

The Science of Happiness and Wellbeing
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Lecture - 08
Happiness: The Unanswered Questions

Welcome to this talk where my principal idea behind is to raise more questions than giving more answers. In fact, in this talk I am not going to give you a clear answer for certain questions which I believe are very important to understand happiness from a scientific perspective. I will have four sets of questions and in each set, I have got three such questions. And with each question will come up with certain conflicting notions.

And conflict is something you all know which bogs us down bothers us perpetually in our life. A conflict like whether we want to be happy for a purpose or it is our passion. We want to be happy for our life for our career we are not happy because of our mind our mindset. Lot of such issues keep coming to us and we fail to resolve it. And when we fail to resolve such conflict then we take certain steps which probably are not very healthy effort.

If I am faced with a conflict of to be happy or not to be happy and if I find that I cannot resolve it then at times we try to avoid some situation at times we try to compromise such situation and at times we try to defend such situations with certain egoistic remarks. We will explain about all these things but before that let us try to share with you what I have in hand as questions for you.

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QUESTIONS

- What makes us happy?
- Questions that remain unanswered...
- Research findings in happiness research
- What we may conclude...



So, the question that we have is, what makes us happy? For example, you become happy when you know that you are going to gain something in future or you become happy when you know that you are in a position to keep yourself happy with some pleasurable moments. This is just an example I will come up with many more questions. So, the questions that remain unanswered will be presented before you.


My job is to not tell you about the answers because I do not have the answer. The very purpose of having this talk is to raise more questions rather than trying to give only answers. And not that by having an answer will resolve the issue we will probably raise further questions. So, what are the research findings in happiness research and what is that we may conclude out of that we are going to talk about it.

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Keywords

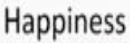


- Choice vs Compulsion
- Affluence vs Autonomy
- Memory vs Moment
- Hopefulness vs Helplessness





So, once again we will have controversies like choice versus compulsion, affluence versus autonomy, memory versus moment, hopefulness versus helplessness. These are certain terminologies will be using more often. In the past also we did make such uses of choice and compulsion, affluence and autonomy, memory and moment, hopefulness and helplessness. So, we will have a set of 12 such questions and each of these questions we need to find answers not through book but through our book of life.

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Happiness

Unanswered questions-I

- Happiness: A choice or a compulsion or a chance?
- If happiness is a choice, why so many of us are unhappy? – *Affluence vs Autonomy*
- Shall we have more choices to become happy? – *Best, Good or Right choice*



Let us first get the first question, question number one, whether happiness is a choice or a compulsion or a chance? Some people believe that well I got something luckily so it is more of a chance. Some people believe that no we need to be happy therefore it is more of a compulsion and

some people believe that let it be a choice because I should be happy when I want to be I do not want to be happy all the time.

So, the question therefore is we need to answer, can we term it as a choice or we call it as a compulsion or we call it as a chance? I would suggest you to find an answer for yourself and instead of finding an answer in the book; its important that we try to find the answer for ourselves. My second question is if happiness is a choice, then why so many of us are unhappy. We want it to be a choice and if we are to be happy and if this is our choosing why so many of us are unhappy.

If you go through the world happiness report you will find that majority of the people report unhappiness barring people in Europe and North America. So, the question is whether happiness comes through living standard Europe and North America of course as having a better living standard? So, is it the affluence or in a country like India where we may not have affluence but we have a high degree of autonomy.

Because we have social support, we have people around us we have the freedom of choosing what we want to do. Of course, the countries which have got affluence also have their freedom to choose their own course of action question is, whether affluence comes first autonomy later or whether autonomy is more important rather than affluence. Once again you have to find answer for that. Then comes shall we have more choices to become happy.

In the past we have understood that having too many choices may have been a misconception for us so too many choices create cognitive load for us. Now the question that I am asking after that that what kind of choices make us happy the best choice, the good choice or the right choice. Many of us believe that we should always go for the best choice. Without realizing probably for getting the best choice or capitalizing the best choice we need to wait pretty long we may have to wait years to get the best choice for us.

Some people believe that since it takes long time to get the best choice it is better to have good choices. Good choice is something where you have got certain alternatives and out of which you can select the one which you consider as a good choice. The best choice out of the alternatives.

But some people believe that right choice makes us happy. That is, you have chosen something for example you have chosen to sacrifice something for a greater gain or a long term happiness.

And at this point of time, it may be self-defeating but in long term it gives us a better field of happiness. So, what kind of choice we must make in order to be happy? What kind of decision we must make in order to be happy? Lot of decision-making problem actually make us unhappy. Without realizing that before we go for best choice, good choice or right choice is important for us to learn how to take decision about a choice.

So, any wise person; who wants to be happy first learn how to decide. So, decision making is more important rather than having best choice good choice and right choices. And then of course you decide that which choices are best for your life or your career, is it the best? Is it the good or is it the right?

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Happiness

Unanswered questions-II

- Are we naturally happy? – *Genotype or Phenotype*
- Can money buy happiness? – *Well-being or Ill-being*
- What kind of happiness do people value most?
Memory or Moment



My second set of questions which are fourth fifth and sixth is, are we naturally happy? Some question comes that people are naturally happy, who are happy always? Some people say that people are naturally unhappy and later on life experiences make them happy. Is it a genotype or a phenotype? That is do we have a gene for happiness or is it the functional expression of proteins in the gene which makes us happy.

Now brain has got two parts one is a cortical region other is a subcortical region, what you have learned from biology I can certainly share with you is that most of our emotions especially the negative emotions like fight or flight. They are captured in our subcortical area and then of course when these subcortical impulses reached the cortical area or the higher centre of the brain, we learn how to inhibit the negative thoughts and how to bring about our positive thoughts.

Some people say that probably it is just not in the brain it is in the gene as such. So, whether it is inherited or whether it can be nurtured say nature and nurture question of happiness comes. There is no direct answer anywhere in the literature it is up to you how you find the answer behind it. Then the fifth question is, can money buy happiness? Earlier we have discussed that money is important for survival and to a great extent.

As long you do not have more than what serves your purpose you would be happy with the money. But can money bring only well-being or it can also bring ill being. A lot of people are unhappy because they have got a lot of wealth. So, happiness produces only through money or money can only bring well-being or money can also produce ill-being. This is a debate and this debate is going on in all forms of social sciences especially in economics and behavioural sciences.



In fact, behavioural economics also talk about it. So, you have to find an answer can money buy happiness. My next question is what kind of happiness do people value most, memory or moment. Some people believe that it is the moment which gives us the maximum happiness. In fact, the theory of moment was also advocated and advanced in Daniel Kahneman's work of behaviour economics.

He suggests that the world of economics, or the consumer behaviour is primarily dominated by the moment not by the memory. But there are controversies as well we need to find out when we actually become very happy. If I have got memories of happy episodes or if I am happy at the moment what is very important for me. So, memory or moment is the next set of controversy that we have in the form of questions.

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Happiness
Unanswered questions-III

- Are we unhappy because of 'hypothetical' missed opportunities? – *Self or Comparative choices*
- Is it not alright to have some bad choices in life? – *Hopefulness vs Helplessness*
- Do failed choices prevent us from being happy? – *Forgiving vs Forgetful*



NPTEL

My third set of questions come in this form that is; are we unhappy because of hypothetical missed opportunities. That is many people believe that whatever opportunity they got in life probably they do not are up to that they should have gotten much more. They believe that their self is much better than others. So, whatever opportunity they get they believe that this is not fit for them.

So, if I want to get a very good job, I get it then I believe that probably I missed other jobs as well. Without realizing that; you cannot avail all the opportunities in life. So, we often apprehend that probably I have missed an opportunity in life. We call it hypothetical missed opportunity and that causes a sense of repentance in our mind that I should have gone somewhere else I should have done something else I should have read something else I should have gotten a bigger job or a better job than the job that I have been doing.

And in the process, they accumulate lot of repentance for themselves and this repentance is like a mental cancer because nobody is going to help you out to get rid of this kind of repentance. So, as long you are going by comparative choices you will repent but as long you are going by your self-standard that what capacity you have and what you have gotten probably that will satisfy you much better.

But I do not have the full answer for it. Lot of people believe that in order to grow we need to compare with others as well. So, at what point we should look for self-choices and at what point

we should go for comparative choices is something that you need to decide about it and that is the question put forward in front of you. My next question is that we always want to be happy. Now the question is, is it possible that we always take the best choices in life.

And that becomes the happiest choices. If we do that, we have to ignore good choices we have to ignore the right choices. I told you that right choices may be self-defeating at times we take bad choices in life. In order to bring a change in order to challenge it tomorrow in order to become more dynamic in order to go beyond our stability and comfort to more dynamic features and some kind of change in life where you believe that you got something what you did not expect.

So, in this process we at times are stuck we believe that we are helpless. So, if you do not know learn how to bring changes in your life. Probably will continue to go for best choices only but best choices do not come in abundance best choices are always limited and best choice is not fit for everyone. Every person has their own way of calling it as a best. Therefore, whether you should feel helplessness or you should feel hopefulness it depends on your mindset.

So, if I am hopeful of something I can even take bad choices but that is the way I believe in life that we should have some bad choices in life as well. So, that we understand what are the good choices what are the best choices and what are the right choices. So, hopefulness versus helplessness which one kills us much more puts us in a difficulty much more. It is you have to decide. Then comes do failed choices prevent us from being happy.

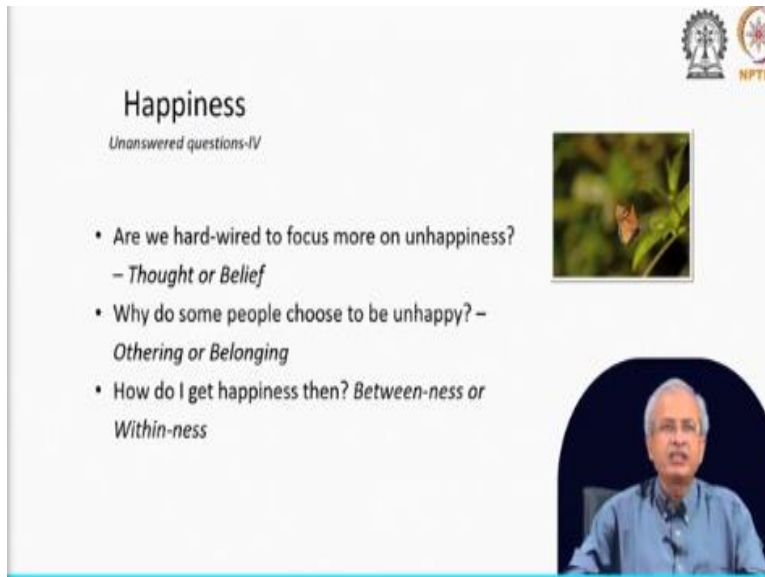
We make certain choices we fail somewhere but then we try to forget it. And if we try to forget it forcefully, we find that we remain unhappy in the process. And in the last talk we talk about forgiving and attitude. So, whether we should be forgiving type or we should be forgetful type is also a mental mechanism through which you try to understand that how the failed choices can actually be taken due care of.

Many a times we fail and we believe and we repent that we should not have taken that choices. But the problem is that if you have chosen something and if you feel and if you believe that you have chosen a wrong domain of pursuance. Then you need to also understand that it is important

to honour our own choices we might have failed we might have succeeded does not matter. More important is whether I honour my own choice.

So, whether we honour our own choices whether we forgive ourselves or we try to forget our failed choices depends on our mindset the kind of template that we develop for our life to be happy. So, this is another question.

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The slide is titled "Happiness" with the subtitle "Unanswered questions-IV". It features a list of three questions, each with a sub-point. In the top right corner, there are two logos: the Indian National Emblem and the NPTEL logo. To the right of the first question is a small image of a butterfly. In the bottom right corner, there is a circular video inset showing a man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, speaking.

Happiness
Unanswered questions-IV

- Are we hard-wired to focus more on unhappiness?
– *Thought or Belief*
- Why do some people choose to be unhappy? –
Othering or Belonging
- How do I get happiness then? *Between-ness or Within-ness*

My last set of questions comes like this therefore. Are we hard-wired to focus more on unhappiness? As I said if happiness is a choice then everybody would like to be happy but why do not we find that, why most of the people in the world are considered to be unhappy. World happiness report has suggested that nearly three-fourths of the people are unhappy in terms of course the population and country-ratio.

So, we are hard-wired for unhappiness if it is true then is it because of our belief system or is it our reasoning or thought process. What is more important? So, thinking comes out of your reasoning beliefs come out of your the process of making yourself assured or getting a set of values that you have imbibed in the beginning. So, are you driven more by your reasoning or thought or are you driven more by your belief.

We need to understand what is the source of our unhappiness the source of unhappiness could be our reasoning process could be our belief system, we need to find our answer for that. Then comes why do some people choose to be unhappy. Some people do not want to be happy. If they are happy, they become anxious. So, they believe that there are reasons to be unhappy because others are happy and he or she is not happy.

And some people believe that even if I am unhappy and everybody else is unhappy, I belong to that particular group and if everybody is unhappy I also do not mind to be unhappy. So, one is a sense of belongingness and one is a sense of othering. We call it reciprocal othering, that is if somebody is in front of me, I would always perceive them as happy myself unhappy it is reciprocal othering.

And belongingness is something where I believe that whatever the other person is I am also like that I find belongingness in the same way the other person is having the feeling. So, othering versus belonging is also a controversy which bogs us down. Once again it boils down to self-standard versus comparative-standard and finally how do I get happiness, then through between-ness or through within-ness through our social connectivity or through our idea of staying within ourselves.

We call it egocentric versus eco centric if I believe that I must remain within myself my personal pleasure is the most important thing my personal gain is the most important thing even if it is at the cost of others then I call it as within-ness. But between-ness is somebody who is eco-centric in nature, who actually looks for the benefit of others who believes that if others are happy then only they become happy.

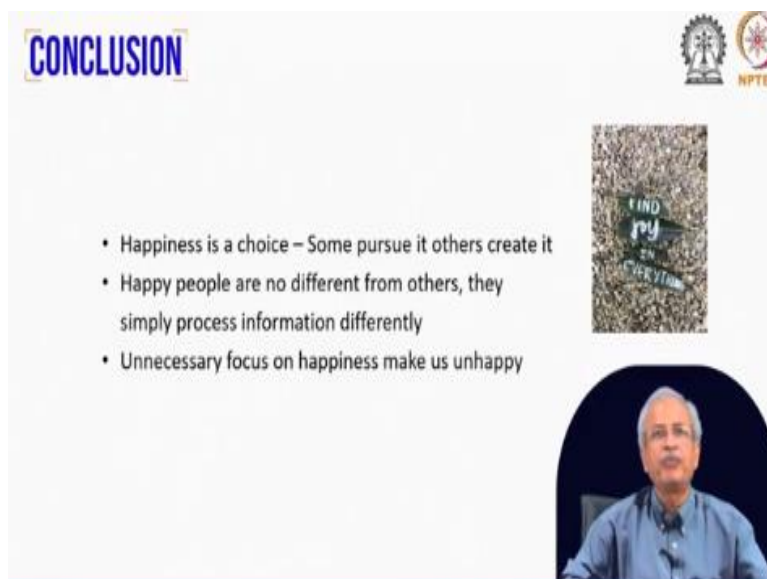
And not only that there are people who believe that in order to make others happy they can sacrifice their own happiness as well. So, between-ness versus within-ness is also a important issue. I talked to you about the Harvard university study which has been continuing since 1937. Where it has been found finally after nine decades of research that it is the social connectivity it is the social relationship that ultimately gives you the happiness.

The study started with over 200 couples in some time in 1930s and continued so long and still continuing and will continue probably forever just to find out what could be the possible reason for happiness. So, those studies reveal in a longitudinal paradigm that well it is the between-ness probably gives us the ultimate form of happiness and not within-ness but the question lies with you, you need to find answer for each one of this.

So, I have a 12 set of questions for you each of those questions we have to find answers. Not in the form of only answering in the assessment that we are going to make for you. It must come out through a thought process and that thought process must have originality rather than having some degree of correctness into it or some form of accuracy. Because through that answer we will find our own answer we will find our own happiness.

The purpose behind having this talk as I said is not to find answer for, how to become happy? Who is more happy. It is about finding certain questions answered for ourselves and probably that will help us find the right kind of answer.

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The slide features a light blue background. At the top left, the word "CONCLUSION" is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. In the top right corner, there are two small logos: the Indian National Emblem and the NPTEL logo. The main content consists of three bullet points in a black, sans-serif font, each preceded by a small black dot. To the right of the text, there is a small, square, textured image showing a close-up of a plant or ground surface. In the bottom right corner, there is a circular video inset showing a man with grey hair, wearing a blue shirt, speaking.

CONCLUSION

- Happiness is a choice – Some pursue it others create it
- Happy people are no different from others, they simply process information differently
- Unnecessary focus on happiness make us unhappy

My conclusion of course, if you ask me, I find that happiness is a choice some pursue it and others create it those who pursue it they find it very difficult to remain happy because they are egocentric people. They try to make themselves happy but someone who tries to create happiness for others

they remain in perpetual happiness because through that happiness they derive happiness. They do not have to forcefully make them happy.

My second conclusion is that happy people are no different from others. Happy and unhappy people are the same people they simply process information differently. The purpose of having this course is to help you understand how to process information differently. Unhappy people actually think in one particular fashion one particular way and that is probably is not the right way to become happy.

So, processing of information is very important and if we have the right kind of processing of information if we can get rid of the misconceptions that we have about happiness probably we do not need to forcefully make us happy. And if we try to unnecessarily focus on happiness then we will become unhappy. If we try to make others happy probably that will change our focus and that will bring the kind of happiness, I am actually looking for a perpetual happiness a happiness for life and a happiness for others that makes me happy.

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The slide is titled "REFERENCES" in blue text at the top left. It features a book cover for "Happiness is an Option" by Ed. Linda M. Ulrich, which includes a circular graphic with the text "Twenty Years of Learning in the Line of the Future". To the right of the book cover, there are three bullet points, each with a URL: <https://happyproject.in/happiness-questions/>, <https://www.wellandgood.com/questions-about-happiness/>, and <https://worldhappiness.report/tag/>. In the top right corner, there are two logos: the Indian National Emblem and the NPTEL logo. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, speaking.

So, this is what is I have to offer for you there is a book happiness is an option as well and there are certain references you can surely go through those and you will find lot of additional literature behind it but not directly getting the answer for which, I have raised those questions. So, you have

to find questions answered for yourself not through books or references but through your own book of reference. Thank you so much.