of course it does, because that process is an expression of how we feel about the other person: we are putting their feelings ahead of our own and it makes us happy. The gift itself isn’t the reason for the happiness, the thought behind it is.

So, as we begin a new year, if we can change the way we think about lasting happiness and realize that it is often the result of an active process of being kind, thoughtful, caring and considerate of others FIRST, then we won’t need to rely on external goals to keep frustrating us in our search for happiness. We can then begin to understand that happiness is truly a way of traveling through life and not the result of reaching some final destination or goal. Begin this new way of experiencing happiness by doing something nice for your neighbor, volunteer your time to a charitable cause, or even just let that person into your lane when you’re stuck on the freeway...putting others first is the best way to travel through life if you really want to be happy!