

## Happiness and Loneliness

### Happiness

A Few Ideas About Happiness Over The Ages:

“Happiness, *eudaimonia*, is an activity of the soul, and is aimed at virtue, and virtuous living. It is about living well and faring well. It is about living nobly, courageously, temperately, and wisely. It is not about having wealth or popularity or power. It is about the enrichment of human life.”

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Greek Philosopher, 3rd Century, BCE

“Everyone’s true happiness and blessedness consists solely in the enjoyment of the good, not in the pride that he alone is enjoying it, to the exclusion of others. One who thinks himself the more blessed because he is enjoying benefits which others are not, or because he is more blessed or more fortunate than his fellows, is ignorant of true happiness and blessedness....A person’s true happiness consists only in wisdom, and the knowledge of truth....”

Baruch Spinoza, Amsterdam, Jewish philosopher, 1600’s

“Happiness depends more on the internal frame of a person’s mind, than on the externals of the world.”

“Happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected.”

George Washington, American Founding Father, POTUS, 1789-1797

“Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions.”

Dalai Lama, Leader of the Tibbeten Buddhists

“Money can't buy happiness, but it can make you awfully comfortable while you're being miserable.”

Clare Boothe Luce, American Socialite and Magazine Publisher, 20th Century

“To be without some of the things you want is an indispensable part of happiness.”

Bertrand Russell, British Philosopher, 20th Century

“Happiness is found in doing, not merely possessing.”

Napoleon, French Emperor, 19th Century

“Nothing brings me more happiness than trying to help the most vulnerable people in society. It is a goal and an essential part of my life - a kind of destiny. Whoever is in distress can call on me. I will come running wherever they are.”

Princess Diana, British Royal, 20th Century

**Questions:** Can you find a common theme among these many quotes? Read one to your class or partner, with conviction!

Is there one that most resonates with you? And why?

### Rabbi Sacks on Happiness

“*Simcha* is usually translated as joy, rejoicing, gladness, happiness, pleasure, or delight. In fact, *simcha* has a nuance untranslatable into English. Joy, happiness, pleasure, and the like are all states of mind, emotions. They belong to the individual. We can feel them alone. *Simcha*, by contrast, is not a private emotion. It means happiness shared. It is a social state, a predicate of “we,” not “I.” There is no such thing as feeling *simcha* alone.”

Collective Joy (Re'eh, Covenant & Conversation)

“A consumer society, in short, encourages us to spend money we don’t have, on products we don’t need, for a happiness that won’t last. The reason such happiness does not last lies in the fundamental difference between hedonic happiness, a momentary feeling of pleasurable sensation, and *eudaimonic* happiness, which is the lasting feeling brought by having lived a good, meaningful and worthy life.”

Morality, Chapter 7, p. 106

“When the ‘I’ predominates over the ‘We’, the market mindset spreads to other aspects of life where it does not belong. The most striking example is the pursuit of happiness. It begins to lose its connection with morality and starts to be associated with the products, services and experiences that we can buy. In both the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions, happiness was intrinsically related to virtue. It was seen as the result of a life lived in accord with ethical ideals. Since the 1960s, however, it has increasingly reshaped itself to fit the contours of a consumer society driven by self-gratification. The result is that we have become less happy, or at least not more so. “

Morality, Chapter 7, p. 102

“Happiness is a state of being, not a state of having, and still today, as it always did, it depends on strong and stable personal relationships and a sense of meaning and purpose in life.”

The Great Partnership, p. 177

“Friends make people happy, but happy people find it easier to make friends.”

Morality, Chapter 7, p. 114

“Happiness is the ability to say: I lived for certain values and acted on them. I was part of a family, embracing it and being embraced by it. I was part of a community ...I asked what I could contribute.”

To Heal A Fractured World, Chapter 1, p. 7

Happiness, though, is not central to the Judaic value system. It is not the telos of human activity. Judaism is the pursuit of holiness, not the pursuit of happiness. Happiness may be the result, but it is not the aim.... Happiness is not the first word that comes to mind when we think of the heroes and heroines of the Bible. They struggle, they wrestle, they argue, they contend. Four of the biblical prophets— Moses, Elijah, Jonah, and Jeremiah—pray to die, so relentless and difficult is the task they undertake. The figures of the Bible know exile, persecution, failure, and defeat. They encounter happiness all too rarely. This remains a feature of Judaism. One twentieth century theologian entitled his book about Jewish spirituality Strife of the Spirit.... Is there something about Abrahamic monotheism that has the effect of displacing happiness as a central value?... The loss of the sense of at-oneness with the world is the source of the "sacred discontent" that the Hebrew Bible introduced into Western tendency to self-critique and the restless desire to redeem a less-than-the status quo and maps it onto the structure of the universe. The Hebrew myth challenges the status quo in its striving for perfection.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Happiness: A Jewish Perspective” Journal of Law and Religion 29:1 (Feb. 2014): 32-33

**Question:** How does Rabbi Sacks’s view of happiness compare with the various quotes that began this section?

What seems to be the common thread here?

### **Loneliness**

A Few Modern Thoughts On Loneliness

“Well, since my baby left me  
Well, I found a new place to dwell

Well, it's down at the end of Lonely Street  
At Heartbreak Hotel  
Where I'll be, I'll be so lonely, pal  
Well, I'm so lonely  
I'll be so lonely, I could die

Elvis Presley, Heartbreak Hotel

“Ah, look at all the lonely people!  
Ah, look at all the lonely people!

Eleanor Rigby  
Picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been  
Lives in a dream

Waits at the window  
Wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door  
Who is it for?

All the lonely people  
Where do they all come from?

All the lonely people  
Where do they all belong?”

Eleanor Rigby, The Beatles

“I walk a lonely road  
The only one that I have ever known  
Don't know where it goes  
But it's home to me, and I walk alone  
I walk this empty street  
On the Boulevard of Broken Dreams  
Where the city sleeps

And I'm the only one, and I walk alone  
I walk alone, I walk alone  
I walk alone, I walk a-  
My shadow's the only one that walks beside me  
My shallow heart's the only thing that's beating  
Sometimes, I wish someone out there will find me  
'Til then, I walk alone  
Green Day, Boulevard of Broken Dreams

A few other thoughts on loneliness:

“Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.”

Mother Teresa, Catholic Charity worker, based in India, 20th Century

“Too much self-centered attitude brings isolation. And the result: loneliness, fear, anger. The extreme self-centered attitude is the source of suffering.”

Dalai Lama, Leader of the Tibetan Buddhists

“What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured. “

Kurt Vonnegut, American Novelist, 20th Century

Questions: Take a few minutes to watch the following:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vimFtZPiciI>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwoCuzGMS\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwoCuzGMS_I)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51XzW98wEDg>

Any musicians among you? Are these songs on major or minor keys? Why?

Next, in groups, read the above quotes to one another, with emotion and meaning. Is there a common theme?

### **Rabbi Sacks on Loneliness**

“Loneliness, the sensed lack of human connection, touches on our essence as social animals. We are not the only such animals, but it is our ability to form extensive networks that differentiates us from other species. Our sociability is our humanity and this is deeply rooted in our evolutionary past. That is what morality represents: our commitment to others, our capacity to form bonds of belonging and care. Our sense of wellness depends on being part of one or several networks of relationships in which we are prepared to act for the benefit of others, knowing that they are prepared to do likewise for us. So individualism comes at a high cost: the breakdown of marriage, the fragility of families, the strength of communities, the sense of identity that comes with both of these things, and the equally important sense that we are part of something that preceded us and will continue after we are no longer here.”

Morality, Chapter 1, p. 32

“A world without shared meanings is one in which it is easy to feel lost. Anomie, it seems to me, aptly describes the state we inhabit today: a world of relativism, non-judgementalism, subjectivity, autonomy, individual rights, and self-esteem. The gains of this long process have been many, but the loss, too, has been profound. The revolutionary shift from ‘We’ to ‘I’ means that everything that once consecrated the moral bonds binding us to one another – faith, creed, culture, custom and convention – no longer does so. The energy now localized in the ‘I’ has

been diverted from family, congregation and community, all of which have now grown weak, leaving us vulnerable and alone. An individualistic universe may be free but it is fraught with loneliness, isolation, vulnerability and nihilism, a prevailing sense of the ultimate meaninglessness of life. We are, in the title of Sherry Turkle's book, Alone Together. That is the price of radical individualism, massively accelerated by smartphones, social media and the loss of contexts in which we form enduring moral commitments. Everything has become immediate, transactional and presentational. We hide behind our profile and become the masks we wear."

Morality, Chapter 5, p. 85

**Question:** What is the common theme in the above song lyrics and Rabbi Sacks's view of loneliness? According to Rabbi Sacks, what is the antidote to loneliness?