

Reading

The passage introduces the concept of happiness and some research on this idea. As you read, pay special attention to the target vocabulary words in **bold**.

Why Are You Happy?



- 1 Are you happy? It is a simple question, one that you can **instinctively** answer with an easy “yes” or “no.” However, for some **obscure** reason the question “What is happiness?” is more difficult to answer. So too is the question that follows: How do we achieve it?
- 2 Well, defining happiness is not quite as simple as it might seem. Go into any mall these days and you’ll find many people shopping at a frantic **pace**, believing that happiness is the **thrill** of buying a new pair of shoes or the latest high-tech device. Indeed, the idea of happiness has been a topic of much thought and discussion within the fields of **philosophy**, religion, and science for the past 2,500 years. A follower of Confucius, the famous Chinese **philosopher**, would say that happiness is the joy obtained from learning about humanity through social relationships and good **deeds**. Those good **deeds**, however, do not include going to the grocery store because your mother has told you to, or treating yourself to a **steak** at a **restaurant** after a hard day’s work. In fact, a Buddhist would say that happiness is the reverse of consumerism, because happiness consists of self-**discipline** and a life without

longing. Another perspective comes from scientists who have demonstrated that 50 percent of happiness is a result of the genes we **inherit** from our parents rather than the jeans we purchase at the mall.

- 3 So who is right, the shopper, the **philosopher**, the **monk**, or the scientist? Perhaps the answer lies in the field of psychology or, more specifically, positive psychology. In 1998, Martin Seligman, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, gave a speech at the American Psychological Association in which he said that rather than **devoting** attention to unhappiness, psychology needed to change direction and focus instead on people for whom everything was going well. He said psychologists had a reasonably good understanding of depression, but they knew almost nothing about the **mysteries** of a happy life. He argued that if psychologists could isolate what those were, then people might be able to learn how to make themselves more satisfied with and **cheerful** about their lives. This was the beginning of positive psychology.
- 4 Since then, research on happiness has come up with some **astonishing** facts. If we go back to the mall, shopping can indeed be a source of happiness, but it is significantly less so once your basic needs have been met. The best kind of “retail **therapy**” is to shop for someone else. This is consistent with the Chinese teachings of 2,500 years ago that **assert** that happiness lies in acting within social networks, rather than for our individual benefit only. Again, current research agrees. In 2002, a University of Illinois study found that students with the highest levels of happiness and the fewest signs of depression were those with strong friendship and family networks. Religion facilitates happiness in a similar **manner**. Once again, a **review** of a large number of research studies on the links between religion and happiness has concluded that

there is a positive correlation between religious commitment and higher levels of perceived well-being and self-esteem.

- 5 **Grafting** modern research onto Confucian **philosophy**, we can go back to our original question and say that happiness is a very personal combination of genetics, actions, and beliefs. In the future, it may become a

standard practice for therapists to suggest **interventions** that **boost** happiness levels—including thanking people, writing letters to old friends, and hanging out with family. Who knew that learning to feel good could feel so good?

(593 words)

READING COMPREHENSION

Respond to the questions in writing. Base your responses on the reading and your own personal experiences.

1. What does Confucianism say is the source of happiness?
2. How much of our happiness may be the result of our genetic makeup?
3. How did Martin Seligman change the way the field of psychology thinks about human happiness?
4. The passage talks about **grafting** modern research onto Confucian **philosophy**. What does this mean?
5. When was the last time you used shopping to make yourself happy? Did it work?
6. Why do you think strong friendships play such an important role in our happiness?