

**High-Intermediate 3**  
**Unit 5 Reading**  
**Presented by Mohammad Rajabpur**

## Happiness is ...?

Singers sing about it: Dorothy, for example, sang about what she hoped to find "Over the Rainbow" in The Wizard of Oz. Bobby McFerrin's advice to us in song was "Don't worry, be happy." Filmmakers often make movies with happy endings. Fairy tales typically end with "And they all lived happily ever after." People go to psychiatrists and psychologists to find out if they've got it or to get it if they haven't. There's a common belief that it's essential for us to be happy in life. The American Declaration of Independence says people are entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It's clear that happiness is central to human existence. But what is it? How can we get it, and how can we keep it?



**Bobby McFerrin**

**typically** = usually, normally

**psychiatrist** = a medical doctor who usually treats psychological disorders by prescribing medicine

**psychologist** = an expert in psychology who usually treats psychological disorders through counseling and modification of behavior

**be entitled to sth** = to have sth as your inalienable right

**pursuit** = following, looking for

It was difficult for me to come up with answers to these questions, so I went to The American Heritage Dictionary and looked up "happy." Here's the main definition I found: "Enjoying, showing, or marked by pleasure, satisfaction, or joy." OK. That seems like a reasonable definition. But the concept of happiness is nonetheless elusive. We tend to say things like, "If only I could find someone I could really love, I'd be happy forever," or "I'd be so happy if I just had enough money to buy the things I want and need." That things and even people are not the key to happiness is quite clear, however. How many times have we gone all out to get something we really wanted, only to discover that it wasn't so great once we had it? I decided to do some additional research about happiness. I found out some interesting things.

**reasonable** = logical  
**concept** = idea; meaning  
**nonetheless** = however  
**elusive** = unclear, indefinable  
**if only** = I wish

The first thing I learned about happiness is that there's a big difference between what we think will make us happy and what actually does. According to psychologist Daniel Gilbert of Harvard University, we human beings are very good at describing our feelings and emotions at the moment of a significant experience. What we're not so good at is predicting what our feelings will be like in the future and how long we'll have those feelings. This is because feelings are produced by certain brain chemicals right after we've had an experience. The feelings are recorded in our memory, but the specific chemicals associated with the experience fade rather soon. When we look back on emotional experiences, we still feel the emotions we once felt but not as strongly as before. It's evident that some force in our brain seeks to keep our emotions on an even keel. When we have a humiliating or irritating experience, for example, our brain takes steps to lessen the impact of this experience in order to maintain mental equilibrium. Gilbert likens this process to the way an oyster produces a layer of pearl around an invading grain of sand. It appears that the brain reduces the emotional impact of very positive experiences as well. A few weeks after a positive experience, we've gotten over the "high" and our feelings have returned to "normal."

**fade** = disappear  
**evident** = obvious  
**seek** = try hard; strive  
**on an even keel** = balanced  
**humiliating** = insulting  
**humiliate** (v.) = treat sb disrespectfully  
**equilibrium** = balance  
**liken** = compare

Psychological experiments bear out this notion that humans are not good at predicting their future happiness. In one case, a number of lottery winners who had won large jackpots were interviewed after they had won. They expected to feel happy for a long time afterwards. They did, in fact, feel euphoria for a short time, but this feeling faded, and their level of happiness was soon back to its usual state. In another experiment, students were interviewed about where they thought they would feel happier attending school, in a warm climate like that in California or in a colder climate. Most predicted that they would be happier in warm California, but later interviews showed that students felt equally happy in warm and cold climates. In a third case, people who had been tested for Huntington's disease or AIDS expected that they would be

devastated if they got bad news. Most of them, however, were not. It was those who decided not to be tested who suffered the greatest anxiety.

**bear out** = prove

**notion** = idea

**jackpot** = a big prize

**euphoria** = extreme happiness, ecstasy

The second thing I learned about happiness is that it apparently centers around our ability to adapt to a situation and live through it, especially under adverse circumstances. For example, a professor recounted an experience he'd had with his wife regarding which curtains they should buy for their bedroom. The professor's wife wanted some brown curtains with vertical stripes. The professor hated them and was sure he would always hate them. His wife was adamant, however, and the professor felt it was important that he not get into an argument with her. They went ahead and bought the brown curtains. In time, he got used to them. In fact, not only did he adapt to them, but he also came to like them. It may be the same with most of our experiences. It's not things or people or relationships in themselves that make us happy; it's the process of experiencing and adapting to them that brings us joy and satisfaction. So it appears that the secret to happiness lies not in thinking about what makes us happy but in just "doing it." Perhaps Bobby McFerrin had it right when he said, "Don't worry, be happy."

**adverse circumstances** = difficult conditions

**recount** = tell, say

**regarding** = about

**vertical** ≠ horizontal

**adamant** = stubborn

### **The Subjunctive Structure:**

It was **important** that he **not get** into an argument with her.

**in time** = finally, eventually

### **Full Text:**

## **Happiness is ...?**

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### **Sample Summary:**

The text explores the elusive nature of happiness, beginning with its cultural prominence in music, film, and foundational ideals like those in the American Declaration of Independence. Despite its importance, happiness is difficult to define and attain, as people often mistakenly believe external things—like money, possessions, or relationships—will bring lasting joy. Research shows that humans are poor at predicting what will make them happy and how long that happiness will last, as emotions tend to normalize over time due to the brain's effort to maintain emotional balance. Psychological studies, including those on lottery winners, students, and patients facing health diagnoses, demonstrate this phenomenon. Furthermore, true happiness seems more connected to our ability to adapt to life's situations, even unpleasant ones, rather than the specific circumstances themselves. In essence, happiness may stem more from acceptance and adaptability than from acquiring desired outcomes—echoing the sentiment, "Don't worry, be happy."

### **Main Ideas:**

There's a common belief that is necessary that we be happy.

Happiness is central to human existence, but it is hard to define happiness.

Things and people are not the key to the happiness.

There is a big difference between expected happiness and actual happiness.

Our brain balances our emotions and the impact of our experiences and tries to get us back to normal. That is why our happiness and sadness don't continue forever.

Humans are not good at predicting their future happiness.

**The key to happiness** => **adaptability**