

## NAME

HappyyAudio.mp3

## DATE

September 8, 2021

## DURATION

16m 4s

## 2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

## START OF TRANSCRIPT

**[00:00:00] Speaker1**

The following is a message from Wellsprings Congregation

**[00:00:03] Speaker2**

If you watched our service a few weeks ago, you would have seen me doing worship leading on online, and I was talking about how sometimes it was good to let your inner curmudgeon out. And now today I'm standing in front of you talking about a movie called Happy. And I am a fan of promoting cognitive dissonance. So here we are. And I want to notice something right now, too, that I am doing this in person with you. Way back in the before times when I started talking with people here about preaching, I had in mind something like this, maybe not quite a hundred percent, but something like this preaching in front of you all. But instead, my very first sermon was recorded in my home office, deep in the dark of January lockdowns and flattening of curves for a while back ago. But here we are, and I want to say, if this isn't nice, I don't know what is. The documentary that's the subject of our spiritfllix, happy. I first watched about eight or so years ago when I was first learning how to meditate and a portion of that. The documentary focuses on the impact that a meditation practice has on the brain, scientifically measured using MRIs and things like that. And the idea being that having a regular practice will change your brain, specifically how you respond to events, how you respond instead of reacting from a fight, flight or freeze like lizard brain kind of mindset.

**[00:01:43] Speaker2**

And I enjoyed most, most of the other aspects of the documentary, particularly to the idea that happiness is something that can be cultivated, can be developed. And through all, they talk about a couple of different things that you can do like through body movement, through being of service to others, seeking out novelty, seeking out novel experiences and things of that. And the one that I think many of us have probably been missing the last 18 months. Connection with others. And I also wanted to think about happiness through a spiritual lens, so. The pursuit of happiness. So what does it mean to be happy? We're not far here in Chester Springs, from the place where Thomas Jefferson wrote that we have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. He wasn't saying it's a guarantee. I don't know if you thought of it this way, but to me, he was describing a journey, a process, not a destination. And ever since, as a nation, we seem to be very much in favor of finding that happiness, maybe to a foolish or naive extent. Because, you know, it's basic to not want to feel discomfort, to feel pain or anything unpleasant and defining happiness as the absence of these things might be where you land in how you define your joy, define your happiness. And our capitalist world is very adept at exploiting this, whether it's with consumer goods or algorithms that make you forget for a moment the discontent you felt at the end of a long week.

**[00:03:24] Speaker2**

And that's OK. I'm as guilty of retail therapy as anybody else. And like one of my favorite songwriters, Billy Bragg, wrote by these things, but you don't need them. But as long as you're comfortable, it feels like freedom. But there's something more to happiness than the absence of an unpleasant stimuli. Right? The after all, the absence could really just be numbness or no feeling. And for me, that's not what I want. That's not what I want to aim for because how you feel is how you feel. If you feel sadness, allow yourself the space for that emotion. We have to accept happiness does not exist without sadness. Comfort does not exist without discomfort. But if you're like me, you're thinking, I want to improve that ratio. I want to balance out the scales with more happiness and less sadness on my scales. How do I do that? I would say it was just a few things. One. The idea that there's something larger than yourself. Whether it's nature being experienced in the odd nature or something bigger than yourself or serving some greater good other than your own individual needs. Second, the connection we feel with others. And third, and I think this is the key. Recognizing those feelings we have when we're in the midst of those experiences so that we are aware we are in a good moment.

**[00:04:53] Speaker2**

And I want to talk about that, how you might practice that, how I might practice recognizing those moments because I think being aware of those moments is key. Some of you might have heard the quote earlier. The Kurt Vonnegut quote you might have picked up on that, that I used, if this isn't nice. I don't know what is. I am embarrassed to admit that I did not know that was from a college graduation speech that he made until I saw this book about two weeks ago. And in the speech, he shared an anecdote about his uncle, Alex. And he said one of the things Uncle Alex found objectionable about human beings was that they so rarely noticed when they were happy. He himself did his best to acknowledge it when times were sweet. We could be drinking lemonade in the seat of an Apple tree in the summer and Uncle Alex would interrupt the conversation and say, If this isn't nice, what is? So I hope that you'll do the same for the rest of your lives when things are going sweetly and peacefully. Pause and say out loud, if this isn't nice, what is? That idea of noticing resonated a lot for me. So I'm thinking also a lot lately about the idea of tragic optimism and in part because I can let my inner curmudgeon out, but more importantly, because it captures how we can be clear eyed about a situation while retaining hope and optimism.

**[00:06:24] Speaker2**

This idea of tragic optimism originated with Viktor Frankl writing about how even in the face of unimaginable tragedy, we seek out meaning. And if we find that meaning, if we find our way, it helps us persevere. And maybe a short way to describe it is it's OK to not be OK, how you feel is how you feel and validate what you are feeling. Make meaning from that feeling and from that experience. It's not what some people are calling like a toxic positivity. You know, I knew a guy who when asked, How are you doing? He would always say terrific. And while some people may have found comfort in his response, I never did because nobody is terrific all the time, and that's OK. Denying how you feel won't serve anyone well in the long run. And most importantly, it won't serve you well. So I want to read to you a quote from Victor Frankl from his in his book Man's Search for Meaning, says. It is a characteristic of the American culture that again and again, one is commanded and order to be happy, but happiness cannot be pursued. It must ensue. One must have a reason to be happy. Once the reason is found, however, one becomes happy automatically.

**[00:07:46] Speaker2**

As we see a human being is not one in pursuit of happiness, but rather in search of a reason to become happy. Last but not least through actualising the potential meaning inherent in dormant in any given situation. So a Buddhist would say that happiness arises when causes and conditions allow it to ensue, which is similar to what Franco is saying here. Once the reason is found, one becomes happy. We're looking for a reason. We're looking for a condition that will allow us to feel this happiness. We're looking for a meaning that exists in any situation, looking for the causes and conditions that will cultivate that happiness. So how do you do that? How do you find those causes and conditions? You can't buy them. They're not going to show up at your doorstep from Amazon. I mean, if DoorDash delivers you a pizza, that's maybe a different story because, you know, a pizza is happiness. But. Here's what grounds me. And this may sound counterintuitive. Buddhism talks about the five remembrances. And at first glance, they might seem a bit of a downer. I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old. I am of the nature to have ill health. There is no way to escape having ill health. I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death. So I feel like these first three remembrances, they're meant to be humbling, sobering, a wake up call, a slap in the face, and we all know these things intellectually, of course.

**[00:09:31] Speaker2**

But honestly, I don't know how many of us get this until it hits close to home. Because at some point your body will start to betray you. Let me share an anecdote about that. For some reason, a few years ago, I foolishly said yes to my brother and sister in law when they asked if I wanted to learn how to water ski. For the first time ever. That was a bad idea after my second fall. I felt something stretch and twisted my hip that hips are not supposed to stretch and twist. Now, maybe if I was thirty two instead of fifty two, I could have recovered with some ibuprofen and some stretching. But being 52 means you go to the chiropractor for a decent number of visits and you get prescribed stretches to do basically for the rest of your life. And I know that's kind of a silly example. But it helps us understand these remembrances, helps me at least. And I also recognize that a cause and condition of happiness is doing something you love, ideally with others. And the movie talks about this being with others doing physical activities in particular resonated with me releasing all the dopamine and serotonin and whatever other good brain chemicals exist.

**[00:10:57] Speaker2**

So at trail races that I do, for example, there's almost always somebody wearing a shirt that says something like, someday I won't be able to run this race, but today is not that day. I really love that shirt. I want that shirt, because that's a reminder of these remembrances that we are alive right now. We are here right now. Because the idea behind these remembrances is to enable liberation and out of that liberation. You have the causes and conditions for happiness to ensue. Recognizing these first three things were what put principle on the path to becoming the Buddha to becoming awake and conscious. And if we think back to the idea of being tragically optimistic. You can also think about these as messengers in a way. Maybe you have had an interaction with someone going through a significant illness and maybe part of you thought I should count my blessings. That's a reasonable thought. But I would also ask. Look clearly and bravely at what you are seeing because they are showing you the reality of life. That person is suffering and they are in pain, and that's what it means to be human as well. The next remembrance, I think, really gets at the core of how we can recognize that moment. All that is dear to me and everyone I love or of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.

**[00:12:34]**

This hits deep and

**[00:12:37] Speaker2**

Home and hard. Everything will change. Including yourself. Love yourself, you will change, you will not be the same person you were seven years ago. You won't look the same. You won't move about the world in the same way all of your cells replace themselves over seven years, so you're literally a different person in every sense. You're a different person and love yourself. Your loved ones will not stay the same. They'll lose their hair. Gravity takes a toll on basically every body part. Some or all aspects of what you thought you knew of them will leave and new aspects of their beautiful selves will emerge. Except that and this is probably easier to do with our kids, if you have kids than with each other, you expect your kid to grow, to develop, to change. But it might be harder to do with siblings or spouses or partners who they were is not who they are now. And you'll be separated from them ultimately. The last remembrance to help us fertilize this garden is this one. My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground upon which I stand. And when I sit with this idea, what arises for me is this what you choose to do in this moment matters.

**[00:14:09] Speaker2**

In this moment. And this moment. Each moment present you with another choice on how to act. Each action resulted in another condition. And then you have to decide how to respond. And when you are able to take that pause between the stimulus and the response, when you make that decision on how to act, you act more skillfully. And that's hard. That's hard. And maybe the action you take is to recognize the moment for what it is. And it's a good moment and we do it skillfully because maybe you're walking along the boardwalk with your loved ones and you get annoyed with them for whatever reason. But maybe you reach forgiveness faster than you would have the day before, because right now, in that moment, you can say to them, if this isn't nice, I don't know what is. And that's my wish for you today. Do you pray with me? God of our understanding. Divine Spark. Help us remember these ideas, and we hold space in our hearts today for those affected by storms. For those grieving together or in silence. I see you. A witness who. For all those seeking equanimity today, we pray for you. And for these thoughts and the thoughts that all are here. Say amen.

**[00:15:52] Speaker1**

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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