

The Science of Happiness and Wellbeing
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Lecture - 04

‘Doing Happiness’ – Philosophical and Existential Questions and Responses

Good afternoon, friends, in the last session when we talked about cultures and happiness among other things, we talked about the fact that language plays a very significant role in the context of happiness. And the way that happiness is experienced defined articulated conceptualized. Today we will touch upon some of those ideas but from a slightly different perspective as you can see from the title, we are talking about doing happiness and there is a reason for that. So, what is it that we plan to cover in this session.

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We will quickly after a brief introduction revisit the concepts we discussed in the early part of the last session and then we will talk about how people explore life and happiness, how people propose to practice happiness and the general insights that emerge out of that.

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Doing happiness

- Nachiketa
- Arjuna
- Zarathustra
- Thoreau
- Gandhi




Why do we talk about doing happiness? Because thinking happiness is what we have been doing all this while. Doing happiness is all about leaving a kind of a life which is conducive to well-being and happiness. Well, we have numerous traditions even live traditions today which focus on doing happiness or practicing happiness. What we are going to do on the other hand is not going to the practice of happiness per se.

But look at the examples from people religions or spiritual traditions as well as philosophies on the different aspects of such explorations. When we talk about doing happiness, we are immediately reminded of a whole large list of people whose stories are well known to us, who have in some way or the other fought with the problems of happiness not just as concepts but as a real critical problem in their own lives.


And have in some way or the other either attempted to or actually transform their lives in order to achieve the goal of bringing about happiness in their lives.

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Recap: elements of happiness...culturally



Feelings	Relationships	Developments
Positive feelings	Love	Character
Ambivalent feelings	Pro-sociality	Spirituality
Bliss contentment, euphoria, cosiness / sensitivity, anticipation, longing, pathos	Transcendent, nonpersonal, romantic, caring / Interaction, community, socializing, morals	Skill, virtue, understanding, self-determination / The sacred, transcendence, contemplation

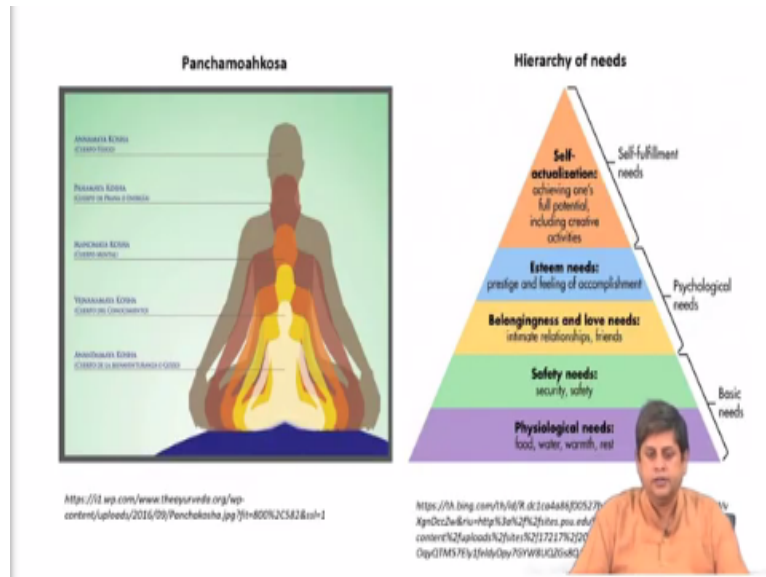



But before we go on to them let me quickly recap some of the elements that we will touch upon. If you remember we talked about the cultural aspect of happiness especially through the different network of words which are available in different cultures. And we found that in that schema feelings relationships and developments were critical components feelings the experiential aspect relationship.

Because happiness only at a level of self does not really lead to anything relationships matter and then of course evolution development of oneself in those directions. And we talked about a number of components like positive feelings or ambivalent feelings, love and pro-sociality character and spirituality and then you can see the examples that we took up. At the bottom you can see a series of words eros, philia, agapa, wabi-sabi, vipasana, sunyata, moksa, nirvana.

If you are looking at these words what they suggest are theoretical positions or concepts very solid tangible concepts from across the world which kind of contain the quintessence of the approaches which have been taken by different traditions and different people in the search or in the quest for happiness. And that is why I just share this with you I am not going to go deep into each of these concepts you can Google and find their meanings and you can explore them still further.

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But if you are looking at the history of human evolution there is something very interesting, we find. I mean whatever little we understand of the history of human beings it tells us that human beings probably in the early phases were not worried about concepts such as meaning of life or with happiness. Early evidences from archaeology palaeontology and other sciences tell us that in the hunter-gatherer stage.

And even sometimes during the farming stage the fundamental crisis was the crisis of survival and hence the focus was on something else. But irrespective of that even in those places even at the hunter-gatherer stage or a slightly advanced stage we have burial sites which give us glimpses of the belief of people that probably there is an afterlife. And the very fact that people start thinking about the meaning of life and death entails.

That they have evolved a stage; where they are reflecting on themselves the element of wonder. The reason for sharing these two schemas one very very old going back to the Upanishadic tradition and the other one by 20th century psychologist Abram Maslow is to make us aware of the fact that at each of these stages whether we are looking at the ancient tradition or we are looking at the modern tradition.

There has been a tendency to classify different layers at which we ask or we live our lives or we ask fundamental questions about life. So, if you are looking at the right hand side we have the

hierarchy of needs of Abraham Maslow where we talk about physiological needs and although we will not talk about this in terms of clear-cut permeable developments related directly with civilizations.

You find that unless the physiological needs are well taken care of there is not enough time to talk about needs of belongingness or needs of esteem or self-actualization asking fundamental questions. It can always happen that in the same individual all the needs coexist it can also happen that for the majority of the people in a civilization one or the other need is the most pertinent need depending on the particular context.

If you are talking about let us, say African countries where the very survival itself is a challenge probably very few of them would be asking questions about self-actualization. But nonetheless these stages might overlap in people there are even higher needs that we find examples of our aesthetic needs and then transcendental needs which Maslow also talks about later on and if you are looking at the Pancha mahakosha.

Then we it is like a metaphor for different layers of body and at the very basic level you have the material body the tangible body and then you move on to the layer of consciousness of supra consciousness and so on. I will not go into the details of it if you are intrigued you can ask questions about that but by looking at these structures what I am trying to simply say is that at some time or the other people started wondering about the meaning of their life.

And you find that probably it is not directly only related to the different civilizational contexts the element of wonder the element of or the desire to ask questions is probably prime able to human nature because if you do not ask questions and if you do not answer questions probably you would not be able to survive. So, as human beings have evolved the element of wonder asking questions and finding answers to as many questions as possible especially fundamental questions.

That relate to one survival is probably something which is inbuilt if we look at a growing child this becomes very very apparent because in the majority of the cases you find a significant

number of children in a particular period of their lives asking many questions until their parents get tired. They ask questions about everything the other day I found somebody having a puja at the house and the child asking the question that every day we have a regular puja why do we have a special person a purohit today to have this, puja.

What is the difference between that puja and this puja? Now when a child asks these questions the child's mind is curious it is but natural that we start asking questions. One of the fundamental questions that why are we here who am I and why are we here why am I here? So, the moment the fundamental existential questions come in, the element of happiness and unhappiness is something which gets involved with that fundamental question.

For whatever reason the; human desire for immortality has been persistent. Through ages through centuries through most spiritual systems you find that sustainability stability and transcendence into another realm is something which is talked about which kind of tells us that people somehow say that I mean being able to live forever is probably something which is a very very happy thing we have.

So, many parables about quest for immortality we have it in the Hindu tradition we have in many fairy tales and folktales we have the concept of Amrit or the nectar, nectar which is mortality which gives you a mortality and this is not something which belongs only to one tradition. It is across Traditions that you have this. What I am trying to do right now in this session is to look at questions that have been asked by people.

And what are the fundamental questions that are asked, especially in the context of life and happiness which might be relevant and which might inspire them. The reason I am talking about doing happiness is because when you start asking these questions in your own personal context in the context of your own lives you are actually exploring the possibility or the impossibility of experiencing happiness whatever that means to you in your lives.

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Philosophical perspectives: Thinking happiness

- **Lao zi & Daoism:** Take a walk in a park. Watch a sunset. Inhale fresh air. Read some haiku. Be one with nature
- **Harmony with nature. Wu wei.** Non-interference, non-action, following the natural course of the universe. Surrender to the eternal forces of nature. *'A good traveller has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving.'* Simplicity, empathy.
- **Aristotle:** Search for factors that to 'good life' – *eudemonia*
- **Siddhartha and Buddhism:** Middle path, detachment, indifference to pleasure and pain.
- **Life is full of suffering.** Desire is the cause of suffering. Cessation of desire, end of suffering. Suffering can end through the 8-fold paths. *Nirvana, Sunyata.*



Now you see that if you are looking about the philosophical perspectives which we will do that a little later let us revisit what we were doing right at the beginning which is doing happiness. Let us share a few stories if you are looking at the Upanishadic tradition and we can confidently trace back some of the early Upanishads at least to 2000 to 3000 years back. Then we have one example of that in the story of Nachiketa from the Katha Upanishads.

And it is one of the earliest example of a child seeker because Nachiketa is a young boy his father is sacrificing old cows and Nachiketa feels humiliated and bad at this action of the father and says that who are you going to give me to, the angry father says that I am going to give you to death. Having made this commitment, the father is compelled to send his young son to death. What is important is the dialogue the conversation which follows between death and Nachiketa?

Because Nachiketa is given the option of asking for few three boons three wishes but instead of boons he asks questions the boons are not material things that he wants, he wants answers to questions, questions about the meaning of life and death questions about permanence, impermanence, impermanence and questions about transcendence. Two things are significant here one the age of this person is very young and the other is what is it that this person wants questions answers to questions.

If you are looking at the next example which is from the let us, say the post-upanishadic tradition the tradition of the Bhagavad-Gita again can be traced back to at least 2000 years back you have a situation where in the midst of battle Arjuna is totally disgusted with the greed and the materiality of the world and ask the question why should I fight. And then the whole discourse of Bhagavad-Gita continues and what is again critical over here is inquiry and self-inquiry.

Because Arjuna is asking a series of questions and these questions stem out of unhappiness and that is the fundamental thing and at the end of the entire discourse which we will not go into which talks about the bhakti yoga or the karma yoga or the Gnana yoga whatever the nature of the discourse. The fundamental fact remains that it is a discourse about unhappiness it starts with unhappiness and moves in the direction of stability or equanimity or calm okay or transcendence.

We have examples of Zarathustra, Zend-avesta and we have him made into a heroic character later in the philosophical tradition as well by Nietzsche. We have Henry Thoreau of the U.S who practice something which was known as transcendentalism but the essence of it is to have a simple beautiful idyllic life which would sustain happiness. We have the example of Gandhiji starting with a fairly comfortable material existence a lawyer humiliated and then asking questions.

The stories do not end there we have so many other stories as well. In the Chinese tradition we have Lao zi and the tradition of Daoism and if you are looking at the tradition of Daoism then it is to be with the flow something which again plays a very significant role today in the context of the contemporary exploration or theorization of happiness. So, Google for the word flow and you will find that this is very very relevant term today which talk talks about being immersed in something getting totally involved and lost in something.


And then deriving sense of happiness out of that obviously this is definitely a little different from that which is to be involved to be in harmony with something alright and flow entails a certain element of harmony. But here the focus is on harmony with the natural way of things and importantly the goal directed focus something which I am sure Professor Mandal has pointed to and emphasized in some of his talks is again important.

It is travelling which is important not arriving or we can talk about Aristotle in Greece, Plato talked about many things including the ideal philosopher king what kind of a governance would lead to political stability which deals with well-being primarily rather than primarily happiness. But if you are looking at Aristotle one of the critical things, he talks about in his ethics is again the search for good life a term which is used very frequently in contemporary studies of happiness eudaimonia.


And it can also be roughly translated into a sense of meaningfulness or if we talk about Gautam Buddha Siddhartha then you have a very very fundamental inquiry into unhappiness. So, many people begin with unhappiness and move in the direction of happiness like life is full of suffering desire is the cause of suffering cessation of desire and the end of desire leads to the end of suffering. So, it is a logical set of rules and suffering can end through following the eightfold paths.

Again, focusing on moderation so concept like Nirvana, Sunyata which are beyond the binaries of life and death good and evil sad and happy going beyond that.

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- **Hildegard of Bingen:** Music and good life. Enthusiasm. Doing that which makes on ecstatic. Flow?
- **Albert Camus: Existentialism:** No God. No ideals. Nothing permanent. Hope is a life. No heaven, *dao* or *moksha*. Death is oblivion.
- But a good life is possible. Admit death, accept life with the absurd. Living life in its fullness! *Charvaka*?
- **Alain de Botton & EI:** Do we give ourselves too much importance? Do we have too many expectations? Are we, thus unhappy?
- Unhappiness at work, in relationships. Ordinary lives, with emotional intelligence. Know your needs. Communicate with empathy.



Now you see that we have Hildegard who focuses primarily on music from Germany in the medieval period and then doing something which makes one ecstatic again linking it with an act

of living which is linked significantly with the element of flow that we talked about a little earlier. Or we talk about somebody who is a contemporary philosopher like Alain de Botton who talks about artificial emotional intelligence.

Where he talks about two fundamental areas where happiness or unhappiness is significantly decided at work and in relationship and a very common sensical approach that if you are emotionally intelligent and if you communicate with empathy probably that leads you on the path of happiness. But then of course you have a radically different attitudes for you for example if you are looking the history of the western civilization in the 20th century you have two wars the first world war and the second world war.

And the huge amount of human and material destruction that these wars brought about led to situation where people started asking questions about religion about spirituality about faith. Now you have a situation where the element of harmony the trust or faith in civilization in society in in countries in states everything is eroded away. You have a whole lot of thinkers and philosophers who are born out of this.

One of the most significant in terms of writing happens to be Franz Kafka and his metaphor morphosis which focus on a life which seems totally meaningless and the fundamental question which comes to one's mind is that if my life is impermanent life is without any specific meaning. And if you are born by accident then is it really relevant and meaningful to survive and to live. The question is further intensified when we are looking at the work of Albert Camus.

And it is kind of epitomized in his beautiful sort writing which we will definitely share with you the myth of Sisyphus. And in the myth of Sisyphus he focuses on the concept of the absurd because here is the life which does not show any connection with anything benevolent or good or positive no God destruction fundamental human nature seeming to be negative with war destruction and killing.

And then probably life is impermanent after death there is nothing to look beyond no God no spirituality nothing. So, the fundamental question is that should a person under those

circumstances survive continue to live or should somebody commit suicide. So, the extreme element of nihilism. Interestingly you see that Albert Camus kind of derives hope from that futility from that absurdity and this hope is derived from the element of courage when you see there is no hope no faith.



And you handle that with courage and perpetually at each moment realizing that life is impermanent and life is futile still sustain that effort. That makes life meaningful. So, here the focus is not so much on happiness as on meaningfulness. As we are having this discussion there are two elements which are popping up again and again one is pleasure pain and happiness the other one is a sense of meaningfulness.

All the quests that we are talking about all the searches all the doing of philosophy are doing of happiness that we are looking at focus on these two aspects. A sense of meaning which is links to immortality and permanence and even transcendence or pleasure which is sustainable and continues over a long period of time.

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Different religions and happiness

- **Islamic definition:** From Islamic perspective, the happiness is not merely a temporary state of joy and delight; rather it's a lifelong process aiming primarily at bringing eternal happiness, peace of mind, tranquility of heart, contentment in this world and everlasting bliss in the Hereafter
- **Christian definition:** Happiness which Christ promises exceeds the limits of our imagination. It is inconceivable and incomprehensible to those living on earth. ... It is the most supreme happiness, absolutely perfect and complete which no one has ever known. A Christian has to achieve in his life something more than the worldly aims.
- **Hindu definition:** Ānanda (Sanskrit: आनन्द) literally means bliss or happiness. In the Hindu Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad gita, ānanda signifies eternal bliss which accompanies the ending of the rebirth cycle.



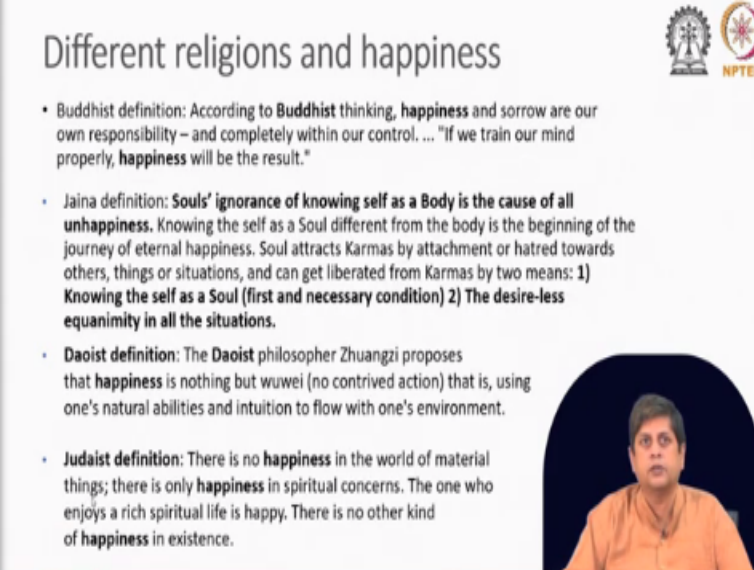
So, but that is not the end I mean I would like to quickly look at some of the traditions across the world which focus on different understandings of happiness. If you are looking at the spiritual traditions of the religions but if you may call them that then in the Islamic tradition the focus is

on happiness which is not a temporary state of joy delight. But process aiming primarily to bring eternal happiness a transcendent focus.

In the Christian context also, happiness very often is not conceived or achievable apparently within this world but there is a transcendent concept of the judgment day of being eternally happy. These are but small fragments of some aspects of these religions and traditions there is a lot more that we are not definitely going into. Looking at the Hindu definition, the element of bliss and ironically escaping death, escaping birth and death the cycle of birth and death.


In the western tradition where the focus is on the crisis of dying because if my death is the end of the world then what is the meaning of life. Here ironically you find that people are obsessed with getting rid of life and death because the belief is that you have so many lives and so many deaths and each one of them is full of suffering how to get rid of that. So, if you are looking at the Buddhist tradition or the Jaina tradition this becomes the focus.

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Different religions and happiness

- Buddhist definition: According to Buddhist thinking, **happiness** and sorrow are our own responsibility – and completely within our control. ... "If we train our mind properly, **happiness** will be the result."
- Jaina definition: **Souls' ignorance of knowing self as a Body is the cause of all unhappiness.** Knowing the self as a Soul different from the body is the beginning of the journey of eternal happiness. Soul attracts Karmas by attachment or hatred towards others, things or situations, and can get liberated from Karmas by two means: **1) Knowing the self as a Soul (first and necessary condition) 2) The desire-less equanimity in all the situations.**
- Daoist definition: The Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi proposes that **happiness** is nothing but wuwei (no contrived action) that is, using one's natural abilities and intuition to flow with one's environment.
- Judaist definition: There is no **happiness** in the world of material things; there is only **happiness** in spiritual concerns. The one who enjoys a rich spiritual life is happy. There is no other kind of **happiness** in existence.




I am skipping many of these components but as you can see element of ignorance getting rid of your ignorance your happiness residing in yourself your happiness residing in God many of the things that we have talked about. When we talked about the definition of happiness are also embedded in these philosophical inquiries.

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- **Lokayata/Charvaka:** The good is strictly associated with pleasure. One's ethical obligation is towards maximizing one's pleasure. Scientific orientation. Scientific materialism.
- **Hedonism:** *Babylonia: Gilgamesh:* Fill your belly. Day and night make merry. Let days be full of joy. Dance and make music day and night.... These things alone are the concern of men. Greek: Democritus, Cyrene.
- **Epicure/ Epicuranism:** the highest pleasure (tranquility and freedom from fear) was obtained by knowledge, friendship and living a virtuous and temperate life.
- **Utilitarianism: Bentham/Mill:** the consequences of any action are the only standard of right and wrong – maximization of happiness and wellbeing for all individuals.



Interestingly very much like the kind of approach that we found in Albert Camus we have the Lokayata, the Charvaka tradition again probably contemporary to Buddhism one of the ancient tradition which has died out. So, we do not have direct texts of the Lokayata or the Charvaka tradition. We indirectly know about them from their opponents during the arguments that they propose. But whatever it is here again the focus is on having a good life through the senses through the five senses.

The hedonics probably focus on that to a certain extent the belief that there is nothing beyond making them say that okay since this is the one life that we have and these are the five senses which give us the richness of this life let us experience and enjoy it. But mind you whether we are looking at Lokayata tradition or the hedonic tradition. They are always at the end focus on moderation and ethics.

It is not an anti-ethical tradition that we are looking at or utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill maximization of happiness and well-being for all individuals kind of striking a balance.

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"Everything can be taken from a man but
one thing: the last of the human
freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any
given set of circumstances, to choose
one's own way."

– Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning



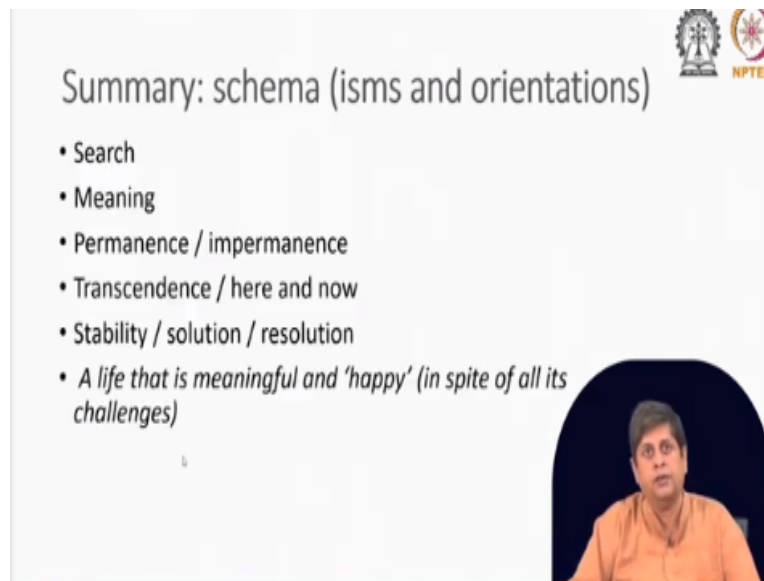
Now what I would like to do before I sum up is quote from Viktor Frankl, who happen to be a victim of the second world war and the traumatization and the atrocities of the Jews where during those prison camps he lost his father and he lost his wife both to the German concentration camps and the torture in the prisons. He says that everything can be taken from a man but one thing the last of the human freedoms to choose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances to choose one's own way of.

What is very significant and sustaining about this quote and the background within which this quote emerges is the fact that in spite of all the negativities that he perceived in the POW (prison of war camps) in and the concentration camps was the fact that he found a pattern that people who survived were the people who had a positive attitude towards life and the people who died were the people who had a negative attitude towards life.

That became the anchor point for his therapeutic approach to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy at the school that he developed later on. But what is significant here is a world without hope where one is still able to capable of creating a sense of meaning and a sense of hope. Search for meaning is very often the search for happiness because you find that or rather the search for meaning is a search to avoid unhappiness.

Most search for meaning begins with a sense of absence a sense of deficiency a feeling that you are not able to answer questions which and these questions not being able to answer these questions lead to terrible unhappiness and one is compelled to explore.

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Summary: schema (isms and orientations)

- Search
- Meaning
- Permanence / impermanence
- Transcendence / here and now
- Stability / solution / resolution
- *A life that is meaningful and 'happy' (in spite of all its challenges)*

The common pattern that which emerges across these traditions if you can at all look at these schema of the isms and the orientations is that at the very basis is as such a human search and this search very often is about meaning, meaning of what meaning of life or search for why we are unhappy search for how to not be unhappy and there are two approaches two positions that it leads one to. It leads to a position of permanence if you are looking at many of the spiritual traditions.

It also leads to a position where one looks at the impermanence and some traditions which move from impermanence to transcendence like if you are looking at Buddhism as opposed to Hinduism or many of the other spiritual traditions, Buddhism beliefs in no soul no permanence. But it believes in a cycle of birth and death and hence in the concept of transcendence going beyond in moksha to a state where you are no longer within the cycle of birth and death happiness and sorrow.

But then there are modern positions or the Charvakan position where you say that life is the end one life one death. There is a position of transcendence moving from through permanence or

impermanence to a state where you transcend all these or there is also a position that here and now is what we have. And this is what we must experience and make as meaningful as possible because we do not know what is beyond death.

But the fundamental focus is on arriving at a sense of stability a solution a resolution and trying to achieve a state where one's life is meaningful and happy in spite of all challenges whatever the challenges are. Friends, why are we talking about this? Because you see that each one's twist for happiness is different. Each one's solution if we at all arrive at a solution is different. This solution may be stable or it might change over time it might radically shift over time it might get modified or evolved over time.



But the human organism in a certain stage of evolvedness focuses on a search for meaning and a search for happiness. And these are the various approaches through which one explores and finds the resolution. Whatever the nature of the resolution that is the school of thought so we have thousands of schools of thoughts. The fundamental thing is state where you are at peace with yourself you are no longer conflicted for whatever reason.

So, the beginning starts with a point of convergence that is the search. The end is a point of resolution which is an element of stasis a sense of lack of conflict no conflict in between you have thousands of traditions thousands of pathways that we follow. This much at least can be shared as we go ahead.

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CONCLUSION

- Quest for meaning is universal
- Often the search involves search for immortality
- Across traditions and time – this involves searching for oneself – ‘doing happiness’
- Similar patterns exist – finally it is about taking a stand in life and this defines who you are...



So, in conclusion what does this particular unit talk about. This particular unit talks about the desire for meaning and happiness the journey that thousands of people make memorable and ordinary in the quest for happiness and the fact that whatever the nature of resolution if you are able to resolve and come to terms with that particular condition probably, we are in our happiest state. These are the fundamental lessons we take home.

As we go ahead there will be a talks by Professor Mandal there will be also a few talks by us me where we focus on strategies for resolving unhappiness. But it is very very important to realize that this quest this desire this journey is both unique and universal. It is universal in the sense that everyone or almost everybody in their lives starts on this journey ask this question. And it is unique in the sense that for each one of us the answer is different whatever the answer.

So, we stop here friends, and we look forward to the next few sessions which will link it to the various causes and effects the various contexts within which happiness can be understood. Thank you.

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Most references are in the presentations.