

Explain what the ancient mesopotamians, egyptians, hebrews and greeks thought and...

[Philosophy](#)



What is happiness? This is a question that has begged to be answered over the ages and defies explicit definition even today. While it is unequivocal that the concept of happiness is universal in its different forms, its manifestation and motivation is subject to a myriad of factors ranging from social-cultural and religious on a communal scale narrowing to characters idiosyncrasies. Contemporary conjecture is as different as there are beliefs, correspondingly, retrospective civilizations despite having different theoretical definitions by astute scholars in the likeness of Socrates, did not advance a universal consensus. Nonetheless, each of the attempted descriptions of happiness was relevant to the circumstances and culture of those making them and has in common the fact despite the fact that what makes one happy does not necessarily translate to others, everyone strives for it in their own way. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the perceptions of happiness by ancient civilizations namely the Greeks, Mesopotamians, Egyptians and Hebrews in order to understand their various interpretations and applications of the concept. Greek philosophers are easily the most influential figures in matters pertains philosophical thought and predictably, they had much to say about happiness. According to Socrates, popularly known as the father of philosophy, the key to happiness is to be found in incisive self-examination and critical questioning ones morality and self-confidence. He further postulated that a simple life in which one has nothing to lose is the one that guarantees happiness, as opposed to those seeking wealth and pleasure, guaranteed to bring frustrations at the expense of happiness. However, while Socrates' ideals were similar to those of stoic scholars who also believed happiness was about suffering, he disparages

activities such as drinking which he found to result in slurred speech and impaired judgment (McMahon 2006). Other Greek thinkers of note held contrary views, believing that happiness was about pleasure seeking and pain avoidance, such as the hedonists while the followers of Aristotle had it that happiness was only achieved in the presence of wealth and status. These beliefs influence the people of Greek at the different times depending on which philosopher was relevant, or alive so to speak, since they theorized to different generations. Notwithstanding, people living in the same times would practice different beliefs based on their philosophy of choice creating a cocktail of lifestyles. Among the ancient Egyptians, happiness was not philosophized about since common belief was that it was a gift from the Gods. They strived to live a fulfilling life in this life so they could expect “ joy in this world and eternal bliss in the next”, and according to the inscriptions on Petosiris tomb, would be honored in life with wealth, children, and long-life and would ultimately find their way into necropolis, a place of joy (Reshafim, n. d.). The ideals for a fulfilling life were specified as the four Ka’s which were long life, wealth, children and proper burial, while other texts claim riches, children, burial and eternal life, however, it is notable that, in each, two of the factors would only arise if one were dead. Their strong belief in life after death made them aspire to lead upright lives in the hope of being rewarded with proper burials and eternal bliss (Reshafim, n. d.). Interestingly, one cannot overlook the fact that wealth and proper burial were only available to those who had means and as such, the ideal for happiness on an Egyptian setting was circumstantial depending on one’s social class. The Hebrews claims to be one the most widely studied and

possibly emulated group by virtue of the fact that many of the world's Christians today, have read the bible and strive to abide by many of the stipulations therein. According to Hebrew tradition, happiness was to be achieved by living according to the wishes of their true God Yahweh and knowing no other. They conceived the idea of moral freedom in which one is responsible for their actions and most of the Christian western world inherited this concept (Perry, 2010). From biblical teaching, hedonistic lifestyles were condemned by their laws and one was expected to abide by the Laws of the covenant between man and God. Many of their laws are similar to eastern philosophies such as putting human life above property (Perry, 2010). They considered it their duty to honor, and praise God with song and dance, and this is evidenced in the many psalms and songs contained in the bible in honor of God. Religion was the nexus of every aspect of Mesopotamian life, and some overriding religious purpose was considered superordinate in any activity or occurrence (Perry, 2010). The Mesopotamians were highly superstitious charms and other amulets aimed at warding off evil spirits were common. They also lived in fear of demons, and since they considered the Gods Capricious and at times wont to malevolent they lived in perpetual fear of attacks, or diseases and a myriad of other ways they imagined the gods would allow or occasion harm on them. McMahons defines happiness as what happens to us when we have no control and says this definition applies to most of the aforementioned civilizations. However, this best fits the Mesopotamians since their idea of happiness a passive concept wherein their actions little to do with it and it could only be achieved if the Gods wished it. In summary, happiness was

viewed by each of the civilizations differently, however, despite the philosophical ideals, certain activities such as drinking alcohol, sporting activities and sex for pleasure, as opposed to procreation were still practiced as they are today across the geographical and time boundaries. Ultimately the pursuit for happiness is a dynamic journey, which changes with time, and circumstances and the individual level is depend on their societies cognizance of what can bring happiness. References Perry, M. (2010). Western Civilization: a Brief History: Volume I: from Ancient Times to the Enlightenment. Stamford: Wadsworth. 10th edition. McMahon, D. M.. Happiness: A History. New York: Grove Press. Reshafim. (n. d.). The four kas: Human happiness as a gift from the gods. Retrieved from <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/people/happiness.htm>