"IS LIFE ABOUT THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS?"
Philosophy Café discussion

INTRODUCTORY NOTES
By Yvonne C.

Life, I believe is about the search for happiness and the way to achieve this is through the attainment of wisdom.

A sage also once said that the whole of wisdom could be reduced to the golden mean.

Aristotle’s definition of happiness is the middle way and a virtuous life. The often misunderstood Epicurus’ way is through financial independence in a simple contemplative life with friends.

Buddhists too believe in the need to live a virtuous life and to cultivate a mental discipline towards compassion for oneself and others -- within the continuum of changes between goodness and evil, love and hate, the dominance of nature over many lifetimes above the temporary and seeming insignificance of our own.

Taoists while embracing a doctrine of inclusiveness -- in the duality of opposites, emphasize the need to be compassionate, avoid extremes and balance the opposing yin and yang energies within worldly and spiritual worlds.

Some religions such as some groups of Christians, Islamic and so on practice more extreme and exclusive forms of beliefs, embracing “goodness” hating “evil”. However, right when carried too far can become wrong -- as when a cow is milked too much blood will be drawn. An old friend once said that when we expect too much from a person we would get a lesser human as a result. There is probably less chance in finding happiness within religious groups which are structured on extremes -- such as when you find yourself having to fit into either one of a multitude of submissive followers or as their charismatic leader.

Other religious groups such as the Religious Society of Friends or Quakers on the other hand have a value system, which include a belief in moderation as a way of life. The search is an optimistic one -- respect for individuals, to see the spirit of God in all and to lead a simple thus virtuous, honest and contemplative life, of excellence. Friends value non-violence, active service under the guidance of a loving God and the centering of the self through silence.

Happiness depends on where one is positioned or where one positions oneself within the scheme of life. I think the ideal would be God-Self-Man with less desirable choices in...
God-Man-Self; Self-Man-God; Self-God-Man; Man-God-Self and Man-Self-God.

We are all in search of the middle way. One way to achieve moderation without straining after it is to place your opposite beside yourself. Opposing values will then become reference points and the communication of extremes will produce the golden mean. Thus people with low resting heart rate are compelled to look for excitement in life. On the other hand, putting two extremes of the same kind together can lead to disastrous results. For example, it is now known that people with low arousal and unemotional states growing up in an abusive or unstable environment will commit violent crimes as adults.

Here are examples of a few areas where moderation, wisdom and virtuous behavior would result in happiness:

**Friends & Virtue:**

When one is good and wise one does not need the company of many and would be able to be happy keeping oneself company. Being one's own best friend would be important for example, since dependence lead to betrayal and knowing the goodness within oneself will help us identify true friends when they come along. After all, one can only recognize what we know and have experienced for ourselves. Thus for example a lover, who cannot believe in love, cannot be believed. Besides, people cannot make others love them; they can only make themselves be loved. But living only for oneself gives a person a false sense of security, as no help will come when help is needed. On the other extreme, living only for others would however lead to our not having anything to offer others. In the case of a partnership, the choice of being an incomplete "other half" of one extreme end of an entity is not likely to produce the same level of happiness as the doubling of happiness by two more "complete and centered" individuals.

Dante in his Divine Comedy supported the view that a knowledge of hell is necessary to reach heaven -- that the joy of wisdom begins with experiences in sorrow.

That we are capable of leading ourselves into hell was explored by Shakespeare in his great tragedies where he focused on the nature of human flaws in-built into great and noble men -- who were high achievers, by nature of their love of extremes. Lear's kingly confidence and later egoistic arrogance led to the loss of his kingdom and the corruption and death of members of his family. Hamlet's princely creative imagination ran the full gamut of suspicion until he became paralyzed by his own obsessive mental state to face the reality of treacherous conspiracy and lost love. Othello's loving and trusting nature, which once worked so well for him, but when manipulated by the devilish Iago churned into a storm of jealous passion, hate and revenge which cause the death of his loving wife. Macbeth's love of power which made him a successful general finally drove him into extremes of greed and the murder of his own king.

Friends should be wise people, the wise are realistic people of mighty deeds and good words. People with inner peace, who count their blessings, are patient, good-natured -- able to pardon anything and insist that others had good intentions or went wrong inadvertently. Best of all friends seek advice when needed and should ideally know of and are friends with great people of his age. Friends listen, see and keep quiet, live much, take pleasure in life, take seriously only matters that are important, are ever watchful and avoid troublesome, compromising situations. Friends put in human efforts as though there's no divine help and seek divine help as though no human could help. We love them because they are people of principles who will treat us well even when they oppose us, and oppose us they will as friends can also turn into our worst enemies. We know that loyal friends are a remedy for bad luck and chase away sorrows while foolish people gather them.

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<th>Paraphrased quotes</th>
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<td>...the Pareto law [the 80/20 Principle] is an empirical law which works and which nobody can explain. -- Josef Steindl. The universe is predictably unbalanced -- roughly along 80/20 lines. - Richard Koch</td>
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<td>If the mind is happy, ... the whole world will be happy. -- Ramana Maharshri</td>
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<td>The more you understand yourself and your emotions, the more you necessarily love God. -- Spinoza</td>
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<td>The kingdom of God is within you. -- Jesus</td>
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<td>The way up and the way down are one and the same -- Heralitus</td>
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<td>It is right to hate the actions of an evil man, but because his deepest self is the image of God, it is our duty to honor him with love. -- Abraham Isaac Kook</td>
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<td>Perfection is another name for reality. -- Spinoza</td>
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<td>When you realize where you come from, you naturally become tolerant, kindhearted and can deal with whatever life brings you. -- Lao-tzu</td>
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<td>Let go of longing and aversion and everything will be clear. - Seng-ts'an</td>
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Foes are stubborn, vile spirited joking at other's expense, contradict and condemn everyone and everything and keep a blacklist of others' defects. Foes are constantly discontented, complaining, publicizing their own dishonor and slights, argumentative, ill disciplined, swayed by extremes of passion and tempers and always unfortunate. Foes provoke contempt, satisfaction and insolence from listeners and encourage them to behave like the people complained about. The fine words of foes cannot be trusted; they harm those who confide in them, as they do not value goodness or honor. They make promises to trap other fools. Foes are vain, presumptuous, self satisfied, extravagant, lightheaded and crave imaginary applause.

Foes seek out and are obsessed with novelty and are therefore fickle in judgement and affections. Living on the edge of "chaos" foes can become friends and they do -- so we leave the door of conciliation open …

**Contemplation:**

Someone once said … for a beautiful life, spend the first part of one's life in dialogue with the dead to find oneself, the second part in conversation with the living and beholding all that is good in the world and the last part in contemplation and philosophizing.

Someone also said that to be happy for a day have a party, for a year - marry, for a lifetime - have a garden.

Contemplation requires silence and inaction. Some examples of the value of Silence and Inaction are:

- Wisdom needs contemplation.
- To foresee danger we need quiet learning
- In handling crisis, stand back quietly from the confusion to gain perspective and clarity.
- When harmful rumors are rampant, it is best to ignore them since responding to them will give them credit and they in turn will bring one discredit.
- Silence is the best way to convey a bitter truth to an intelligent person and a "no" is not so bitter when allowed to ripen.
- If a stream is muddy, only by leaving it alone will it grow clear. Remedies often worsen evils.
- Neither hear nor speak secrets. It is dangerous to confide in others as threat would make yourself slave or act as confidants to friends or those equal or greater than you as the latter will smash the mirrors that remind them of their ugliness.
- Favors work well for well-bred people but for those less cultivated, wait and only give rewards of merits for jobs well done.

**Financial Independence (… on surviving changes within our material world)**

In economic terms, some levels of inflation are good to keep jobs going. Keynes (1883-1946) believed that government spending must be made to compensate for insufficient business investment in times of recession whilst Hayek (1899-1992) believed that government should not intervene in economic matters. What we have now is a combination of these two opposing forces of beliefs which seems to work best together in moderation.

When thrown a sword by life, do we seize it by the blade or by the hilt, the later

| Complex systems, perched on the edge of chaos are self-organizing systems that produce order from instability. - George Zipf's rank/size rule. "cells collectively seem in effect to decide to become different parts of the organism, they behave as if they knew their own polar co-ordinates. -- Paul Krugman |
| The place is here; the way leads everywhere -- Dogen |
| To see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower -- William Blake |
| Do your work, then step back. The only path to serenity. -- Lao-tzu |
| Be still and know that I am God. -- the bible |
| The first law of thermodynamics is that energy changes form, the second law is that a chemical system tends toward maximum disorder. The natural condition is not equilibrium, it's entropy - |
suggesting that we make and effort to see contentment in everything and turn things to one's advantage.

The Chinese believe that to survive hard times, we should be like the evergreen pine trees the plum blossom and bamboo trees. The first means to stay calm, relaxed, good humored and unruffled during serious periodic downturns in order to ensure good health and long life. The plum tree blossoms in the midst of icy winters suggests that those who are wise are able to stay serene, perform and even shine under adversity. Finally, to be like bamboo the wise has a flexible disposition and is effortlessly resilient. Wise people are able to bend to prevailing strong winds without breaking. This attitude introduces goodwill into every potentially hostile situation.

The need is to simplify our lives for example in terms of "unnecessary" material, ideological and emotional needs, also to depend less on variety and novelty. To then however, double our store of life's necessities during more favorable times in order to be prepared -- to avoid difficulties.

As changes are certain, obstinacy can therefore be "evil". Obstinacy that leads to the passions for war between inflexible, opposing angry forces -- where judgement and hearts are damaged. Thus when we take the sword by the hilt changes will be viewed as good.

Life & Death (Longevity)

We used to think that the more nutrition and amount of food we eat the better. We now know that by eating much less than what is regarded in Western countries as normal will prolong life. That a high nutrient, low calorie and primarily vegetarian diet will actually promote health and lengthen active life. That gentle and not vigorous exercise is what will keep you physically fit.

Some people think that retirement is more stressful than working. A survey on the number of pension checks issued to retirees across a number of major engineering companies shows that people who retire after 65 years of age live an average of 18 months before meeting death. However, those who retired at 50 years of age live on average well into their nineties. Data shows that those who prolong their retirement pass 55 years are taking away two years of their life with each year's delay in retirement. The people who live long are those who retire early from "mandatory" work but who continue to engage in activities of their choice well into old age. Thus again - moderation saves the day!

countering it requires constant innovation and improved use of the energy that is available.

Own less - the less we depend on, the less we are likely to be betrayed in life.

To Dante heat is change, God and love while ice is stagnation, the devil and hate.