

This card—**The Happiest Man in the World**—is Number 16 in a series of “Diversions for You and Your Friends” created by Arlene Harder, MA, MFT, Support4Change Blog.

Being sick or having a major problem in your life is a pain in the neck. This is because, in large part, any situation that negatively impacts your life forces you to think about *it*, rather than more pleasant things. That is why this card is designed to **take your mind off your troubles**, at least for a while—and you can find more diversions every Monday on the blog.

(Be sure to read to the end of Page Four.)



When we see clouds like these, we can be unhappy that a storm is approaching, or glad that water will replenish the ground—it all depends on our perspective. The sky, the weather, our job, our health, our financial situation is what it is. How we react to it is up to us.

This is the lesson of another post by David Spero. I hope you like it as much as I do.

Long ago in what is now Kazakhstan, a man named Jameel reached middle age. His children were grown. He had some land and a little home; he was doing well by the standards of the time. But he wasn't happy.

He felt there must be more, so he sought help from a series of teachers. He studied yoga, practiced meditation, learned philoso

phy, but he still wasn't happy. Finally, he traveled over the mountains to see a renowned guru.

The guru, an older man with bright eyes and a long beard, with a turban masking most of his face, asked to hear Jameel's story. "I've tried everything; I'm strong and pretty healthy, but I'm not happy," Jameel said. "I'm not enjoying this life much, which must offend Allah, who has gifted me so generously."

"I see," said the guru. "Here's what you must do. You must find the happiest man in the world and ask him to give you his shirt. Put it on, and you will be as happy as he is."

"But where is this man to be found?" asked Jameel.

"I can't tell you that," said the guru. "Simply keep searching and you will find him."

Jameel set out. He visited towns and farms in many districts. He crossed deserts; he climbed mountains. He endured cold and wet in the winter and intense heat in the summers. He met many happy people, but when he would ask someone if he was the happiest man in the world, each said, "No. There is one happier than I."

Years went by, and Jameel, though tired, kept searching. He even visited neighboring countries with different languages and customs, but without success. One day in a forest, nearing despair, he heard the sounds of laughter coming from a nearby clearing. He went over and looked upon a man dancing and laughing with abandon, with a look of pure bliss on his face.

'This must be the guy,' thought Jameel. He went up and asked, "Are you the happiest man in the world?" "That would be me," said the other. "What can I do for you?"

"I need you to give me your shirt," said Jameel. "A wise man told me wearing your shirt would bring me happiness."

At this, the dancing man starting laughing so hard he fell upon the ground, pointing at Jameel and laughing until he gasped for breath.

"I came all this way," Jameel said in a hurt voice. "I've sought you for years and endured great trials to find you. Why are you treating me so rudely?"

The dancer calmed down. "Apologies for clowning you," he said, "but if you had looked more closely you would have seen I do not have a shirt."

Jameel looked and saw that it was true; the man was shirtless. In that moment, he felt as though a great weight had been lifted. He realized his search was at an end, and he felt profound happiness. He took another look at the happiest man in the world and noticed something familiar.

"Wait a minute," he said, "aren't you the same guru who sent me on this quest in the first place?"

"Yes, I did," replied the other, "and it seems to have worked."

"But you made me spend years in difficult, uncomfortable, dangerous, lonely searching. Do you know how much I've suffered? Why didn't you just tell me what I needed to know?"

"I could have told you," replied the guru. "But you wouldn't have understood."

Psychotherapists usually recognize this story immediately as a metaphor for therapy. It does no good to tell people the answers or point out their mistakes. They won't understand. The skill of therapy is in guiding them on a journey to find out for themselves.

When this tale was being developed, though, there was no such thing as psychotherapy. The Happiest Man tale isn't about therapy; it is a metaphor for life. Most of us are born lost. We spend our lives trying to find happiness, find peace or fulfillment, or poor substitutes for those things such as wealth, power, or sexual conquests. Sadly, we can rarely attain happiness or peace by searching, because the Happiest Man has no shirt to give us. The point of the search is to realize there is nothing to search for, the destination of the journey is to realize that the journey never ends.

All the trials and tribulations we face; all the twists and turns we go through are taking us somewhere. All our losses open new paths for us. It doesn't matter where they go, because the journey is the point. You can't learn happiness from a guru; you can't learn it from a book; you can't learn it from me. You need to find out for yourself, in your body, and that usually takes years, as it did for Jameel. (There are exceptions. Some lucky people seem to reach bliss in a blinding flash, but not many. I haven't met any of them or got there yet myself.)

So do you need to take a transcontinental multi-year quest like Jameel's to learn what you already know? Probably not. Most people who listened to Jameel's story over the years were peasants who never got more than ten miles from home in their lives.

The journey is a metaphor; life will bring it to you, through growing and aging and relationships and a dozen other ways. You only need to become aware of it.

My friend Guillermo stopped working, stopped traveling and even dating about twenty years ago when he committed to caring full-time for his mother, who is now 101 years old. The two of them spend a lot of time together in their apartment, occasionally getting to senior lunches or church as their only outings. You could say his journey seems to have stopped.

Guillermo would disagree. He says these years have been a time of great growth for him, and he is now happier and more at peace than he has ever been, or even imagined being. For him, the journey is in full swing and getting better, even as his Mom's decline makes it harder.

Guillermo's case shows that there is no way off the path. For me, that's what makes it so exciting. You keep growing in appreciation and amazement and love for the magnificence of the world (which some people call "God.") Of course, there will also be pain and grief and other challenges, but those always end.

Right now, I feel the path is my home. I know there will always be difficulties; everything will keep changing, and my body will die eventually, but I feel at home with change now (at least more at home than I used to.) I'm like a turtle; I carry my home with me in my heart.

Stability and a physical home can be good, too (as I wrote about here,) because you will be less anxious and physically stressed. But when you feel you've got it all figured out, you've probably taken a wrong turn. The journey is the destination, so enjoy the trip!

(David Spero ends his blog post by saying that, "My telling of 'The Happiest Man in the World' was adapted from the book *World Tales* by Idries Shaw. I first read it about 35 years ago, and I finally came to understand it this week – a good illustration of what the story says.")

*I hope this card helps you create a little  
peace, joy and love in your life*