

Sparks (Conversation Starters) For Happiness

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"He who lives well is blessed and happy." —Socrates

"Long is the path that leads to happiness through words alone. But the path that leads to happiness through the practice of daily deeds is short." —Crates of Thebes

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Suggestions for use ▪ Use the following Sparks to start a conversation with a friend or group. Or journal with them, using them to get to "know yourself" — an imperative straight from the ancient Greeks.

The following quotations come from the Cave's
Happiness—What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Happiness.

Spark 1 ▪ The Goal of Life

Spark 1 Quotations

Every living thing naturally yearns and stretches out for happiness.—*Julian (the Roman emperor)*

Happiness is the goal of human life. . . . It is evident all men shoot to live well and to be happy.—*Aristotle*

Spark 1 Questions

1. Name and describe three to five major things or goals that we humans (and other animals) naturally yearn for, stretch out for, shoot for. Is happiness one of them?
2. What is the goal of life? Is there one goal or many goals? Describe the one or many goals. Do you agree with Aristotle and Julian that happiness is the "goal of human life," the one thing "all living things naturally yearn and stretch out for?" Why or why not?
3. What are your goals? You may think of them in terms of your short-term goals and long-term goals. Or in terms of family and friends, your present work (whether school or a career or whatever it is), hobbies, physical health or fitness, mental health, personal improvement, education (including ongoing education), things you want to do ("bucket list"), and so on. Anything else?

Spark 2 ▪ The Ingredients of Happiness

Spark 2 Quotations

Different men delight in different things.—*Homer (Odysseus is speaking)*

Pleasure and pain are two streams released by nature to flow. Whoever draws the right amount from them, at the right place and time, is happy.—*Plato (the Athenian is speaking)*

Of all the means that are procured by wisdom to ensure blessed happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friendship.—*Epicurus*

Happiness comes from a healthy mind and heart.—*Aeschylus (the chorus is speaking)*

Virtue promises happiness and tranquility and a life that flows well.—*Epictetus*

Spark 2 Questions

1. The quotations above mention a variety of possible ingredients for happiness—"different things" (which could be anything!), pleasure and pain (in the right amount and at the right place and time), friendship, a healthy mind and heart, and virtue or excellence (*aretē*). What "different things" make people happy? How would you evaluate (or how do you value) each of these ingredients? That is, how does each contribute (or not) to happiness? Which ingredient is the most important to you (if one is)?
2. What specific ingredients would you add, if any, to the above list? Explain each. Would you subtract any? Why?
3. Imagine you have to write a recipe for happiness for yourself and for a friend. What ingredients would be on your list? Would there be one most important ingredient? Or many important ingredients? Would the recipe for yourself be the same as the one you write for your friend? Explain. Finally, how do your ingredients match the goals you discussed in Spark 1 (if you've already discussed this Spark)?

Spark 3 ▪ Practicing Happiness

Spark 3 Quotations

We must practice those things that produce happiness since if happiness is present, we possess everything, and if it is not, we do everything to acquire it. Do and practice those things that I have continually recommended to you, taking them to be the basic elements of living well.—*Epicurus*

Long is the path that leads to happiness through words alone. But the path that leads to happiness through the practice of daily deeds is short.—*Crates of Thebes*

Spark 3 Questions

1. Is it necessary to practice happiness? Or is happiness just something that happens (as the etymology of happiness indicates, that it is a matter of luck or fortune)?
2. How will learning or talking about happiness help us to be happy? Is it necessary to know what happiness is to practice it? Where can you learn about happiness? Who can you talk to? Is learning about happiness enough? Is talking about happiness enough (watching YouTube videos, reading, hearing lectures, and so on)? Or do you agree with Epicurus that “we must practice those things that produce happiness”—and with Crates of Thebes that we must approach happiness on “the path [of] . . . the practice of daily deeds”?
3. How can you practice happiness? What specific, concrete things can you do? Daily? Weekly? Monthly? Relative to your experiences? Relative to your external and/or internal life? Your body and soul (innermost self)? Relative to your feelings, thoughts, words, and deeds? Your habits and character? What else (look at your happiness recipe again)?

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