

# What is keeping me from being happy?

'Abdu'l-Bahá would often ask "Are you happy? Are you happy? Are you happy?" and "If not now for what time do you wait?" When I think about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's questions part of me grasps that message and my soul says "yeah!", and another says "Do you deserve to be happy?" Being raised Catholic I believed I have developed an addiction to guilt and penance. Still, I do question my right to happiness free of guilt. My childhood was not one I recall as being overflowing with happiness and joy. My faithful companions in my youth were loneliness and melancholy. So if I may ask your indulgence I truly have many questions about happiness and what the Bahá'i Faith has to say about it. I have prepared my questions and some quotes that I hope answer them at least in part.

## What is Happiness?

Where is happiness? When is happiness? How do I get happiness? For whom is happiness meant? Is it fulfillment, completeness or a burning desire? Is it laughter or a tear of joy? Is it a word, a drink, a state of mind, a vacation, a dream, a reality, an illusion? Is it a reward, a mood, a higher state of awareness or a simpletons thought? Can you hold it, smell it, taste it, see it or hear it? Does it exist? Is it part of the physical world or a spiritual entity? Is it a gift, an award, a treasure? Do I have to steal it? Will I have it if I find it? Can I keep it? Does it belong to someone else? Is it out there or in each of us? Is it mine to hoard or plentiful enough to share? Can I give it to someone? Can I take it away from them? Is it in the lucky penny on the ground? Can you rob another of their happiness? Do you have to be somewhere to be happy? Do I have to do something before I can be happy? Do I deserve to be happy? Can I be happy and for what length of time is it appropriate to be happy? Can I have a happy time, when you are having a bad time? What requirements exist to be happy? Is there a happy pill? Does happiness grow on trees? Is it the fruit or a seed? What does it cost? Is it a smile or a wink or a twinkle in the eye? Is it a lack of something or an abundance of something? If you lost something you want to find, is it better to look for it where you know you didn't have it or where you know you had it in the past? Is it possible to be happy anywhere, anytime? Is it a goal or a path or an aroma? Can I justify being happy in a world as seemingly messed up as this one? Where does happiness lead to or from or through? What keeps me from being happy? Is it a party or a present, a special food dish? Is it in the wag of your dog's tail or the purr of your cat? Can you be happy in your work or is your work the source of your happiness? Do sports bring happiness? Does the musk of the

air after a spring shower contain happiness? Is sleep or other bedtime activities the source of happiness? Is love a requirement of happiness? Do you have to go to school to learn how to be happy? Are you born happy? Do you have to die to be happy? Is there more than happiness? Is there less?

Webster's New World Dictionary defines Happy as:

1. favored by circumstances; lucky; fortunate 2. having, showing, or causing a feeling of great pleasure, contentment, joy, etc.; joyous; glad; pleased 3. exactly appropriate to the occasion; suitable and clever; apt; felicitous ...

Well, then being or becoming a Bahá'í has made me happy by the first definition. I feel I am favored by circumstances; lucky, and fortunate to have found and recognized the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Still I don't I don't know if I consider myself happy just because I'm a Bahá'í.

'Abdu'l-Bahá defined happiness as:

*Happiness consists of two kinds; physical and spiritual. The physical happiness is limited; its utmost duration is one day, one month, one year. It hath no result. Spiritual happiness is in one's soul with the love of God and suffereth one to attain to the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Therefore, endeavor as much as thou art able in order to illumine the lamp of thy heart by the light of love.*

*. . . Anybody can be happy in the state of comfort, ease, health, success, pleasure and joy; but if one will be happy and contented in the time of trouble, hardship and prevailing disease, it is proof of nobility. . . .*

*. . . If material anxiety envelopes you in a dark cloud, spiritual radiance lightens your path. Verily, those whose minds are illumined by the Spirit of the Most High have supreme consolation.*

*I myself was in prison forty years - one year alone would have been impossible to bear - nobody survived that imprisonment more than a year! But, thank God, during all those forty years I was supremely happy! Every day, on waking, it was like hearing good tidings, and every night infinite joy was mine. Spirituality was my comfort, and turning to God was my greatest joy. If this had not been so, do you think it possible that I could have lived through those forty years. . . .*

*Thus, Spirituality is the greatest of God's gifts, and "life Everlasting" means "Turning to God." May you, one and all, increase daily in spiritually, may you be strengthened in all goodness, may you be helped*

*more and more by the Divine consolation, be made free by the Holy Spirit of God, and may the power of the Heavenly Kingdom live and work among you.*

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 673, 674, 263 & Paris Talks 102

Is it that I don't understand what happiness is? Am I looking for something that doesn't exist? Or have I envisioned the wrong picture of my goal? Have I become brainwashed by the TV and the society I live in that I am dissatisfied with "God's greatest Gift"?

*Know thou that there are two kinds of happiness, spiritual and material.*

*As to material happiness, it never exists; nay, it is but imagination, an image reflected in mirrors, a specter and shadow. Consider the nature of material happiness. It is something which but slightly removes one's afflictions; yet the people imagine it to be joy, delight, exultation and blessing. All the material blessings, including food, drink, etc., tend only to allay thirst, hunger and fatigue. They bestow no delight on the mind nor pleasure on the soul; nay they furnish only the bodily wants. So this kind of happiness has no real existence.*

*As to spiritual happiness, this is the true basis of the life of man, for life is created for happiness, not sorrow; for pleasure, not grief. Happiness is life; sorrow is death. Spiritual happiness is life eternal. This is a light which is not followed by darkness. This is an honor which is not followed by shame. This is a life that is not followed by death. This is an existence that is not followed by annihilation. This great blessing and precious gift is obtained by man only through the guidance of God. . . .*

*This happiness is the fundamental basis from which man is created, world are originated, the contingent beings have existence and the world of God appears like unto the appearance of the sun at mid-day.*

*This happiness is but the love of God. . . .*

*Were it not for this happiness the world of existence would not have been created.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, Quoted in The Divine Art of Living, 17-18

Am I only looking for material happiness? What's wrong with material happiness? If I focus only on the material happiness what am I missing?

*When a man is thirsty he drinks water. When he is hungry he eats food. But if a man be not thirsty, water gives him no pleasure and if his hunger be already satisfied, food is distasteful to him.*

*This is not so with spiritual enjoyments. Spiritual enjoyments bring always joy. The love of God brings endless happiness. These are joys in themselves and not alleviations. The life of animals is more simple than that of man. Animals have all their needs supplied for them. All the grasses of the meadows are free to them. The birds build their nests in the branching tress and the palaces of kings are not so beautiful. If earthly needs are all, then the animals are better supplied than man. But man has another food, the heavenly manna of the knowledge of God. All the Divine prophets and Manifestations appeared in the world that this heavenly manna might be given to man. This is the food which fosters spiritual growth and strength and causes pure illumination in the souls of men. They become filled with the breaths of the Holy Spirit. They increase in the knowledge of God and those virtues which belong to the world of humanity. They attain to the very image and likeness of God.*

*God created in us a divine holy spirit - the human spirit with its intellectual powers which are above the powers of nature. By this we enjoy the ecstasies of the spirit and see the world illumined. The tree and the stone have not this power; they have no mind or soul; therefore they are excused. We are not excused. This power gives man effectual control over nature. He is enabled to discover reality and bring invisible things into the courts of the visible. Thus he is enabled to render effective the will of God and give it material station. This is what is meant by Bahá'u'lláh when He said, "Verily We have created you rich, why have ye made yourselves poor?" And Jesus Christ when He said, "The Father is in Me and I in you" It was this power which through Bahá'u'lláh said, "Noble have I created you, why do ye degrade yourselves?" This power distinguishes you above all other creatures, why do you devote it only to your material conditions? This is that which should be used for the acquisition and manifestation of the bounties of God, that ye may establish the Kingdom of God among men and attain to happiness in both worlds, the visible and the invisible.*

Quoted in The Divine Art of Living 16-17 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Montreal, Sept. 3, 1912

OK, I may be seeking pleasure or relief for stress and pain from my daily occupation, is it wrong? Bahá'u'lláh tells us that all must find meaningful work in His dispensation, and I believe that He knew about the state of civilization that exists today and the environment it creates. I want to be happy in my job. I want to perform it in a manner befitting its exalted station of worship when performed as a service to mankind. What, Why, Who is keeping me from this bounty of God's grace and my enjoyment of it? Is it my boss? Or my co-workers or the company or is it the one I see in the mirror in the morning? The guy who wears my clothes, eats my food, drives my car, kisses my wife and kids good-bye.

How can I be happy in my situation? Life's not fair. I do the best I can and still it seems I am dealt the worst hand. What can I do?

*I was happy in imprisonment. I was in the utmost elation, for I was not a criminal, they had imprisoned me in the path of God. . . . I was happy that - praise be to God - I was a prisoner in the Cause of God, that my life was not wasted, that it was spent in the Divine service. Nobody who saw me imagined that I was in prison. They beheld me in the utmost joy, complete thankfulness and health, paying no attention to the prison.*  
'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, 261

*This is the day of rejoicing and the hour of ecstasy! This is the season of the dead arising from the graves and gathering together! And this is the promised time for the attainment of plenteous grace.*

*Be calm, be strong, be grateful, and become a lamp full of light, that the darkness of sorrows be annihilated, and that the sun of everlasting joy arise from the dawning-place of heart and soul, shining brightly.*  
Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 405

*O Son of Man! Rejoice in the Gladness of thine heart, that thou mayest be worthy to meet Me and to mirror forth My beauty.*  
Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, 12

*O God, refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will not longer be sorrowful and grieved, I will be a happy and joyful being. O God, I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life.*

*O God, Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord.*  
'Abdu'l-Bahá

*Ferocity and savagery are natural to animals, but men should show forth the qualities of love and affection. God sent all His Prophets into the world with one aim, to sow in the hearts of men love and goodwill, and for this great purpose they were willing to suffer and to die. All the sacred Books were written to lead and direct man into the ways of love and unity; and yet, in spite of all this, we have the sad spectacle of war and bloodshed in our midst.*

*When we look into the pages of history, past and present, we see the black earth reddened by human blood. Men kill each other like the savage wolves, and forget the laws of love and tolerance.*

*Now this luminous age has come, bringing with it wonderful civilization and material progress. Men's intellects have widened, their perceptions grown, but alas, in spite of all this, fresh blood is being spilt day by day. Look at the present Turco-Italian war; consider for a moment the fate of these unhappy people! How many have been killed during this sad time? How many homes are ruined, wives desolate, and children orphans! And what is to be gained in exchange for all this anguish and heartache? Only a corner of the earth!*

*This all shows that material progress alone does not tend to uplift man. On the contrary, the more he becomes immersed in material progress, the more does his spirituality become obscured.*

*In times gone by progress on the material plane was not so rapid, neither was there bloodshed in such profusion. In ancient warfare there were no cannons, no guns, no dynamite, no shells, no torpedo boats, no battleships, no submarines. Now, owing to material civilization, we have all these inventions, and war goes from bad to worse! Europe itself has become like one immense arsenal, full of explosives, and may God prevent its ignition - for, should this happen, the whole world would be involved.*

*I want to make you understand the material progress and spiritual progress are two very different things, and that only if material progress goes hand in hand with spiritual progress can any real progress come about, and the Most Great Peace reign in the world. If men followed the Holy Counsels and the Teachings of the Prophets, if Divine Light shone in all hearts and men were really religious, we should soon see peace on earth and the Kingdom of God among men. The laws of God may be likened unto the soul and material progress unto the body. If the body was not animated by the soul, it would cease to exist. It is my earnest prayer that spirituality may ever grow and increase in the world, so that customs may become enlightened and peace and concord may be established.*

*War and rapine with their attendant cruelties are an abomination to God, and bring their own punishment, for the God of love is also a God of justice and each man must inevitably reap what he sows. Let us try to understand the commands of the Most High and to order our lives as He directs. True happiness depends on spiritual good and having the heart ever open to receive the Divine Bounty.*

*If the heart turns away from the blessings God offers how can it hope for happiness? If it does not put its hope and trust in God's Mercy, where can it find rest? Oh, trust in God! for His Bounty is everlasting, and in His Blessings, for they are superb. Oh! put your faith in the Almighty,*

*for He faileth not and His goodness endureth for ever! His Sun giveth Light continually, and the Clouds of His Mercy are full of the Waters of Compassion with which He waters the hearts of all who trust in Him. His refreshing Breeze ever carries healing in its wings to the parched souls of men! Is it wise to turn away from such a loving Father, Who showers His blessings upon us, and to choose rather to be slaves of matter?*

*God in His infinite goodness has exalted us to so much honour, and has made us masters over the material world. Shall we then become her slaves? Nay, rather let us claim our birthright, and strive to live the life of the spiritual sons of God. The glorious Sun of Truth has once again risen in the East. From the far horizon of Persia its radiance is spreading far and wide, dispersing the dense clouds of superstition. The light of the unity of mankind is beginning to illumine the world, and soon the banner of Divine harmony and the solidarity of nations will be flying high in the Heavens. Yea, the breezes of the Holy Spirit will inspire the whole world!*

*Oh, peoples and nations! Arise and work and be happy! Gather together under the tent of the unity of mankind!*

*Abdu'l-Bahá Paris Talks, 106-109*

*Work! Work with all your strength, spread the Cause of the Kingdom among men; teach the self-sufficient to turn humbly towards God, the sinful to sin no more, and await with glad expectation the coming of the Kingdom.*

*Love and obey your Heavenly Father, and rest assured that Divine help is yours. Verily I say unto you that you shall indeed conquer the World!*

*Only have faith, patience and courage - this is but the beginning, but surely you will succeed, for God is with you!*

*Abdu'l-Bahá Paris Talks, 101*