

# IDEAS 53

**International Online Teachers Society  
Debate  
Educational Materials For  
Advance and Upper Intermediate  
Students**



**International Online Teachers Society  
Publishing Committee**



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## PUTTING HAPPINESS BACK ON THE MENU

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Happiness is a state of mind, not an emotion. To put it simply, if you believe that you are happy, then you are. It doesn't really matter if you tend to laugh a lot or enjoy insane things; the important thing is you have a source of joy.

I have often marveled at the simplistic way most children still perceive happiness. Many children can still easily derive happiness from seeing a classmate after long periods of not being in school. They still feel happy just being with their brothers and sisters and watching cartoons all day.

Children in the old days had much simpler pleasures back then. We used to enjoy playing tag, hopscotch, hide-and-seek and catch, all under the moonlight when we were kids. Squeals of delight were then abundant as those simple games were played by simple children.

Nowadays, children have more worries, though. With the amount of schoolwork they have to do and the many distractions they have to face, our children nowadays seem to be enjoying less and worrying more. They still have simple pleasures like enjoying an ice cream cone with a friend or a parent or just lying around doing nothing. But those moments have been sources of respite rather than happiness. Our children have been so taken up with obligations of their own that they have slowly lost track of the things that truly make them happy, which have been readily replaced by things that give them peace of mind. This leaves me asking, Are we to blame, as their parents, in taking their happiness away from them?

It is definitely a challenge to be a parent, but let us ask ourselves more if we have perhaps passed on the huge challenge to our own kids. Children now are more aware of what is happening around them, in contrary to us back then who only had to contend with our studies and nothing else. Many children today find happiness in the number of gadgets they own, the recognition they get from other people, and the achievements they reap in school. They have somehow ceased to find happiness just in being themselves. Granted that achievements, accolades and material things are sometimes necessary, but those are not to be used as yardsticks of contentment and joy. They are merely physical proofs, but not spiritual food that nourishes the soul completely.

As parents who have experienced happiness in our own childhood days, let us not forget to teach our kids about what can truly make them happy. Let us help them grow holistically so they can enjoy their childhood as much as we enjoyed ours.

Let's put happiness back on the menu!

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Define happiness.
2. What would make you truly happy? What makes you happy now?
3. Why is happiness so elusive nowadays?
4. What are the current standards of happiness? How do they compare with the old standards?
5. Are you truly happy? Why or why not?



## THE UNENDING CHALLENGE OF FINDING HAPPINESS FOR YOUR KIDS

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Happiness is being grateful for what you have. In today's world, that perspective is often regarded as too naïve and simplistic to define happiness by this day's parameters. This is most likely the reason why many people nowadays literally go crazy trying to find happiness.

I remember the time when we used to consider happiness as just being able to go to the ice cream house with the whole family after church on Sundays. My late father would regularly make sure there was always an ice cream cup for everyone, after which we all would head home to share Sunday lunch. It was nothing elaborate or ceremonial, really. It had all been just one simple but heavenly Sunday with the whole family.

Nowadays, our family still tries to share Sunday lunches and dinners together, but those have somehow become fewer and farther between. Much as I'd like to impose my rules for such simple pleasures, my children have had to contend with their own agenda at school and work, which has somehow prevented them from participating in such activities regularly. My younger kids still participate, though. But I have somehow begun countdowns for each one of them. How long will they really share in such a noble family activity as Sunday lunch and dinner?

Those who've seen that particular TV ad where a family makes Wednesday evenings as a family affair might agree with me when I say that family dinners have somehow lost their very essence. We have been distracted by the evening news or early evening TV dramas to ever talk about anything. Many times, I have often felt too tired to strike up a conversation with all my kids on the dinner table. I have had to do my catching up with their daily affairs in snippets: listening to this child recount her funny encounters in class; listening to that other child complain about her classmates teasing her; asking that son about activities in their performing arts class; asking about this son's pet spider. Believe me, if I could only grow more ears and channel my voice to various zones on the table, I would. But I take the challenge as part of my growth, and embrace each child warmly whenever I can.

They say that one of the secrets of happiness as a parent, especially one with several kids, is not to feel guilty for your shortcomings. But that's just meant to make the job easier, not to take the guilt completely away. I wish there was a genuine way to make everyone in my family happy all the time. As it is, I have to take consolation in the fact that I am neither in control or command of their happiness. Happiness has to come from within them, and I can only guide them in this respect.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In your opinion, why do children nowadays fail to find happiness in simple things?
2. Are parents to blame for their children's failure to find happiness? Elaborate on your answer.
3. What made you happy as a child? Are they still the same things that make you happy presently?
4. What would make you genuinely happy as your parent's child? Your child's parent?
5. If you could do anything during the last days of your life, what would they be? Why?



## REACHING FOR HAPPINESS

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Is supreme happiness possible? Yes, it is, with the strength and guidance provided by the Almighty.

Many people in the world today seem to find great happiness in having worldly possessions. Fame and power are a heady mix which can easily be misconstrued as happiness bringers. Having the world at your feet, like many celebrities and politicians enjoy, can be addictive, bringing with it a certain thrill or enjoyment that proves too potent and beyond description. But can they guarantee lasting happiness?

And what about the joy of seeing all your dreams come true? Admittedly, that is a significantly powerful motivation to determinedly work harder each day and see oneself at the pinnacle of things someday. We have been born with brains that think and hearts that beat faster, so achievements have been strong motivators that would give us happiness immeasurably. Isn't that what matters most?

But on second thought, can all the material things in this world ever guarantee spiritual happiness?

Where do all our possessions go when we leave this existence to transcend to the next? They remain in the physical realm, testaments to all the hard work we put in, yes. But they still get left behind. All this talk about legacy is wonderful and inspiring. We leave our footprints behind. Yet, it is not an option for us to neglect investing in our spiritual happiness, too.

See how those who put in extra effort to amass spiritual grace also leave a more lasting legacy on earth. People remember them in more profound ways, fonder ways than just "He gave our organization huge donations" or "She was one of the most generous donors we ever had". True, donations can serve as great testimonies to our selfless spirit, but wouldn't sharing talent and time count equally, if not more? Spare change is a far thing from the widow's mite, which is literally what you need the most but still have the heart to share. Giving is noble, but the spirit in which we share is a heftier consideration than the amount we share.

Happiness is possible, yes. It is evident in the happy faces of volunteers who share their services, the work of their hands, the beauty of their works, and the strength of their hearts and shoulders, to those who are sick, weak, hopeless or dying. It is evident in the cheerful attitude of a volunteer who agrees to stand up longer or reach further where a stance or a grasp is not sturdy or long enough.

Let us strive to reach farther than our grasp. Oftentimes, it's just happier that way.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is spiritual happiness? How important is it to you, personally?
2. How can you invest in your spiritual happiness?
3. How will you give advice to someone who has experienced a "burnout" in their career?
4. What steps have you taken to attain your goals and be happy someday?
5. Where can you find happiness? Be as specific as needed



## DESPERATELY SEEKING HAPPINESS

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We all are victims of our own ambitions and goals. Many of us have been labeled unstoppable and have managed to remain unflappable in all the chaos in the world. Such people simply never stop reaching for the stars, maintaining a collected attitude despite living hectic paces in their lives. I personally envy those people.

They say that:

As a rule, man is a fool,  
When it's hot, he wants it cool;  
When it's cool, he wants it hot,  
Always wanting what is not. (<http://www.wockyjivvy.com/poetry/folly/manfool.html>)  
But of course! Give it to poets to say it in not so many but definitive words!

We are humans. We think and see things further, I would like to think. We seek things which are simply beyond what we are now. That's normal.

Who wouldn't want to succeed in life? Who wakes up each morning without seeking a better plane of existence? Those who live their lives to the hilt are not zombies or invalids. They want something better, dream of something bigger, thirst for something sweeter, aim for something higher. We are such individuals, aren't we? We seek satisfaction, happiness and total achievement.

The road to holistic, complete happiness is strewn with challenges and hardships. Many of us try very hard to get there, but have to go through the needle's eye. There are also no shortcuts. But remember: we design and pave our own roads according to what we wish them to be. Whatever we come to, wherever we end up in and whenever God wills it, we basically control our own courses. Therefore, right now, while we still can, let us set our priorities straight. Let us set our sights on the horizon with a clear vision that's not blurred by pride, misunderstandings, and plain and simple carelessness.

In the performance of our duties, let us ask ourselves: How much of ourselves have we truly given up to reach our goals? Have we become what we have become independently, or have we been negligent of others' needs and considerations?

In our daily quest for excellence and perfection, let us not entirely forget that we also owe it to the world to give back as we have been gifted. Let us constantly seek spiritual guidance and inner harmony towards attaining our dreams. If we can influence others in a profound manner on the way, the world would be all the better for it.

Be firm in your convictions but forgiving in your calculations. Be happy, but make sure that many others can spiritually share in your mirth.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Name some individuals whom you admire for their happy disposition in life. Describe each person briefly and what makes them special.
2. Are you happy? Why or why not?
3. How can one attain ultimate happiness in life?
4. Why is the road to happiness filled with so many challenges, in your opinion?
5. Are all successful people truly happy? Cite examples, if you need to.



HAPPINESS IS.....

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We encounter different situations in our life but it is only according to each and every person as to how he views what happiness is in its real context. Dealing with a lot of happenings, be it good or bad brings happiness to an individual. We all view happiness in different aspects and in our different outlook in life. Whatever brings happiness to a person's life is worth remembering and is really worth to cherish the rest of our life. Maybe we could touch on some things and facts about what happiness is in any person's journey in life.

Life is full of surprises and there are a lot of unexpected turnouts of events in our life that lead us to happiness. When we look at other people's lives and surmise that he or she is in a state of bliss, sometimes we think that they are happy but they are not. On the contrary, we may think that other people are miserable but they are not. Sometimes it's an irony when we think that some people who seem to have nothing are very happy; whereas some people who seem to have everything are not really happy. This only means that happiness is unpredictable, unexplainable and inconsistent.

Happiness is an emotion. All emotions have causes, causes which can be understood and controlled for that matter. It is not caused simply by entertaining our whims. It is not merely a life lived by accumulating moments of pleasure. There are times that you are happy in just a fleeting moment. On the contrary, happiness is a long lasting enduring enjoyment of life; it is being in love with living.

Happiness is your reward for achieving a good character and personal rational values in life. Some of these important values that we can consider are friendship, romance, hobbies and a productive career too. When you learn to have confidence in your own mind, when you discover the virtues that make it possible to achieve your values and make your life worth living, then you experience happiness. Happiness is a state of non-contradictory joy, a joy without penalty or any guilt feeling. Although sometimes there are instances when we are still quite ignorant as to what happiness really is.

Happiness is stopping to appreciate the little things that life can bring. Happiness is being able to see the beauty that God created for us to take care of. Happiness does not exist in the past or in the future, for it exists with what our state of life is right now, here in the present time, when we face the challenges of our daily life. You yourself know when you are feeling joy and happiness or even struggling with suffering. The secret of happiness in life is when you have built a strong inner-self that no trial or hardship could ruin.

As for me, happiness is being contented with what you have right now, my family, my friends and especially having a personal relationship with the Lord. Even when times get rough and hard, I still feel happiness is being with the people that God had given me, no matter what situation I am in and no matter what happens.....Happiness is the joy of having the comfort of knowing that I can still be happy in any state I am in and learning to appreciate what you have right here, right now.

Questions for discussion:

1. How would you define happiness?
2. How can we achieve happiness?
3. Do you feel happy most of the time? Why or why not?
4. What's a simple activity that makes you happier? Explain your answer.
5. How can you have that happy attitude when you feel down and out? Justify your answer.



## HAPPINESS IS SERENDIPITY

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Yes, almost always happiness is serendipity in our lives. I bet you will agree with me when I say that happiness is all around us. It's everywhere! But amidst our very busy lives, we are still able to appreciate how it is to be happy! All we've got to do is to take time out to look for it and we can learn to appreciate the things around us! Do not be too wrapped up with what problems you are faced with but instead we must learn to have an "eye" on the things that surround us which makes us a happy person.

We can be happy in a very simple way; just plain kisses from our loved ones mean a lot to us that we find so much happiness in it! The mere fact that we spend quality time with them makes us very happy too! A hug or an embrace from our dear ones explicitly spells out that word which gives us that exhilarating feeling! These bits of simple bliss can brighten your day and lead to creating happiness in its real thing. Apparently, happiness is more about internal qualities rather than the external stuff. It is not something that we search for and go after.

Sowe come to think of what really makes a person happy. If an individual is not contented on what he has or possess and what is the state or condition he is in right now, then he is far from being happy. If money, fame, possessions and status make a person happy then Michael Jackson, Marilyn Monroe, Amy Winehouse would have been very happy in the world where they became popular but I don't think that's the real thing that happened in their lives. Maybe they would still be doing their craft that gave them happiness and contentment in life and as it is they would still be here with us today. We could therefore say that "Happiness is a combination of meaning and pleasure."

In whatever we are experiencing or going through, we need to put meaning to all of these things to make us happy. In that case, anyone can become a happier person for happiness begets happiness. Why don't we eliminate all our negative emotions...anything that creates bad feelings, anything that distracts us so we could experience life at its fullness! It's a moment by moment decision we make that will make us happy. Let us associate the things around us to lead us to happiness.

We could also find time and learn that happiness can also be found in unexpected places. So, why don't we take even just a minute break and allow ourselves to escape into happiness leading us to serendipity! Most of all we should always learn to appreciate the things that God has given us especially this life that He bestowed upon us. It's about time to stop whining about our life and try to see even just one happy aspect of what we are doing every single day. Then you will find out that happiness is serendipity!

Questions for discussion:

1. Are you an optimistic kind of person who always associates happiness in every moment of your life? Justify your answer.
2. Cite an instance or instances when you felt you were so happy that nothing mattered to you except the fact that you are in a state of bliss.
3. Do you get so distracted by the circumstances that happen in your life that made it hard for you to appreciate life and be just a happy person?
4. Are you willing to give up anything just for you to attain happiness in the real sense of it? Why or why not?
5. Do you agree in the statement that, "Happiness is serendipity"? Explain further.





## FINDING TRUE HAPPINESS

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Finding true happiness is hard to find, though if you delve deep down inside you, it can be found within the depths of your heart. It is right through our inner self that only we can ever say what it is that can make us truly happy. If we talk about the sciences, it is said that about 50% of our genes comprise our attitude and character. Although some behavioral geneticist believe that how and whatever we feel during a given time frame can be determined by whatever we are experiencing at that particular moment of time. This is actually determined by approximately 90% of our genes.

Whatever it is, everything boils down to the fact that in finding true happiness, we can account it to the experiences that we encounter. That is, how meaningful and pleasurable do these moments register in our life. I believe that true happiness comes from within, our focus on being contented, our personal values and loving others too. It's up for us to decide and make that intentional choice of being happy. Make that commitment of happiness by telling yourself at the start of the day that you are truly happy.

Stop chasing happiness for we should be happy with what we are right now. It is because God gave each one of us talent and each one of us is unique in our own special way. Knowing this is more than enough to reach for the stars and make the world a better place to live. If we never cease to do this, we might miss the happiness that is right under our nose. Let us not only try to enrich our lives but also other lives too and that can be done best by investing in our relationships with our family, friends, colleagues and community. If you extend love to others, you will feel great and happy and this is the best investment that we can ever have.

We should learn to be grateful throughout the day and happiness follows. Try to see life in a different perspective and learn to forgive those who have wronged you by taking off those grudges and hurts inside your heart. You can also create good times for yourself by enjoying your life and doing the things that you love to do. Don't forget to lighten up your day and laugh your heart out knowing full well the medical benefits that laughter can bring us. Stay happy by constantly being connected to God and draw strength from Him. The secret to finding true happiness is by acknowledging God in our life, thus we can attain spiritual happiness.

Let us keep in mind that life is a grand event and we should celebrate our life with the people around us. Don't wait for others approval but instead recognize your accomplishments in life no matter how big or small it is. There is no other time and place for finding true happiness for you could make it happen right here and right now!

Questions for discussion:

1. What is true happiness for you? Describe it.
2. Do you believe that true happiness comes from within? Explain your answer.
3. How can you attain true happiness?
4. Do you think you have achieved true happiness at this moment and time of your life? Why or why not?
5. Have you made a commitment of happiness to yourself? If yes, justify your answer but if not, when do you plan to do it?



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