

Understanding Happiness

Happiness is a state of well-being that feels pleasant. It is an experience of positive emotions. It is the goal of most quests. People seek wealth, status, material goods etc. in order to be happy. But happiness is sought for its own sake.

Different words are used to describe happiness;

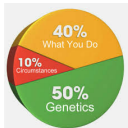
- Contentment or satisfaction with life
- Joy
- Pleasure
- Appreciation of life
- Positive inner peace

Why seek happiness?

- 1) Natural need for happiness in the human being
- 2) Leads to good health – mind/body link
- 3) Motivates and energizes: *Happiness expands the soul and creates energy.* Imam Ali (a) (Ghurarul Hikam, H#2045)
- 4) Helps you handle life better
- 5) More chances of success in various aspects of life; spiritual, physical, academic, social,

Determining Happiness

According to research about 50% of happiness is determined by our genetic make-up. Another 10% is from life circumstances. The remaining 40% depends on the choices you make. To accept and be pleased with God's decree helps maintain happiness in the part over which we have no control. To make good choices based on God consciousness and awareness helps in the rest.



God gives you genes and circumstances, the raw material with which you create a final product – You.

It is important to understand that it is not possible to maintain a high sense of happiness at all times. It is not the highs that we should be after. Rather the goal should be a level state of happiness that is lasting and not vulnerable to circumstances. It takes thought and planning to keep on experiencing that. It requires self-knowledge and awareness, an inner alertness that comes through reflection.

Happiness and Islam

The Arabic word for happiness is 'sa'adat', also translated as good fortune. The ultimate happiness is that of the hereafter when a soul knows that Allah is pleased with it. But in the world there can be happiness on the path towards that. There is happiness in the knowledge that we are servants of God, in obeying Him and earning His pleasure. In accepting His decree and trusting in His plan for us. Imam Ali (a) says; *The happiness of a believer is in obedience to his lord, and his unhappiness is in his sins* (Ghurarul Hikam, p.400)

The famous scholar al-Ghazali has written 'Kimya al-Sa'adat' – The Alchemy of Happiness, in which he emphasizes following Islamic rules and avoiding sins to achieve eternal happiness.

Factors that increase happiness

Happiness levels are often in the control of human beings. They can boost their happiness through the habits and behaviour they carry out regularly. It also comes from reflection and self-regulation.

- 1) Meaningful life – when there is purpose and meaning to each day there is more satisfaction with life and less chances of succumbing to negativity.
- 2) Relationships – connections with others boost emotional stability and enhance well-being in life. Shared experiences increase joy in what we do in life.
- 3) Gratitude – being thankful for big and small blessings of life, thinking of specific daily favors of the Lord, all increase feelings of positivity.
- 4) Doing things you enjoy - being engaged in an activity that you like increases satisfaction with life. This should be a constant habit to help rejuvenate the heart and soul. See ‘The Flow Experience’ at the end of this document.
- 5) Reframing difficulties - when circumstances rob you of happiness try to reframe the situation. A different perspective helps you see the situation in a new light.

Happiness in Hadith

- 1) *You cannot make all people happy with your wealth, so do it with cheerfulness and pleasantness.* Holy Prophet (s) (Al-Kafi, V.2, p.103)
- 2) *The Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) has said, "The Messenger of God (s) in order to make one of his companions happy who had been upset, would joke with him and he would say, 'Verily, God hates one who scowls in his brother's face.* (Sunan an Nabi, p.60)
- 3) *Divide your time in four parts; a part for worship, a part for the affairs of life in this world, a part for socializing, and a part for leisure and halal pleasures. The happiness from the hours of leisure will give you energy to carry out your other duties.*
Imam al-Kadhimi (a) (Tuhaf al Uqul, pp. 409-410)

True happiness derived only in connection with Allah

The greatest bliss is the good pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity
(Sura Tawba, no.9, verse 72)

Complete happiness can only come from closeness to Allah. The human soul has come from God and yearns to be with Him. Connecting to God through the mind and tongue helps fill that yearning and eases the restlessness of the human heart.

The Flow Experience

To experience flow is to be totally engaged in a meaningful activity. Its components include:

- 1) *Complete immersion in the activity*
- 2) *Focus on the present moment*
- 3) *A loss of self consciousness*
- 4) *The activity is intrinsically rewarding*

We can be happy experiencing the passive pleasure of a rested body, warm sunshine, or the contentment of a serene relationship, but this kind of happiness is dependent on favorable external circumstances. The happiness that follows flow is of our own making, and it leads to increasing complexity and growth in consciousness.

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