

Historical Perspectives on Happiness

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Kensington Ward, Farmington, Utah
Zoom 5th Sunday combined meeting

29 Nov 2020

In asking me to talk about the *historical* perspectives of a topic, Brother Hafen must think of me as old enough to have been there to observe this topic of happiness as people may have experienced it in ancient historical times. I'm really not that old, although on some cold, dark winter days I may feel like it.

However, as I review my own personal experiences with happiness in the early years of my childhood, you also may believe that I am ancient. My early years overlapped the U.S. presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the later lifetime & ministry of President Heber J. Grant – This was NOT a happiness of times as the Great Depression and World War II also overlapped during the period. It was a very uncertain and unhappy time in US and World History as many tens of millions of people died in the ravages of war, disease and famine. An estimated 80 million people died in the warfare, including war-related disease and famine, or 3% of the world population at the time. As a comparison, thus far in the covid-19 pandemic of 2020 we have had almost one and one-half million deaths, or one fiftieth of one percent of the current world population of 7.8 billion. I guess we should be happy to be living during this world crises rather than the one of my childhood. And I definitely would NOT want to be living in Europe during the Middle Ages when one-third of the human population died in the bubonic plagues.

Unfortunately, plagues, wars, natural catastrophes, and economic downturns have troubled people throughout the ages. Even in times and places without great natural and human caused catastrophes, people have still experienced accidents, disease and the negative consequences from the decisions made by others and themselves. Life is rarely painfree in this terrestrial environment on planet earth. So how can we find happiness during our sojourn here? Or, can we? Is happiness just something to be hoped for in the hereafter – as some religions believe?

How have I found some answers? I am a social scientist by training and profession. I have studied and taught university courses on anthropology, history, religion, politics, economics, and similar, overlapping disciplines. There seems to be three distinct levels or priorities of human existence on planet earth. I will use three 's' words to describe them. They are **survival**, **society**, and **success**. What might be some types of happiness in these three levels of human experience?

survival (stayin' alive – stayin' healthy & alive – stayin' healthy, long-living & alive)
The primal instinct of humans, animals and plants is to stay alive. Survival of the fittest (or the 'law of the jungle') means that only a few strongest ones might find happiness as they overpower others. 'Might makes Right' and selfishness & fear rules such a culture. ***In a gospel context – Gaining and controlling our own physical body is the first essential purpose of earthlife.***

* And fulfilling this purpose brings us a level of minimal happiness.

society (the totality of social relations among human beings, esp. family and friends)
Society is the combination of all human relationships. It begins with the family. The need to propagate and have offspring is second only to the need to survive in plant, animal and human life. It was the great divine law of 'multiply and replenish' given to all in the Garden of Eden.
3 Notes: 1. Just having children does not necessarily mean that one will find happiness.
 2. Not being married or not having children does not condemn one to misery
 3. We all have extended family around us; we are all children of God

Some 'society' statements: A united society has far more power than the sum of its individuals
It takes a town (or extended family) to raise a child (and the ward family can fill in the voids)

We CANNOT go through a lifetime without the help of other people in our weak-times.

Safety in numbers protects us against wild animals and raiders & thieves and wickedness

Even hermits often gather in common isolated areas

We SHOULD NOT go through a week-time without helping other people around us.

In a gospel context: Building lasting relationships is another essential purpose of earthlife.*

* Fulfilling this purpose brings us a stronger level of happiness.

success is a measurement of the quality of life that a person experiences.

It is the achievement of something desired – such as:

prosperity, power, fame on a **telestial level** = **brief, shallow happiness**;

physical health (mobility & strength), emotional peace (thankful patience), social respect (friendly kindness) on a **terrestrial level** = **longer, moderate happiness**;

intellectual education (‘the glory of God is intelligence’), moral reputation (integrity & trustworthiness), spiritual righteousness (obedient faithfulness) on a

celestial level = **eternal, most encompassing happiness and joy**

→ becomes an eternal ‘spiral’ round[⊗] of progression and joy ↗

→ grows into more success > more happiness > more commitment > ↗

→ work for Success > experience Happiness > strengthen Commitment > ↗

gospel context: Discerning truth and becoming godlike is the ultimate purpose of earthlife.*

* Fulfilling this purpose brings us the highest level of happiness and joy.

Let’s talk about a common synonym for happiness = joy

The scripture passage that comes to mind is 2 Nephi 2:25 ***“Men are, that they may have joy”***

Note that in the scriptural language of Hebrew, the masculine, plural “men” is a collective noun meaning both men and women. Thus the phrase in today’s English could be better translated as

“Men and women are, that they may have joy” or

“Mankind is, that they may have joy” or “Humans are, that they may have joy”

Note – Lehi doesn’t say that people will have joy but that they may have joy.

To properly set a context for this passage, one needs to read also 2 Nephi 2:14-23, which describe many negative consequences that befell Adam and Eve after they partook of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The last two verses. 22 & 23, describe what life would be like if Adam and Eve had never eaten the forbidden fruit and the passage concludes with the summary

“wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery” Thus when Lehi says that we are on this earth that we may have joy, it is because we also would have known misery as an opposite of joy. Having experienced misery and sorrow, we can then more readily recognize and appreciate joy and happiness.

The misery & sorrow that we feel can be in the life experiences of others and/or in our own lives. And the joy & happiness that we feel can be shared with others or experienced by ourselves.

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From my personal, professional, historical, and gospel perspective --

We best find true, lasting happiness and sublime, celestial joy through:

obedience to God’s laws

service in the Lord’s kingdom

following the Spirit along the covenant path

Note - We need to involve all three members of the Godhead in our personal lives!

⊗ “the course of the Lord is one eternal round” see 1 Ne 10:19 (see also footnote)