

Can Money Make You Happy?

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Can money and material success make you happy?

Certainly, abject poverty—where even the basic necessities of life are out of reach—rarely produces happiness. But multiple research studies indicate that beyond that threshold, when the necessities of life are available, relative happiness does not depend on higher and higher levels of material prosperity.

Baha'is believe that two kinds of happiness exist:

Know thou that there are two kinds of happiness—spiritual and material.

As to material happiness, it never exists; nay, it is but imagination, an image reflected in mirrors, a spectre and shadow. Consider the nature of material happiness. It is something which but slightly removes one's afflictions; yet the people imagine it to be joy, delight, exultation and blessing. All the material blessings, including food, drink, etc., tend only to allay thirst, hunger and fatigue. They bestow no delight on the mind nor pleasure on the soul; nay, they furnish only the bodily wants. So this kind of happiness has no real existence.

As to spiritual happiness, this is the true basis of the life of man because life is created for happiness, not for sorrow; for pleasure, not for grief. Happiness is life; sorrow is death. Spiritual happiness is life eternal. This is a light which is not followed by darkness. This is an honour which is not followed by shame. This is a life that is not followed by death. This is an existence that is not followed by annihilation. This great blessing and precious gift is obtained by man only through the guidance of God.

Spiritual happiness is light, while sorrow is darkness.

This happiness is glad-tidings, while sorrow is disappointment.

This happiness is the Kingdom while sorrow is the earthly world.

This happiness is life, while sorrow is non-existence.

This happiness is the fundamental basis from which man is created, worlds are originated, the contingent beings have existence and the world of God appears like unto the appearance of the sun at mid-day.

This happiness is but the love of God.

This happiness is but the eternal might the brilliant traces of which are shining forth, unto the temples of unity.

Were it not for this happiness the world of existence would not have been created.

– Abdu'l-Baha, *Star of the West*, Volume 4, p. 163.

The new *World Happiness Report* reaches a similar conclusion in its survey of 156 countries: Discussions about the inequality of income and wealth, and what to do about them, typically include reference to the transfer of resources from richer to poorer to achieve greater equality. Increasing the equality of happiness does not in general require transfer, since building happiness for some does not require reduction in the happiness of others. Indeed, one of the side benefits of broadening the focus of policy attention from income and wealth to subjective well-being is that there are many more options for improving average happiness, and increasing equality by improving the lot of those at the bottom, without others being worse off. – World Happiness Report 2016.

The Report does show a great disparity—twenty-five times higher—between incomes in the top 10 happiest countries and incomes in the bottom 10 countries. That significant income difference, however, does not create unhappiness in and of itself. Instead, what tends to create a lack of happiness among low-income individuals is their awareness of the unequal distribution of income in their societies.

Accordingly, the Report's conclusions center around this main finding: inequality, and the clear awareness of continuing inequality, drives much of the world's unhappiness.