

Happiness is a state of mind

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There are innumerable definitions of happiness. Everybody has their own definition depending on their outlook about life. For example, some get it from money, fame, or helping others while others get it by being close to their loved ones. Googling the word happiness produces close to 50 million results!

Irrespective of the inputs, happiness is a state of mind and when humans feel comfortable in their existence, happiness results. So what is that state of mind which makes us happy? I will try to present in this essay the neurobiological basis of happiness.

When the whole mind concentrates on a single object for a considerable amount of time, we get a sense of well being. This is called [Samadhi according to Patanjali Yoga](#). I am sure each one of us also have personally experienced episodes of happiness when we get completely engrossed in our work or do creative work which requires deep concentration. During this process, we even lose the concept of time. All great inventors and creative people have often said that they were so immersed in their work that they lost all concept of time and space.

Why does whole mind concentrating on a single positive thought give us a sense of well-being? Part of the reason could be that with huge processing power it can resolve all conflicts so that we are at peace with ourselves. Another reason could be that it is a mind-expanding exercise where our minds connect to the Universal Consciousness. Thus, all of us, when concentrating on a positive thought or an idea have knowingly or unknowingly connected to the Universal Mind resulting in happiness.

Similar things were also reported by people who took the hallucinogen LSD or other mind-expanding drugs. Recent research at Imperial College London has shown that fMRI of brains of volunteers taking LSD revealed that the [whole brain was connected during LSD episodes](#) and that such episodes gave great happiness to the users and a sense of

connectedness to the Universe This is similar to the state of [Sanyam \(according to Patanjali\)](#) where contemplation, meditation and Samadhi work together on an object.

The true feeling of happiness also comes when we are not attached to anything including a person or an idea. Detachment helps in reducing the formation of psychological knots in the brain. Psychological knots are produced when brain is not able to resolve properly the mismatch between expectations and reality so that permanent neural pathways or memories are formed. The more such knots in the brain means less available processing power of the brain since such memories use up neural pathways. The concept of detachment leading to happiness is also described in Gita and Patanjali Yoga.

Most of the attachments come because of the desire to possess or own either an object or an idea. Possession gives us a sense of security and hence the need for it. A powerful brain is able to [resolve every issue and thus reduces the desire for possession](#). Desire for possession also comes from fear. For example the fear of loosing out if we do not possess something, etc.

Brain is a continuously active machine and based upon signals from senses and internal churning; there are constant makings and breakings of neural pathways. The numbers of neural pathways available for processing information increase drastically if we have less strong memories stored in the brain.

Strong memories are based on emotional events. Generally such events take place during childhood, in early years or are due to traumatic happenings. According to Patanjali these memories can be dissolved through the science of Yoga and by practising Sanyam.

Some people say money provides happiness. That maybe true since money allows us to take care of mundane things so that mind is not distracted and is able to focus fully on higher goals in life. However money should be looked at as means to an end and not an end itself. This means that there should not be any attachment to money-a very difficult proposition but maybe helped by a powerful brain.

Absence of pain also leads to happiness. Recent researches done at Oxford University have shown that the centers for pain, both emotional and physical, in human brain, are located in [dorsal posterior insula \(front position of brain\)](#) and at the same place where the

[seat of ego exists](#). Thus, the pain management is directed by the ego so that the whole brain is focused for its alleviation.

State of happiness is a complex phenomenon but ultimately it is perceived by the brain and if we make our brain powerful through Yoga and meditation then it can resolve the conflicting issues and help us live a happy and emotionally satisfying life.

Suggested Reading

1. Zoe Cormier, “Brain scans reveal how LSD affects consciousness”. Nature News, 11 April 2016.
2. Anil K. Rajvanshi, “Less Possession Produce Happiness”, Editorial Article in Times of India, 14 January 2005.
3. Oxford University News, “Ouch Zone in the brain identified”. Based on an article published in Nature Neuroscience, **18**, 499-500 (2015). Authors; Andrew R Segerdahl, et. al
4. Anil K. Rajvanshi, “Neurobiological basis of Ego and Anger”, www.nariphaltan.org/ego.pdf.

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