

In this final part of the podcast, I introduce the metaphor of The Matryoshka Doll - Is it really happiness or something else?

Transience of experience.

Our feelings come and go, the change is how we relate and associate to them. Whatever you experience (think, feel, experience in your body) is natural, it might not be pleasant, comfortable, or fun. It often connects to something out there, something important, perhaps loss or change or uncertainty or control. The feelings are as important as we make them, but they could highlight an important relationship between you and the object – a person, a thing, a being. Happiness is transient, like any experience. I would argue that it has no inherent value except what we give it. It's the meaning we give it depending on context, mindset and relationship. This includes the stories of the mind from the Secret Director.

Feelings aren't truth but they might feel believable. If something is rehearsed enough and repeated internally, we might believe it more. Also, if a totally random thought, like, I'm always bad in social situations activates a feeling, other thought or physiological reaction it feels more believable because something coming from within us is often seen as truth and fact, especially if activates other aspects of experience. The thought I'm a teapot doesn't activate the threat response in the same way, and so feels unbelievable.

I like to think of feelings and thoughts as Russian Matryoshka dolls, also known as stacking dolls or nesting dolls. You open one, and there's a smaller one inside, and another and another. They contain unseen elements within them. I'm wanting to show not only feelings as transient with variable data that we don't have always have to interpret, but also that behind the simplistic word, many different elements are at work. Things are just not what they seem. We are not what we seem. Oxford isn't what it seems.

The outside world.

One of the elements I want to mention is the outside world. I'm often stressed because of other people and other systems. I still have to venture out in the world and engage, and it remains helpful to think some of what I sometimes feel just isn't mine. Is it from other people, other systems, the world around us? The social dimensions within the physical space of our communities both large and small. It depends on where our mindset focuses and what it ignores. Happiness is not just mine, but a co-creation of us in the connected world.

The World Happiness Report published by our very own Wellbeing Research Centre, Gallup and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and the WHR's Editorial Board doesn't just consider subjective well-being and affect but also GDP, healthy life expectancy including access to health care, social support, perception of corruption and institutional trust. Happiness is multi-faceted and interconnected between internal and external experiences. It's also about families eating together and returned wallets with money in them.

As anxiety states fluctuate more generally in the world, the world might seem scary, overwhelming, and very uncertain (understatement of the century, insert your own adjectives here). And we know these feelings transmit easily across the social WIFI. Our happiness levels are impacted by global events too. This sounds so obvious to be patronising, but we often personalise our inability to be happy or to have moods as personal rather than a reaction to all that is going on around us.

We naturally react to this anxiety with anxiety, sometimes we bring the lack of control and uncertainty into us, we attack ourselves to bring in that control or we dehumanise others and situations. We make the uncontrollable controllable. The uncertain certain. The uncertain predictable. Or we try to.

In times of perceived challenge and scarcity we can try and notice how we become more addicted to happiness. Happiness becomes more commodified, and deficit thinking drives us to want happiness. It becomes a reward, an escape, perhaps a pseudo-purpose compounded by global experiences, and we often treat ourselves harshly because we want more. Happiness and nostalgia become wanted, desired and intertwined.

Is happiness overrated?

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We often forget that we are systems within systems. Stacking dolls within stacking dolls. Happiness is a set of Russian Matryoshka dolls for other experiences – thoughts and feelings. It hides a multitude of meanings, contexts, understandings and associations both pleasant and less pleasant. You open one and there are lots of dolls inside – of varying sizes. Happiness is often a shorthand used by the critical Secret Director as a globalising and assumed term.