

## Happiness Is a Moral Obligation TRANSCRIPT

When people think of happiness or pursuing happiness, the first thing they think of is, “Well, it’s a pretty selfish desire, I want to be happy for me. I mean, after all who wants to be unhappy?” Actually, there is an answer to that, but that’ll be for another time.

But I am here to tell you that in fact happiness is far, far, far more than a selfish desire, it’s actually a moral obligation.

That’s right. I’m sure most people have never thought of it like this, and I didn’t for most of my life. I thought that happiness, the pursuit of happiness, was primarily selfish, but it isn’t. Whether or not you’re happy, and certainly whether or not you act happy is a very, very altruistic endeavor. In other words, it’s how you touch other lives. Ask anybody who was raised by an unhappy parent whether or not happiness is a moral issue, and I assure you the answer will be “yes”.

It’s no fun being raised by an unhappy parent, it is not particularly good to be married to an unhappy person, it is not at all nice for a parent to have an unhappy child, it’s lousy to have a chronically unhappy co-worker.

Yes, our happiness affects others tremendously. That’s why I believe and that’s why I advocate that happiness is a moral obligation. We are morally obligated to at least act as happy as possible. Even if you don’t feel it. You can’t be guided by feelings. How we act affects others.

I use the analogy of, if you will, forgive me, bad breath or body odor. Why do we brush our teeth everyday and why do we shower so often? It’s not only because of hygiene, it’s because we want to present good breath and good body odor to anybody who comes into contact with us.

Well, the same thing holds true for our moods. A bad mood should be regarded exactly as you would bad breath. Why are you inflicting it on me? Or, why am I inflicting it on you? It’s just not right. That’s why one should endeavor as much as possible, to act as happy as possible, as much as possible.

And let me tell you something, just about anyone can do this. No matter how unhappy you may feel or sad you may feel at any given moment, it is a decision you make on how to act, on whether or not to present a happy countenance to others.

That doesn't mean that you don't say to friends, "You know I'm really sad. I had this problem at work today, I have this problem with my marriage, I have this problem with my kids, I have this problem with my parents." No, you share with your friend or your spouse. You share as much as possible about your life, you should share how you feel.

But you don't inflict a bad mood on to anybody. That's a different thing altogether, and we all have the capacity, and I can prove it. Ask someone who is just miserable to let's say his or her spouse and then somebody comes to the door. Have you ever noticed how nicely they act to the stranger? How come they just went from an awful mood, inflicting their terrible mood on a spouse and now a stranger is walked into the room and they're very nice. Obviously we can control it.

How bout this: let's say you are chronically in a bad mood and I offered you a hundred thousand dollars a week not to be in a bad mood. You think it would affect your ability to be in a good mood? I suspect it would.

That is why I say that we have to act that way even if we don't feel that way.

Abraham Lincoln said we are as happy as we decide to be. And I'm telling you, as I have told myself, we should decide to be happy. That is what we owe everybody who is around us. If you are on an island alone you don't have to be happy or at least act happy.

Now there is one other great benefit to this, and that is this: the happier you act, the happier you will feel. We think that our actions should represent our feelings or be determined by our feelings. But the fact is, that we can make our feelings respond to our behavior. How we act influences our feelings more than our feelings should be allowed to influence our behavior.

Yes, indeed, we have a moral obligation; happy people make the world better. Unhappy people tend to make the world worse.

When you think of people who do great harm in this world, historically; Nazis; communists; terrorists; they're not from the happiest group of humans. They tend to be among the least happy.

Happiness is a huge issue and it's time to start working on it at any given moment. Lincoln was right, we are as happy as we decide to be; it's time to make that decision.