

## New Science of Happiness

By Prasad Kaipa, Ph. D.

pkaipa@kaipagroup.com :: www.kaipagroup.com

Time magazine put out a special mind-body issue on the new science of happiness. It is dated January 17, 2005. You might want to get a copy of it and see the set of articles that they have put together. They are thought provoking. How you may ask and here are my reflections.

Some of you might be familiar with the positive psychology movement that Dr. Martin Seligman has been driving forward for the past few years. He wrote a book on learned optimism a while ago and was quoted extensively by Daniel Goleman in his emotional intelligence books. In some respects, emotional intelligence has more to do with optimism and hope than generally presumed but that is another topic. The recent book of Prof. Seligman is called Authentic Happiness and it is selling well and reads well. I recommend it because it focuses on moving from a 'neutral state of being' to a 'happy state of being' instead of ordinary psychology that focuses on moving from a negative, ailing state of the mind to neutral state. You could also checkout [authentichappiness.org](http://authentichappiness.org).

The Time article begins with Seligman meeting a couple of thinkers at a Mexican resort in 1998 to explore the theme of happiness on the eve of him becoming the president of APA (American Psychology Association). 'What are the enabling conditions that make the human beings flourish?' is the question that he inquires into and that attracted my attention.

The article brings variety of research results from Dr. Diemer of the University of Illinois, Nobel Laureate Dr. Kahnemann and Dr. Lykken. The key questions that the articles asks are:

- What makes us happy?
- How do we measure our dynamic happiness and other moods?
- Can we get happier?

I won't go into details of the answers as I want you to read the article.

It ends with set of exercises that work. There are other articles on: 'laughing therapy' (that is started by Madan Kataria and is spreading around the world), 'whether money makes us happy or not' and 'whether God wants us to be happy'. Overall, it is a very good issue to read and reflect.

Now my own thoughts about happiness.

One of the earliest influences on my life was a radio program that I listened to on Buddha's compassion and how he tries to save a bird that his cousin tried to kill with an arrow. Compassion was the feeling that I got in touch with very deeply and found myself crying to myself and saying that I will never hurt anybody. I was 10 years old, I think. That radio program made me reflect on three things — One, happiness does not come by what we get but what we give. It is about empathy and compassion and removing pain and suffering that brings happiness to us. I also was painfully aware at that time, how quickly I forgot the influence it had and how I am hurting or contributing to the suffering of others — my siblings, parents etc. That awareness made me feel more determined and pay more attention to what is going on with me and others.

Two, when I grew up a little older, I realized that Buddhism is about removal of suffering and reaching Nirvana whereas Hinduism is about bringing wholeness (purnam) and focusing on Ananda — or bliss. When I took 10 day Vipassana meditation in California in 1997 ([vipassana.org](http://vipassana.org)), it became clear that my suffering, my emotions and feelings are becoming part of my body and by bringing awareness to my breath and sensations, I could really release my suffering in a grounded, bit-by-bit way. It was like allowing the body awareness to direct my mind and by removing pain, psychosis and addictions, I could bring happiness and centeredness to myself.

Three, Hindu philosophy taught me that I have a choice in the matter to let go of my suffering and recognize that I am whole and complete and happiness is my birthright! In Taitriya Upanishad, there is a section called Ananda Valli — you might call it a dissertation on bliss. I understood and later experimented with the concept of kosas or sheaths that cover our true self or inner identity. The sheaths from gross to subtle are: physical (body), breath (vital body), manas — there is no equivalent word in English, you can call it lower mind, buddhi —intellect or higher mind and Ananda— bliss body. What I understood from studying it for past 10+ years can be summarized as follows:

- Body being the grossest of the five sheaths, other four sheaths influence it much more than body influencing the others. Note that this is very different from Buddhist approach... where Body is the interface between the world, others and the self. It is like the screen on which the movie projects and has as much control on the subtler elements as the screen has on the movie. But beware — without a screen, there is no movie!
- Prana or vital body is what makes the body come alive (literally). As long as the energy or life force is moving through the

body, various bacterial and viral organisms do not take over and the moment the vital force is gone, they destroy the body. There are five distinct ways in which vital force or prana controls the body (including throwing up, flatulence, imbalance and balance in the stomach, breath etc). Another important aspect of prana is that it controls our emotions. By breathing differently, we can change our emotions consciously. For example, when a deep emotion grips us, we stop breathing or we hyperventilate. When we are sobbing or experiencing sadness, by changing our breath pattern, we can gain control over our emotions. Try it yourself and you can also ask others when they are in your presence experiencing rage, sadness, anger or grief. When they do listen to you and alter their breathing pattern, they begin to shift their state.

- Manas or lower mind is like a taxi dispatcher of a cab company. Mind attempts to make sense of the input from all the five senses and directs our attention, action (motor functions) and either creates confusion or solidifies intention. So desires, association and clarity are operated at this level and manifested at prana and the body level. When the mind is clear, we begin to gain certain equanimity and when it is confused, we get overwhelmed by the sensory inputs. Just like the dispatcher in a taxi company can put various customers, drivers together and give directions to various taxi drivers to go to different locations optimizing business, the manas controls both perceptions and actions of our senses. In terms of happiness, the mind is a powerful visualizer and tranquilizer. So at manas level we create addictions, attachments and aversions.
- Buddhi or the higher mind is subtler than the manas. Buddhi is the owner of the taxi company while the manas is the dispatcher. It sets directions, gives guidelines for the dispatcher to work with. Buddhi gives us the ability to discern, discriminate and make effective decisions and you can call it intelligence. Once the decisions are made at this level, manas takes over the execution through prana and the body. If we are not clear at this level, if we don't think systemically and have no vision, then we end up focusing just on the short term and lose out the future. In other words - strategy, direction, purpose and vision are connected to our higher mind. When we do these exercises just for making our colleagues happy and not engage our higher mind, passion is never evoked and commitment to action is out of question. We might have an intention to follow through (manas level) but behavior will not change unless buddhi is engaged. This level is what differentiates one person from the other. Happiness can be a choice that one makes at this level and that percolates into how our manas seeks goals that are connected with happiness. If we decide at this level that we are not happy, then lower mind helps us find the evidence that we are looking for. Buddhi gives us the ability to discriminate ourselves and our intelligence differentiates others from us and the identity is formed at this level. When I compare myself with others, I feel happy or unhappy and the cycle continues.
- Ananda or bliss body is the subtlest of all the five sheaths. It is the subtle ego in us. While intelligence or buddhi helps us to discriminate, we don't have to follow that direction. We do listen to our intelligence when we are unhappy with who we think we are and are content when we are happy with ourselves. Discrimination is wonderful in dealing with others and the world whereas happiness is what shapes our experiences and ultimately our 'I-sense'. In other words, happiness creates freedom or bondage of the human spirit. When we are free, we experience the oneness, "the flow" (a la Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi ) and the interconnectedness with the universe. In that respect, according to Vedanta, happiness is the root cause of the universe. Through happiness the universe is created, sustained and dissolved because subtly that is what allows us to take action by subverting our intelligence and manas to go in the direction of pursuit of happiness.
- In another part of the same Upanishad, we find a scale of happiness. The ideal person is defined as young, strong and virile and that person's happiness is the basic unit of happiness. From there, we discuss celestial beings, gods, kings of gods, teachers of gods all the way to Brahman. According to that scale, the ananda of Brahman or a person who has discovered his/her true self to be none other than Brahman is 10 followed by 19 zeros of units. That is 100 times the billion times the billion times of the ideal person's happiness.

Summarizing, it is about time we talk about the science of happiness. It is very different from the absence of unhappiness and the lowest measure begins at that stage. It is the process of self discovery that progressively intensifies our happiness and in that process of appreciation, our psychosis begins to dissolve and sense of fulfillment begins to increase. I have found in my own coaching of executives that 'what you appreciate, appreciates'. I really appreciate the direction psychology is taking and more power to people like Dr. Seligman and his colleagues...