

Adopting a New Story of Happiness

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"I really should call my old friend."

"I forgot how much I enjoyed this!"

"What took me so long to get around to doing this when I love it so much?"

It's easy to forget to schedule activities we enjoy. Consequently, we never seem to get around to doing them.

If we simply forget to do what we love to do because we're busy all the time, we can take a break to think about what we enjoy doing and how we can start doing it more often. If we have assumed that we don't have enough of a block of time to spare for this activity, we can question that assumption. Maybe the problem is simply that we're not prioritizing what we like to do.

It can be a helpful exercise to think of two or three favorite activities we would like to engage in more often and identify any obstacles to doing them. If we can't do a favorite activity in the usual way, maybe there's an alternative way to make it happen that we haven't identified yet. For example, maybe we can see or talk with the people we love using technology instead of traveling to visit them, or we can write an old-fashioned, handwritten letter and mail it to them, asking them to write back. Maybe we can find a creative way to have physical contact with them—more than one person has invented a "hugging wall" to allow hugging and social distancing simultaneously.

If it doesn't seem important to do what makes us happy because we're "happy enough," we can question that belief. We can think about whether we have a happiness story such as, "It's selfish to take time for myself," or "Other people's needs are more important than what I'd like to do with my time."

If we do, we might consider adopting a new happiness story.

To do that, we have to identify our current story about happiness and well-being and ask ourselves whether it's working for us. Then we can start imagining what a new, more satisfying story might be and how we can bring it about. For example, we might want to adopt and live according to a happiness story called, "I deserve to be happy and that means making time to have fun," or "Doing things I love is good for my health and well-being, so I make sure I do them."

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Maybe thinking about what our happiness story is will lead to the discovery that we resist making time for what gives us pleasure. This will help us feel vitalized because growing up, we regularly received the message that good people work hard all day long and are constantly productive. That internalized message can color our perception of how much time we have to devote to simply having fun.

Some people might have been told that what they enjoy isn't all that important, that it's selfish to spend time on hobbies or sitting and talking with friends. Long ago, they might have internalized that story called, "Don't devote time to activities you enjoy because that's narcissistic" and never questioned it.

When it comes to opportunities to feed the soul, the doors to happiness and fulfillment may not be locked after all. By meditating on what is blocking us from feeling happy and accessing our inner wisdom, we can identify our happiness story and consider changing it.

Then, we might find we do make more time for the pleasures that contribute to our happiness and well-being.



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