

The Contentment Habit

by Leo Babauta

I'll admit I do it as much as anyone else: see the cool things that others are doing and wish I were doing something cool like that too.

You see great travel photos on Instagram and other social media — people living amazing lives, creating cool things, going on adventures. And instantly, there's the thought that you should be living a better life.

But this is the wrong habit. It leads to a feeling that your life isn't good enough, that you aren't good enough. And the habit doesn't end: if you pursue a better life, you will always feel that you should be doing more, partying more, creating more, learning more, reading more, traveling more. You can't possibly do it all, but you'll always wish you were.

So what's a better habit? The contentment habit.

What I've been learning is that happiness and contentment and greatness isn't out there. It's not where everyone else is, even if it seems like it. You can spend your whole life chasing this happiness, contentment, dreams, greatness, coolness, and never reach it. That's because it's right where you are now.

Before we talk about that, let's look at the habits that most of us do.

The Discontentment Habits

Tell me if these habits sound familiar:

* You see people doing great things, traveling, having fun, and wish you were doing something like that too. This never ends, because no matter how much you do, there will always be other people doing still more things that sound really cool. So you'll never reach the pinnacle of fun and cool and achievement.

* You look at yourself and think that you can improve — get fitter, leaner, more

learned, calmer, happier, more productive. This too never ends, because even if you do amazingly at improving yourself, you will never be perfect, and there will always be more to improve. So you'll never be content, and then you die.

* You feel you could be doing more. You're rushing around, doing a lot, but there's always a feeling that you could be doing more. This never ends, because there is always more you could be doing. You can never do everything, so there's always more that you're not doing than there is that you are doing.

* You criticize others for what they're not doing. Your kids, your spouse, your family, your friends ... they're all doing something you think they shouldn't, or maybe not doing something you think they should. There isn't happiness in criticizing others, because you're dissatisfied with life when you're dissatisfied with other people.

If you find yourself doing any of these things — and I'd bet \$1,000 that you do them more than you realize — then it's a good time to think about whether that habit will ever end, and if it will bring you happiness.

The answer to both questions is no — those habits don't have an end, and they don't bring happiness or contentment.

The Contentment Habit

When you catch yourself doing those discontentment habits, by being mindful of your feelings and thoughts during the day ... try this instead:

* Stop looking elsewhere for happiness — in what others are doing, in what you should be doing, in what others should be doing but aren't, in the things you should improve. Happiness and contentment aren't out there.

* Instead, turn to where you are right at this moment. Pause and feel your body, your breath, and all the sensations surrounding you right now. See how this moment contains so much that you don't normally notice, if you start paying attention.

* Realize that this moment is enough. All around you, right now, is a moment that is as high quality as any of the possibilities that often enter your mind of what you should be doing or where you should be. Those ideal experiences aren't of any higher quality than the experience you're having right now.

* See the wonder in this moment. Right where you are, right now. Notice the amazing things around you, and in you, as if you're seeing it for the first time ever. Notice the

miracle of your body, your mind, your surroundings. How did all this come to be? The building you're in, or the nature you're in, didn't just magically appear — it's almost as if the world conspired to make this moment happen, and you get to be here to witness it. Awesome!

That's the contentment habit, and you can do it anytime, anyplace, no matter what you're doing or who you're with. It is free, always available, always miraculous. And it never ends.