

Happiness (Part 2)

What do some of the world's major religions teach about happiness?

INTRODUCTION

Remind the students that they are thinking about what happiness actually is and reflecting on whether the pursuit of happiness is all that it is cracked up to be!

This session is designed to make students consider the fact that virtually all religions believe that people will become happier if they follow their religion. The session will focus specifically on the Abrahamic religions and Buddhism.

ACTIVITY

Begin by explaining that, at heart, Christianity, Judaism and Islam are all clear that the route to happiness is faith in God.

'Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.' Jeremiah 17:7 and Proverbs 16:20 (Both these quotes are from the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament).

'Whoever does good whether male or female and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life, and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did.' (Qur'an, 16:97)

Ask the students to respond to such questions as:

- *Have you ever thought about Judaism, Christianity and Islam as routes to happiness?*
- *Has this changed your perception of what these religions are about?*
- *Do you think that you can be happy without faith in a monotheistic God?*

Once this discussion has come to an end, explain that of all of the world's major religions, it could be argued that Buddhism is the one most overtly concerned with the pursuit of happiness.

ACTIVITY

Use the Buddha's 'Parable of the arrow' to illustrate the point that the Buddha was more interested in fixing the suffering in the world than in answering ultimate questions. The parable can be found at:

<http://buddhists.livejournal.com/2844718.html>

Read the story and ask the students to respond to such questions as:

- *What do you think of the Buddha's view that attempting to answer ultimate questions is less important than searching for an end to suffering?*

Explain that, after devoting years to attempting discover the secret to true happiness, the Buddha had realised that the key to happiness was to rid oneself of all attachments by living according to 'The Middle Way'. This is because he had realised that it was attachments that caused suffering. For example, if you want to do well in an exam and you don't do well you will suffer. This is because you have attached yourself to the idea that you want to do well. Or, alternatively, if somebody you know and like dies or stops contacting you, you suffer because you are attached to them.

CONCLUSION

Encourage the students to reflect on today's session and to offer some thoughts on such questions as:

- *Do you agree with the Buddha that suffering is caused by attachment?*
- *Would you really be happier if you stopped craving things?*
- *How does the Buddhist take on happiness compare to the Christian, Muslim and Jewish beliefs we looked at earlier?*
- *Is there anything from today's lesson you can take to make you happier in your own life?*