

--, this was an outstanding presentation. You (and I guess X :-)) are quite the philosophers :-). Seriously, thinking about what true happiness means has absorbed the attention of great thinkers from the Buddha and Marcus Aurelius to... Charlie Brown (?). You made a couple of outstanding points that I just wanted to underline. First is the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic happiness. As you observed, it is not a question of one vs. the other. However, many of us tend to be excessively reliant on external sources of happiness. It's great when the external world provides us with a reason to celebrate (got the residency we wanted, made a successful investment, bought a cool car). So does this mean our happiness is subject to the vagaries of what's going on "outside" of us? As you realize with such perspicacity, not necessarily because it is the feeling underlying the event - rather than the event itself - that is happiness. Therefore, happiness can also be derived from "the inside," by feelings we can generate simply by focusing on someone we love, or the beauty of the world etc. A wonderful exercise I learned simply says, "Think about something that makes you happy. Now think of something else. Now something else. Something else." If you do this for a minute, you end up feeling... Happy!

I also thought you made a critically important distinction between "pleasure" (kicking back and drinking a beer) and "happiness" (feeling a deep inner contentment). There is nothing wrong with pleasure, far from it. But learning to cultivate happiness is ultimately I believe more fulfilling and more meaningful.

--, on a personal level, I must say it gives me great happiness (:-)) to have watched you grow and evolve as a person and a physician over the last 4 years. Much good luck in the next phase of your training - and your life. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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