



## Query

**H**appiness. What is it? Where is it? When is it?

At first I thought I'd be happy when I got accepted into medical school. Then I thought I'd be happy when I became a doctor. Then I thought I'd be happy when I finished residency and was practising on my own as a doctor. Then I thought getting married would make me happy. Then I thought having children would make me happy.

See the pattern?

It's always happiness deferred, happiness dependent upon external factors. Staring down the long barrel of a divorce, I've been forced to evaluate a few things. First off, who am I?

Well, that's surprisingly easy to answer. I'm many things. A doctor, a father, a son.

Second, what do I want?

Well, I thought I wanted happiness, since that's the gilded state our culture encourages us to obtain. But now I'm not so sure.

A long-lost girlfriend once told me that I couldn't be the one because I didn't make her happy. After some more experience, I feel qualified to respond, many years later: it's not about happiness. Seekers of happiness will miss the point, they will seek but never find it. It's not about perpetual bliss, it's not about making another happy.

It's about contentment, I think. Being satisfied with oneself.

I once heard somebody say this at a group therapy session — yup, I'm in therapy — and I thought they were crazy. What do you mean, you don't want happiness? I subscribed to the mass delusion. Isn't that what everyone wants? Isn't that what our culture — TV, movies — has conditioned us to expect?

What this person said has stuck with me, and I've been doing some thinking. As I survey my life, I figure I could have done a lot of things differently. I could have studied harder, I could have made a better match maritally. I could have spent more time with my daughter. But if I dwell too long on this, if I make regret the focus of my existence, I am actually doing the inverse of happiness-seeking. Same mistake, different way.

I think again that I've done some wonderful things in my life. I've tended to patients, I have a beautiful daughter. I've fallen ill, I've surmounted some odds. I feel like I've come through the other side of something, but I'm not sure what yet. Middle-age maybe?

What I've discovered, is that contentment is all about being oneself, about being satisfied with what one has. I've ceased postponing happiness; all happiness was for me was a fleeting, a temporary, euphoria, a drug that I chased for too long. Now I know who I am, I know what I have, and I'm comfortable with that. More may come, more may not come. I may have less.

The important thing is, I'm off the treadmill. And I feel like things will really change. Optimism is perhaps the corollary of contentment.

Is all of this the result of too much therapy? Or am I actually getting better?

— *Dr. Ursus*