

## Happiness—UUFVB Covenant Groups—May 2018

### Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,  
but connected, in mystery and miracle,  
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

**Check-in:** How is your spirit right now?

**Centering:** Find a stillness, hold a stillness, let this moment of silence ease your soul.

### Opening Readings

Happiness is not a goal; it is a by-product. (*Eleanor Roosevelt*)

Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions. If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito. (*The Dalai Lama*)

When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us. (*Alexander Graham Bell*)

Authentic happiness derives from raising the bar for yourself, not rating yourself against others. (*Martin Seligman*)

### **Topic Exploration (from an online interview of the book by Nathan S. Collier)**

“In *Authentic Happiness*, Dr. Martin Seligman postulates that there are three paths to happiness: the pleasant life, the good life, and the meaningful life.

The Pleasant Life: Happiness is primarily sought through the use of the senses-- good food, fine wine, shopping, time off with friends, vacations, cars, houses, pursuit of things of this world, having as many pleasures as possible.

The Good Life: The good life involves a balanced focus on the three main areas of life-- work, play, love. Happiness is attained by achieving competence, and identifying and building on your core strengths to reach flow states in these areas. Flow is when full engagement and commitment creates a sustainable feeling of energized involvement and enjoyment. (*Mihaly Csikszentmihaly's "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience"*)

The Meaningful Life: Happiness comes from a deep sense of fulfillment by living for a purpose greater than oneself.

The pleasant life is obviously weighted toward the hedonistic. The chief disadvantage of the pursuit of physical pleasure is that we tend to quickly become habituated. Each new level rapidly becomes the norm and thus loses its allure. The three lives are not completely contradictory, and a balanced life can contain elements of all three. However Dr. Seligman believes that lasting happiness lies in progressing through each until we achieve the ability to have most of our happiness come from living the meaningful life.”

In his book *Authentic Happiness*, Martin Seligman identifies six core virtues embraced by almost all religious and philosophical traditions: Wisdom/ Knowledge, Courage, Love/Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Spirituality/ Transcendence. The route to achieving these virtues and authentic happiness is through identifying and employing our signature strengths, which he outlines in the following reference. Identify your signature strengths at: <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/testcenter>

### **Questions / Sharing**

1. The signature strengths underpinning wisdom/knowledge (curiosity, love of learning, judgment, ingenuity, social intelligence and perspective) are highly valued by the educated and the politically liberal. What dangers do you see in the single-minded pursuit of this virtue?
2. Valor, perseverance and integrity are different paths to courage. Think of a time when maintaining your integrity required moral valor.
3. Kindness and generosity are strengths we recognize and continually work on improving. The virtue of love also requires us to allow ourselves to be loved. Why do you think this is so difficult? Is it more difficult for men than for women?
4. Flow is when full engagement and commitment create a sustainable feeling of energized involvement and enjoyment (Mihaly Csikszentmihaly's "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.) Describe an experience working for justice and the feelings evoked in you. Did you achieve "flow?"
5. The virtue of temperance (signature strengths self-control, prudence and humility) is valued cross culturally, but is ranked lower in importance than the most commonly endorsed traits (kindness, fairness, authenticity, gratitude and open-mindedness from Park, Peterson and "Seligman, 2005) Is this true for you personally? Explain.
6. Dr. Seligman defines transcendence as "emotional strengths that reach outside and beyond you to connect you to something larger and more permanent: to other people, to the future, to evolution, to the divine, or to the universe." Strengths include: appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, spirituality, forgiveness, humor and zest. Where are you strongest? Where would you like to be stronger?
7. How does pursuit of "the pleasant life" fit into your plans for achieving happiness? Do you believe we all need some hedonistic pleasure to thrive? If so, where is the balancing point?

### **Closing Reading**

Each morning when I open my eyes I say to myself: I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it. (*Groucho Marx*)

**Check-out and reflections on today's session:** How were your needs for connection and spiritual growth met by this session? Do you feel your voice was heard?

### **Extinguish the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,  
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.  
these we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

### **Housekeeping**