**What is Happiness?**

**By Dr. Ellen Keener**

**A puzzling situation:**

Billy won the lottery. A cool $25 million! He appeared to be a good man with a good character. Of the many types of people who might have won, his friends were happy it was Billy. But two years later he was arrested for drunk driving, resisting arrest, soliciting a prostitute, and having drugs in his car. The arrests continued over the next few years. The excitement of winning did not grow into a lifelong happiness.

Tom, a successful businessman, was a loner who worked long hours, saving and re-investing most of his profits. He was disliked for his independence and envied for his wealth. Yet his was a life full of contentment and happiness. Why does [wealth](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/money_and_wealth.htm) bring happiness to some and misery to others?

If wealth is not a shortcut to happiness, what about [sacrificing](http://www.drkenner.com/articleduty.html) for others? Terry volunteers at the soup kitchen 6 days /week, 52 weeks a year, but hates it, hates her life, and has grown especially bitter towards the people she serves. Dora, an engineer, never does volunteer work. If she gives to charity, she does so very selectively and sparingly. Acquaintances [envious](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#envy) of her success call her [selfish](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#selfishness1). Yet Dora is very happy.

There are many people who we think should be happy but are not. (Billy the "lucky" lottery winner and Terry the "serious" volunteer.)

There are many people who we think should be miserable but are not. (Tom the "loner" businessman and Dora the "selfish" engineer.)

Some people who seem to have nothing are very happy. Some people who seem to have everything are not. Some jet-setters seem happy while some moral crusaders have become miserable old grouches. Happiness seems very unpredictable, inconsistent, irrational.

What follows is an explanation as to the rational basis of happiness.

**Happiness**

Happiness is an [emotion](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#emotion). So is [sadness](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#sadness), love, hate, curiosity, revulsion, excitement, jealousy, contentment, [depression](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#depression), [anxiety](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#anxiety), [fear](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#fear), [guilt](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#guilt) and [anger](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#anger). All emotions have causes, causes which can be understood and controlled.

The emotion of [happiness](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#happiness) is not caused simply by entertaining your [whims](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#whim). (Whims are an [obstacle](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/obstacles.htm) to happiness.) Happiness is not merely a life lived by accumulating moments of pleasure. On the contrary, happiness is a long lasting enduring enjoyment of life, it is being in love with living. It is your reward for achieving a [good character](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/virtue_and_happiness.htm) and personal rational [values](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#values) in life. Some important values are a productive [career](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/career.htm), [romance](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/romance.htm), [friendship](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/friendship.htm) and [hobbies](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/hobbies.htm).

Achieving these values requires [rationality](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#rationality) and takes effort and skill. Two types of skills you can use are [thinking](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/thinkingskills.htm) skills and [valuing](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/valuingskills.htm) skills.

Once you learn to have confidence in your own mind and once you discover the [virtues](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#virtue) that make it possible for you to achieve your values and that make your life worth living, then you will experience the result - an earned [pride](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#pride) and a genuine [self-esteem](http://www.drkenner.com/DRKENNER_COM_ARC/definitions.htm#self-esteem). And of course happiness.