

**The Science of Happiness and Wellbeing**  
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**Lecture - 07**  
**Myths and Misconceptions**

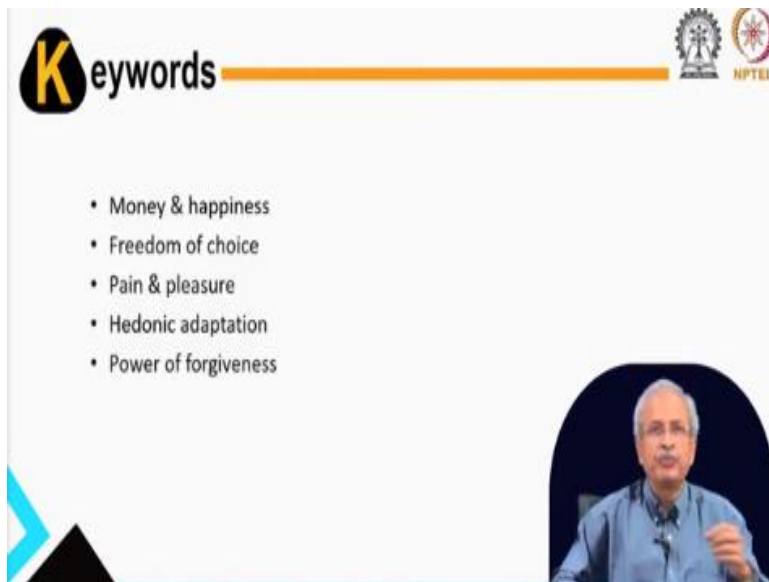
Welcome to this talk and this is about as I earlier told you that we need some misconceptions to get rid of in order to really understand the potentialities of to become happy. Many of our unhappiness actually is primarily due to the reason that we do not have the right kind of understanding about happiness. So, misconception create a lot of troubles for all of us. Given that; this talk will exclusively dedicate on clarifying certain misconceptions that I would like to highlight for all of you.

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So, with that we will go to our first talk. That is the questions that we have in hand. First question, what are our misconceptions about happiness? We will in this process let you know can money buy happiness. We will also talk about many more misconceptions but the question will ask finally, does science explain happiness and finally of course why we are unhappy. I will try to answer these questions systematically with the hope that you will realize what kind of misconceptions we are talking about.

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The slide features a header with the word "Keywords" in a large, bold, black font, preceded by a stylized "K" in a yellow circle. To the right of the header are two logos: the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) logo and the NPTEL logo. Below the header, a list of five keywords is displayed in a bullet-point format. In the bottom right corner, there is a circular video inset showing a man with grey hair, wearing a blue shirt, speaking.



- Money & happiness
- Freedom of choice
- Pain & pleasure
- Hedonic adaptation
- Power of forgiveness

The first misconception of course relates to money and happiness therefore I have utilized this as a keyword money and happiness. Many people believe that money can buy happiness. Some people believe that having money will not make you happy. Will also talk about freedom of choice that is if you have got a lot of freedom of choice will you be happy. Some people talk about pleasure and pain with the notion that probably they are orthogonal to each other just opposite to each other.

If you have got pain you cannot have pleasure, if you have got pleasure, you cannot have pain. Question is do they coexist are they orthogonal, what is our misconception. And then of course we will also talk about hedonic adaptation that is we become happy after achieving a target but why do not we remain happy by achieving the target. We continually seek more targets in order to get a thrust behind happiness all the time.


How do we adapt it? And finally we will talk about, why do we become unhappy? Why do we carry negative memories? What is the power of forgiveness? Can we unload our brain with the power of unhappiness?

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### More money does increase happiness

- Behavioral economists have found that happiness begins to plateau after a decent salary
- Kahneman studied on 4,50,000 people in USA: found that happiness does not increase after a salary of \$75,000/year



With this I will first talk about money. Now people believe that if you get more money, it will increase your happiness that is a common man's notion. Now Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel laureate, he did a big piece of research with roughly 4 lakh Americans who are earning in a range of 20000 dollar per year to 150000 dollar per year. Now let us try to understand what did he find. He found that your happiness does not increase in a linear process.

That is if you have got more money does not necessarily mean that you become happier. So, Daniel Kahneman is a behavioural economist in 2004 he got Nobel Prize for this purpose. He found that happiness begins to plateau after a decent salary. And what is that decent salary is about 75000 per year. Now as of now I cannot give you an Indian rupee equivalent of how much that should create a plateau for us in India but roughly that is the estimate.

Because this research was done on a very sizable population in US and the finding is that happiness does not increase after a salary of roughly 75000 per year. So, more money does increase, is actually a misconception. After you fulfil your basic needs which probably Kahneman meant that getting 75000 dollar per year would be able to help you survive effectively. And thereafter even if you get probably, it will increase your life evaluation but not the feeling of emotion.

In a separate lecture we will talk about how for money and happiness are related world over. But for today's purpose let us get rid of this notion that more money does increase happiness is truly a misconception.

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### Happiness comes from receiving gifts

- Researchers have found that happiness level goes much higher when someone purchases a gift. Finding applied to 136 countries with empirical data (Dunn et al., 2008, Science)
- Research has also shown a neural link (temporo-parietal region of the brain) between generosity & happiness by fMRI (Park et al., 2017, Nature)



The second thing comes about gifts. People believe that you become happy when you receive a gift. This is once again a misconception a myth. Research was done on this subject matter and this research was published in science a hugely appreciated journal in the field of hard sciences as well as social sciences is called science. Where researchers have found that your happiness goes up when you purchase a gift for someone.

And if you receive a gift, you become happy, but if you purchase a gift for someone else you become happier and this was a pan cultural studies, 136 countries were involved in that lot of empirical data have come up and based on that it has been concluded that when you created happiness for others you become more happy. So, the notion I try to forward here is that create happiness for others whatever be the form here I am talking about only gifts you would become happier.


And biologist and neurologist have also found a neural link that if you are generous in giving something to others you remain happy. And this generosity and happiness link has been found in functional MRI study, functional magnetic resonance imaging. This imaging process is a scientific

process where we find that with every experience there is a neural fire and the moment there is a neural fire oxygen in that area gets depleted.

And the nearby capillaries in the brain open up blood rushes in at that point and we get two kinds of blood one is oxygenated blood and one is deoxygenated blood. The oxygenated and deoxygenated blood is captured through magnet and we get a picture in the computer that which area of the brain is getting activated. The study has been found published in nature once again a very big Journal in scientific community.



And we have found that generosity and happiness has a link, a biological link just not psychological just not in the mind environment it is also in the brain.

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### Freedom of choice enhance happiness

- Its better to have some choice than no choice; but having too many choices may reduce happiness
- Research by Barry Schwartz has shown that too many choices create burden on cognitive abilities & cripple decision making capabilities



My next concept is about freedom. We believe that freedom of choice enhance our happiness. If you are given freedom, you would be happier. Let us see what is the status. Now it is always better to have some choice than no choice but does that mean having too many choices reduce too many choices give us more happiness. In fact, researches have been done Barry Schwartz a person who has done a lot of research on that.

And he finds that if you have got too many choices it actually creates a cognitive load on your mind. And when there is a cognitive load, it cripples your decision-making capability, you fail to

actually take a decision. Let us take an example of our daily life. We all aspire for getting a good job. So, if I do not get a job, I am unhappy but if I get a couple of job offers, I become happy and I can choose easily from.

But suppose I get five job offers and each job has its own advantage and disadvantage then with so many choices you find it very difficult to take a decision. Because whatever decision that you take you are bound to feel that the other jobs were probably better jobs and the job that you have taken up probably is not that good because you have not experienced the other jobs. So, freedom of choice enhances happiness is a myth but that does not mean we should not have choice at all. So, let us clarify on this position that freedom of choice enhances happiness but to some extent.

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The slide features a title "Longer vacations will make us happier" in a bold, sans-serif font. Below the title are two bullet points: "▪ Two week's vacation is not twice as good as one week vacation" and "▪ In long vacation, memories mix together; it does not make one happier". To the right of the text is a small rectangular image showing two people hiking up a dirt trail towards a mountain peak. In the bottom right corner of the slide is a circular video inset showing a man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, speaking. In the top right corner of the slide, there are two logos: the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) logo and the NPTEL logo.


My next idea is to let you know that we all aspire for vacations leave. Throughout the year we believe that when we are going to get leave. Now getting leave, getting vacations make us happier. But if you have got too long a vacation, we all want to meet our family member, we all want to go to somewhere where I feel that well I become happy. But researchers have found that two weeks of vacation is not twice as good as one week vacation.

For example, we all want to be with our family but during pandemic we have seen we were with the family for two years roughly. But did we feel that happiness or we had proximity stress for such kind of leave or vacation. So, in long vacation what really happens? Memories mixed together

there are lot of intrusion of other feeling. It does not make one happier if you are in a longer vacation.



So, vacation is important as long we are enjoying it to some extent during our regular day-to-day activity plan that we have. So, longer vacations will make us happier is actually a myth.

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Negative memories prevent us from being happy

- Research shows that forgiving other for past misdeeds reduce long-term stress. Forgiveness has great unburdening effect (Zheng et al., 2014)
- The study shows that forgiving people have more physical fitness & better quality of life



My next point is about negative memories prevent us from being happy. We all believe that if I have got bad experiences in life if somebody has shouted at me, if somebody has a bad interaction with me that will make me unhappy, that is true. But let us see what the research shows. Research shows that people remain unhappy if they do not know how to forgive others. In fact, forgiveness has great unburdening effect.

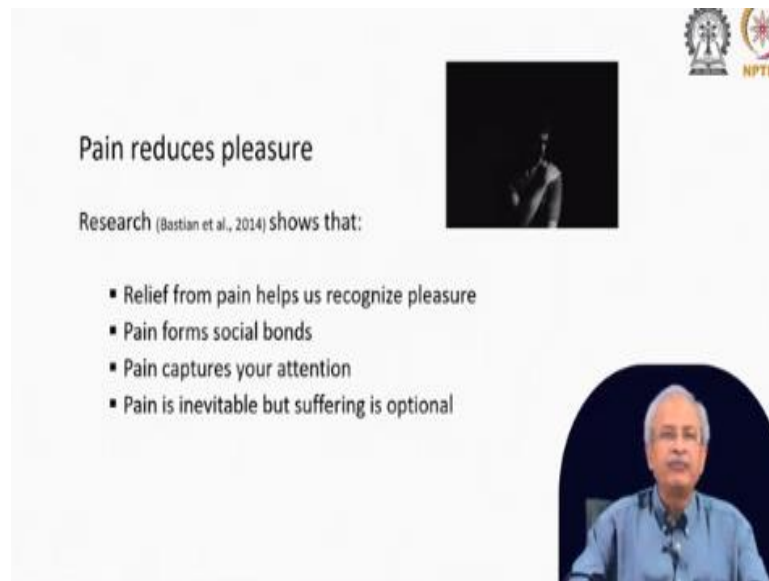
If you can forgive somebody you can permanently forget that incident. What really happens? If you have got a negative experience and if you try to forget it forcefully it will come back to you again and again and if it is a very traumatic experience then it becomes a part of your psychological problem. We call it PTSD post-traumatic stress disorder. But if people learn how to forgive others, then forgiveness will be a power for you.

The study shows that forgiving people not only they have got unburdening effect, they have more physical fitness and better quality of life. Why? Because if you remain in negative memories, you

actually in the process damage some of your bodily organs. So, physical fitness and better quality of life are ensured if you have got that attitude to forgive people. So, negative memories prevent us from being happy is not true.

We do not become happy because we do not know how to forgive others. Because negative emotions or negative memories are bound to come you cannot have positive memories all the time.

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The slide features a title 'Pain reduces pleasure' and a subtitle 'Research (Bastian et al., 2014) shows that:'. Below the subtitle is a bulleted list of four points. To the right of the text is a small, dark, square image. In the bottom right corner, there is a circular video inset showing a man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, speaking. In the top right corner, there are two logos: the Indian National Emblem and the NPTEL logo.

Pain reduces pleasure

Research (Bastian et al., 2014) shows that:

- Relief from pain helps us recognize pleasure
- Pain forms social bonds
- Pain captures your attention
- Pain is inevitable but suffering is optional

In fact, in the next slide, we are going to discuss that as well that is we believe if you do not have negative experience if you do not have pain probably you will have pleasure that is pain reduces pleasure. And if the pain reduces pleasure that is true then let us see what really the research shows. Research shows that when you are relieved from pain that help you recognize pleasure because pain and pleasure are not orthogonal to each other.

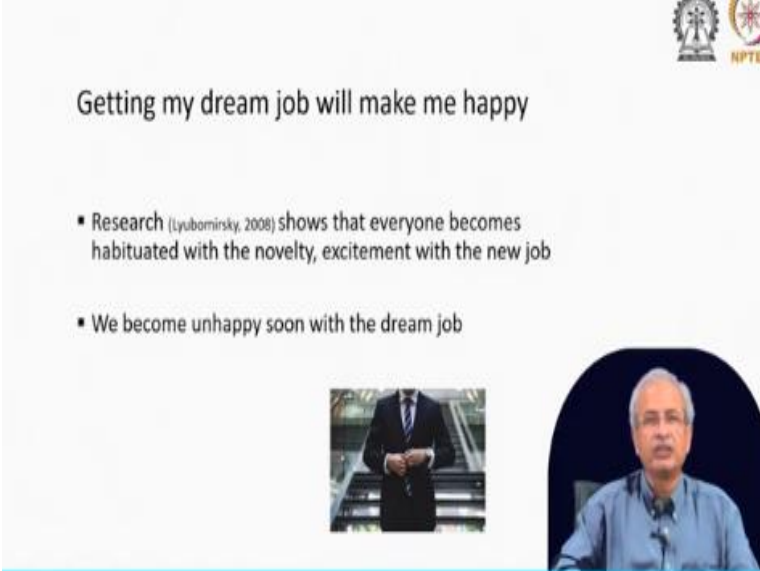
Biologically they are found to have one single locus in the brain. So, pain and pleasure actually can coexist. So, if you look at the last line, I have written that pain is inevitable but suffering is optional. And we have seen through literature of course that the pain and pleasure have got two neural different pathways. For pain there is a different pathway and for the feeling of negative memories there is a different pathway.

So, lot of people can dissociate pain and pleasure, pain and suffering. Everybody has to go through some kind of pain but whether somebody will suffer or not depends on their mindset plus pain also captures your attention. If you are not having the pain then you will not give attention to that particular area. Let us give you an example. Suppose I am getting toothache we do not realize how good this service that we get from our teeth.

Once you have got the problem then only you realize that your teeth has got a great potential and that actually helps you sustain a quality of life. Therefore, we pay attention to teeth once it is causing some kind of pain for us. Through pain also we form social bonds that is love and had come together because of this we say hate is a conditional love only. So, pain and pleasure, pain and attention, pain and having social bond they can coexist.

And it is possible that we can dissociate them through our scientific understanding because biologically pain and suffering have got two different roots.

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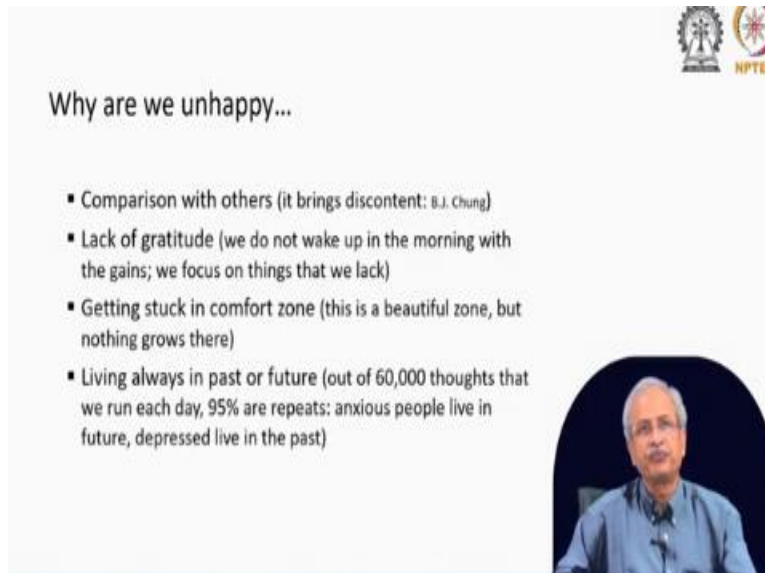
The slide features the title "Getting my dream job will make me happy" at the top. Below it, two bullet points cite research by Lyubomirsky (2008): "Research (Lyubomirsky, 2008) shows that everyone becomes habituated with the novelty, excitement with the new job" and "We become unhappy soon with the dream job". At the bottom, there is a small image of a man in a suit and a larger video inset of a man in a blue shirt speaking.

Getting my dream job will make me happy. People believe that if I get a very good job in my life, I would be a very happy person. Now let us see what really happens. Sonja Lyubomirsky has done a lot of research on the subject matter of happiness not just on getting job or dream job. I would strongly recommend to read her book as well which I have referred in my earlier talk. It shows that when you get a very good job that you would aspire for you get it you become happy.

But at the same time, you develop some kind of hedonic adaptation with that as well. The novelty is lost in the process over a period of time and the excitement of having a new job will go down after a certain period. It may be three months, it may be six months, it may be one year but getting my dream job will make me happy is a wrong notion it cannot make me lifelong notion. It has been found that even after getting a good job you become unhappy soon with your dream job.

So, a lot of people who believe that they if they get a very good salaried job probably, they would be happier. They get it then they try to aspire for a job that will probably give them more job, more salary.

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The slide features a title "Why are we unhappy..." in a light blue font. To the right of the title is a logo consisting of two circular emblems, one of which contains the acronym "NPTEL". Below the title is a bulleted list of four reasons for unhappiness. To the right of the list is a circular video inset showing a man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, speaking. The slide has a light blue background with a thin blue horizontal line at the bottom.

Why are we unhappy...

- Comparison with others (it brings discontent: B.J. Chung)
- Lack of gratitude (we do not wake up in the morning with the gains; we focus on things that we lack)
- Getting stuck in comfort zone (this is a beautiful zone, but nothing grows there)
- Living always in past or future (out of 60,000 thoughts that we run each day, 95% are repeats: anxious people live in future, depressed live in the past)

So, the reason behind why we are unhappy. One of the reasons is of course the misconception and the misconceptions come because we compare with each other. Very few of us actually go by our self-standard, more often we go by ourselves a comparative standard. The moment you try to compare yourself with others then it brings discontent for you. You do not see what difficulty you have.

You only try to see what others are not capable of and yet they got what you aspired to get in. So, comparison with others which brings discontent helps actually to bring more unhappiness. The second point of course is lack of gratitude. Gratitude is a great virtue. If you have the gratitude of

telling others that how he or she has helped you or how much you have got in life you would probably remain happy.

For example, if you get up in the morning with the notion that what is that you could not get last night a last day you will remain unhappy throughout because you begin your day with unhappiness. So, you focus only what that you lack but how much you have gained you never consider it. So, in theory of economics we always say fear of loss or loss aversion whatever you have lost you are more worried.

Whatever you cannot could not get you are more worried whatever you did get you never think of it. Why? Because you do not have gratitude for that. Gratitude actually helps you sustain your happiness therefore lack of gratitude makes us unhappy. Then getting stuck in comfort zone that we all want to be very comfortable a comfortable job, a comfortable position, a comfortable room, a comfortable social surrounding.

Comfort is a beautiful zone but as long you are comfortable nothing will grow there. Comfort zone is very difficult to find something is growing. Therefore, if you are stuck in comfort zone or if you always look for comfort zone probably you would never be able to challenge tomorrow and if you do not challenge tomorrow there would be no change. And if there is no change which is a gift of time that life would be monotonous.

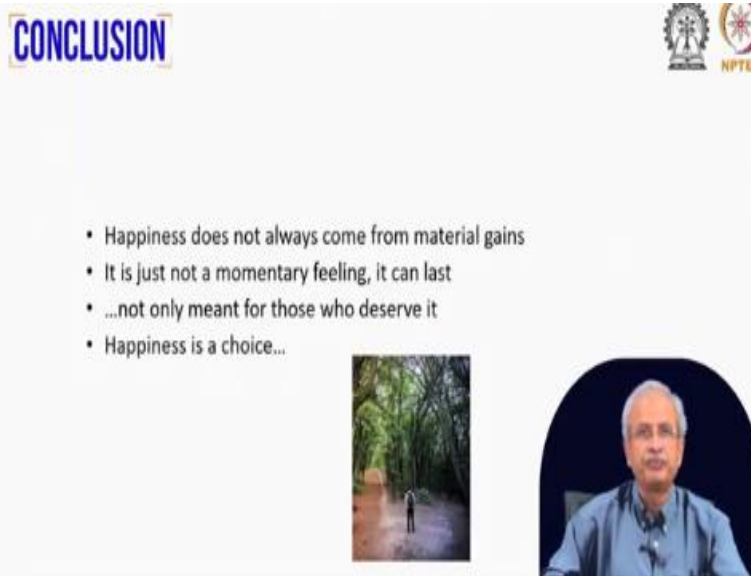
Whatever resource you have a biological resource, a psychological resource, social resource, economic resource whatever be the resource if you are stuck in the comfort zone probably you will not be able to find something what is very challenging. And of course, finally we are very unhappy because we always live in the past or future. We do not try to live in the present. Someone says that if you live in the past, it will give you tears.

If you always live in the future, it will give you fears. But if you live in the present, it will give you cheers; that is a poetic form of telling what our psychological state if we are in the past or if you were in the future. If you are in the past then you will feel depressed because you always have

some kind of negative experience and if you are in the future too apprehensive you would be very anxious. So, anxious people live in the future depressed people live in the past.

And in this process what happens? We repeat our thoughts in the brain and with every repetition of our thought we lose energy in the brain. The glucose that gets metabolized with each of your thought is lost. So, when we find that if we have a day where 95 percent of our thoughts are repeats you do not have any new thoughts any novelty in mind. So, living always in the past or future does not help us, you have to live in the present.



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The slide features a title 'CONCLUSION' in blue text on a yellow background. To the right of the title are two logos: the Indian National Emblem and the NPTEL logo. Below the title is a bulleted list of four points. At the bottom of the slide, there are two images: a person walking on a path through a forest and a portrait of a man in a blue shirt.

**CONCLUSION**

- Happiness does not always come from material gains
- It is just not a momentary feeling, it can last
- ...not only meant for those who deserve it
- Happiness is a choice...



So, in conclusion we need to say that happiness does not always come from materials gain. Happiness can come from any source even if you do not have anything. We talked about appreciation you may not have autonomy, you may not have affluence but you can still have a subjective sense of feeling of happiness because it is all in your mind. It does not exclusively depend on your material gain.

Then it just not is a momentary feeling. Some people believe that happiness is just about the moment if you lose the moment then your happiness is gone. But happiness can last, you can have a happiness sustained through several activities by getting rid of the misconceptions. Therefore, you can help your happiness last. Some people believe that some people are happy only because they deserve it.

Anybody can be happy; it is not meant for those who deserve it. In fact, happiness is a choice. So, in the photograph where you see you have got two parts you have got a part of choice and you have got a path of compulsion. Those who think of having compulsion they are perpetually unhappy but if you think about a choice then they can even go to the path of unhappiness for a short-term condition.

But ultimately, they choose to be happy in a long-term gain. So, happiness is a choice it comes from your understanding of life, it comes from your understanding of the context or the experience or the environment to which you belong. And it is not a biological or a psychological or a social or economic property of someone who has it, anybody can achieve it that is the science behind it. **(Refer Slide Time: 28:12)**



Ted Talks: Happiness

- Nic Marks  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH2ys\\_lgV4Y&ab\\_channel=TEDxTalks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH2ys_lgV4Y&ab_channel=TEDxTalks)
- Raj Raghunathan:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klp3rHn3Pii&ab\\_channel=TEDxTalks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klp3rHn3Pii&ab_channel=TEDxTalks)

So, you can actually think about reading more about happiness there are other issues related to it but we can take it over at a later talk. Thank you.