

## Contentment

What does it mean to be content?  
Can finding a balance in how we live our lives help us to be content?  
How does contentment lead to happiness?

Contentment is a state of mind that has nothing to do with money, objects, or other people. It's about finding a point of stillness within ourselves which allows us to be quietly happy whatever our situation might be and at peace with who we are. It brings a quiet joy.

How do we experience contentment? It can be as easy - and yet as radical - as taking a breath in and deciding to release everything that makes us feel anxious and dissatisfied as we breathe out. It is a settled feeling that rests deep inside. It is not something intellectual. It only exists in the single moment of time when we decide to be content with who we are, what we're doing and what we have. Even if the mind continues to buzz gently around at a superficial level, it may be possible for another deeper part of us to be happy and at peace.

Contentment is the cooling influence that enables us to focus energy and to quiet the feeling of "not good enough." In contrast, discontent is like a parrot on the shoulder that distracts us with its endless inner monologue. "How are you feeling? Are you too hot or too cold? What do you want right now?" Exhausting. Distracting. Always there.

Lack of contentment has chilling consequences. Our habits as discontented consumers have placed the very survival of the planet at risk. The habit of wanting more can endlessly clutter and distract our mind. Desire works with a multiplier effect - ever more, even faster - until we are unaware of anything except the object or sensation being pursued.

"Less desire means less pain" says Lama Zopa Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher. When we notice that we are obsessing, this is a signal to stop and pause. Our inner wisdom tells us that this kind of relentless wishing and hoping will never bring us peace. An obsession with everyday details often masks an undercurrent of discontent and a sadness deep inside that can feel like it has been there forever. There is a tendency to expend our energy on feeding that discomfort instead of seeking resolution.

Throughout history, diverse spiritual teachers have advocated periods of 'voluntary simplicity' and reduced consumption. In modern life this can start with turning off a mobile phone or choosing to do less at the weekend. For others a routine that creates quiet personal time at the beginning or end of the day can have the same effect. Peaceful places can help our thoughts slow down to the point where, momentarily at least, we feel no need to reach for something more.

Finding a balance in what we consume and how we live is a challenging, yet rewarding, way to contribute both to our own peace of mind and to the well-being of society and the planet. Balance brings clarity and equanimity to our lives. An unbalanced life is often driven by cravings and desires which rarely lead to satisfaction. Balance, on the other hand, is driven by both a smart mind and a warm heart. As we discover the pleasure of being in balance - of sharing with others, of knowing when enough is enough, and of living in cooperation rather than in competition - it will bring increasing contentment, harmony and happiness into our lives.

Contentment is easily misunderstood. It isn't about being static in a world where everything is in flux. Nor is it about being inactive: it can actually free us up to focus more sharply on what is working well. It doesn't make us weak or passive: on the contrary, as the mind becomes more pliable and open, then inspiration and creativity have space to flourish.

Unless we learn to live in the moment, and to accept it as it is, we may never function well or feel fully alive. Contentment releases us from the restless desires that drive us blindly forward, and which prevent us from being open to the needs and gifts of others. It frees us up to direct our energy in fresh and more conscious ways. Can we discover how to enjoy contentment despite the hurry and worry of contemporary existence?

*(Excerpted and adapted by L. Brown from, The 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life, in 2012.)*

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“There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for anyone's greed.”  
*Mahatma Gandhi*

“Well-being arises from the only source it has ever arisen from, the calm mind. A sense of freedom ensues from knowing that your well-being is not utterly dependent upon things that are entirely out of your control.”  
*B. Alan Wallace*

“There is a great happiness in not wanting, in not being something, in not going somewhere.”  
*Krishnamurti*

“My life is my message. We must be the change we want to see in the world.”  
*Mahatma Gandhi*

“Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex and more violent. It takes a touch of genius - and a lot of courage - to move in the opposite direction.”  
*E.F. Schumacher*

“Too much choice is a trap. You end up isolated from the richness and complexity of life.”  
*Ken McLeod*

“Let appearance, what is experienced, just be . . . allow thoughts or fixation, which only solidify that experience, to be exhausted - let go of that.”  
*Thrangu Rinpoche*

**Challenge:** Do you often feel restless and dissatisfied? Next time you experience this, instead of springing into action, come to a standstill. Resist the impulse to eat, drink, smoke, start a conversation or whatever you usually do. Take a few deep breaths and accept things as they are. Let it remain so for five minutes. Does this alter the choices you make?

*16 Guidelines for a Happy Life*