

Enablers of Empowerment: A Study of People's Life Experiences Based on the Foundation of Empowering Philosophies

Shilpi Lokre

Assistant Professor, Brihan Maharashtra College of Commerce (BMCC), Pune, Maharashtra, India
Email: lokreshilpi@yahoo.co.in

Abstract: *"Give a Man a Fish and you feed him for a day; teach a Man to Fish and you feed him for Life" The age old adage holds value in an age which is rife with cut throat competition, insecurity, the desire for more and an emptiness in human beings like never before. Empowering the young and old with education, life skills, spiritual philosophies is the need of humanity. The present paper seeks to understand how taking refuge in a philosophy Empowers people and brings Absolute Happiness amidst their struggles of daily life. All of us seek Happiness. Fulfilment of desires for wealth, fame, social status which constitute relative happiness. Happiness that is indestructible even in the face of windfalls and blows that life brings, is Absolute Happiness. It leads to complete fulfilment in life. It's a life marked by compassion, courage, joy and wisdom. In the compilation of essays by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, he offers six concrete conditions for Happiness: Fulfilment, a Profound Philosophy, Conviction, Cheer & Vibrancy, Courage, and Tolerance. All these conditions are encompassed in the single word "FAITH". The paper seeks to differentiate relative happiness from absolute happiness and examine if these conditions make people absolutely happy.*

Keywords: Absolute Happiness, Empowering, Fulfilment, Philosophy

1. Introduction

Spiritual Philosophy

Philosophy is a way of thinking, an ideology propagated by a person who has tread the path of life. It is based on intense study, contemplation and deliberation. It could involve assiduous practices, sometime severe austerities to achieve harmony with oneself and with others. In recent times some of the philosophies like- Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's Art of Living and International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISCKON) have assumed great importance in India as also worldwide. The increasing stress levels, the ever increasing anxiety, hopelessness and despair have necessitated people to take refuge in philosophy. A philosophy gives direction, enabling people to have a mission and vision in life. Empowering people to achieve their material and spiritual goals these philosophies have come to rescue people from the severe blows of life.

Need for a Spiritual philosophy

The desire for more is at the core of the many causes of discontentment and dissatisfaction. There is in abundance for everyone. Most philosophies teach to harness this abundance from the universe.

Loneliness is another problem youngsters as well as senior citizens are battling. Older parents staying away from their children, young boys and girls with social anxiety are on the increase. Chanting together, reading together, doing community service helps people to fight loneliness and emptiness away.

Self-doubt, complexes, fear of missing out, guilt and shame are some of the scary problems of the youth. A philosophy helps in removing all of these. On the spiritual plane the individual unleashes his latent potential and there is a deep sense of accomplishment and fulfilment.

2. Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been outlined for the study:

- To understand respondents' life state as they live each day.
- To understand if they can distinguish between relative and absolute happiness.
- To study if the six conditions of happiness are being fulfilled by respondents.
- To examine if following a philosophy has empowered them.

3. Literature Survey

Popular Philosophies & Spiritual Leaders: An Over View

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISCKON)- The philosophy is based on the precept that all human beings are parts of Krishna- The Supreme One. Living beings are trapped in a body and should constantly strive for liberation and pure happiness.

To achieve the goal of happiness and liberation followers chant mantras, read scriptures, engage in community service and worship Krishna. They surrender to a spiritual master, who is pure and dedicated to the service of the Lord. Followers abstain from having illicit sex, intoxicants and any illegal and moral activities. ISCKON strives to give humans peace of mind, good physical and mental health and all sublime qualities to make them Good and Pure citizens of the society.

The Art of Living Foundation- It is an NGO based on humanitarian and educational principles. It's a holistic philosophy finding solutions for a stress free and happy life through Yoga, Meditation and Breath control. The founder of this NGO Sri Sri Ravi Shankar bases his ideology on some beautiful core values - Accept people and situations as they are; Don't be a football of others' opinions; Don't see

intention behind others' mistakes; and Live in the present moment. These principles promote acceptance of the self, taking charge of our lives and a peaceful co-existence with others.

The Foundation organises camps for yoga and meditation, Sudarshankriya being their signature breathing technique. The organisation helps people to release negative emotions and lead a happy and balanced life.

Sathya Sai Baba, Puttaparthi- The ideology of Sathya Sai Baba is based on the premise that every human possesses divinity and the purpose of life is to realise this divinity. His teachings are summed up in the maxim "Love all, Serve All". He taught that the values of Sathya (Truth), Dharma (Right Conduct), Shanti(Peace), Prema (Love) and Ahimsa (Non-violence) are inherent in every human being. These values should be expressed in thoughts, words and actions. The ideology is implemented through educational programs, social and humanitarian service, spiritual practices like prayer, meditation and devotional singing.

Soka Gakkai International- It is a lay Buddhist organisation following the principles of Nichiren Daishonin, a 12th century sage in Japan. The lay followers chant the mantra "Nam Myoho Renge Kyo" "for themselves and for the happiness of others. The organisation aims at achieving Kosen- Rufu (World Peace) through chanting, engaging in dialogue, education and community services. The philosophy imparts a message of hope and courage for a world increasingly beset with sorrow and suffering. Practice for oneself and practice for others – is the core principle of this empowering philosophy.

Buddhism originated in India and travelled to Japan, Korea and China. It took various forms and several schools of Buddhism sprang up. Nichiren Daishonin studied the various Buddhist texts and the Lotus Sutra (written by Shakyamuni Buddha) and gave the essence of the Lotus Sutra in a crystallised form. After him, his philosophy was lost and later revived by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who founded the Soka Kyoku Gakkai (Value Creating Society) and later carried forward by the Second President Josei Toda and Third President Daisaku Ikeda. The philosophy is practiced in 194 countries and based on Ikeda's principle of Human Revolution. "A great Human Revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will enable a change in the destiny of Humankind." Daisaku Ikeda. The tool to bring about the change is Nam Myoho Renge Kyo.

Key Concepts from Daisaku Ikeda's Work on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism

- **Relative Happiness:** Buying the latest version of the apple phone makes some happy. To be seen with the most expensive GUCCI handbag is the talk of the town. Wearing Prada glasses is chic. Owning a Mercedes is a status symbol. Conferral of an Award gives a high. This happiness is related to objects. The object goes, happiness goes. That's relative happiness.
- **Absolute Happiness:** "Losing a job doesn't deter my spirits" Facing challenges with optimism and courage" Rising up again after a nasty fall" Not swayed by pleasure

or pain". There is something unshakeable, indestructible in an individual- that's Absolute Happiness. It is a state of life characterised by high life force, enthusiasm and wisdom which can surmount any obstacle in life.

"There are two kinds of happiness: absolute happiness and relative happiness. Absolute happiness is attaining Buddhahood. Relative happiness means that your everyday wishes are fulfilled one by one - for instance, to have a million yen, a wonderful spouse, fine children, a nice house or clothes and so on. Such happiness is not of great consequence. Yet everyone is convinced that this is what being happy is all about.

Absolute happiness means that being alive here itself is joy. It also implies a state where one is free of financial worries and enjoys adequate good health, where there is peace and harmony in one's family and one's business prospers, and where all that one sees and hears brings one a wonderful sense of pleasure and joy. When we achieve such a state of life, this world, this strife-ridden saha world, will itself become a pure land. This is what we call attaining the state of Buddhahood." Daisaku Ikeda, Third President, SGI.

Daisaku Ikeda's Six Conditions for Happiness

1) The First Condition- Fulfillment

To be filled each day with a rewarding sense of exhilaration and purpose, a sense of tasks accomplished, and deep fulfilment- people who feel this way are happy. Those who have a sense of satisfaction even if they are extremely busy are much happier than those who have free time on their hands but feel empty inside.

2) The Second Condition- Profound Philosophy

Reciting the Lotus Sutra and chanting before the Gohonzon represents the dawn, the start of a new day, in our lives, it is the sun rising; it gives a profound sense of contentment in the depths of living beings that nothing can surpass. In addition to the chores of daily life, practitioners of the Sutra (SGI members) exert energetically often amid many hardships and obstacles, chanting for others happiness. There is no nobler life, no life based on a loftier philosophy. To possess a philosophy of such profound value is itself the greatest fortune.

3) The Third condition- Conviction

We live in an age in which people can no longer clearly distinguish what is right or wrong, good or evil. This is a global trend. If things continue in this way, humanity is destined for chaos and moral decay. In the midst of such times, SGI members are upholding and earnestly practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, a teaching of the highest good. The important thing is to hold on resolutely to one's convictions come what may, just as Nichiren teaches. People who possess such unwavering conviction will definitely become happy.

4) The Fourth Condition- Cheer & Vibrance

The fourth condition is living cheerfully and vibrantly. Those who are always complaining and grumbling make not only themselves but everyone else around them miserable and unhappy. By contrast, those who always live positively and filled with enthusiasm- those who possess a cheerful and

sunny disposition that lifts the spirits and brightens the hearts of everyone they meet- are not only happy themselves but are a source of hope and inspiration for others.

5) The Fifth Condition- Courage

Courageous people can overcome anything. The cowardly, on the other hand, because of their lack of courage, fail to savour the true, profound joys of life. This is most unfortunate.

6) The Sixth Condition- Tolerance

Those who are tolerant and broad make people feel comfortable and at ease. Narrow and intolerant people who berate others for the slightest thing or who make a great commotion each time some problem arises just exhaust and intimidate others.

The Six Conditions laid down by Daisaku Ikeda are all ultimately encompassed in the single word FAITH. A life based on faith in a profound philosophy is truly and absolutely happy.

People practicing a profound philosophy are able to unleash their fullest potential. Everyone possesses the seed of goodness in them. Adhering to a philosophy enables that seed to germinate and sprout. The sublime qualities of Compassion, courage, wisdom come to shine as people practice and polish their lives.

(Selections from the Works of Daisaku Ikeda – SGI President)

Problem Definition

Fear of missing out, anxiety, sadness is gripping humanity, more so the youth. Tolerance, contentment, joy – the youth needs to experience these in this lifetime. They need to lead a fulfilling life – a life free of regrets.

4. Methodology

The present paper deals with a very abstract theme that's Happiness. What constitutes happiness is different for each person. The paper attempts to examine the differences in happiness amongst people through primary data. The sample chosen is of respondents who are following some spiritual philosophy,

The paper is also set within the framework of the Six conditions for Absolute Happiness in selections from the works of Daisaku Ikeda (Late President of Soka Gakkai International). This constitutes Secondary Data, the basis on which the questionnaire for respondents is designed.

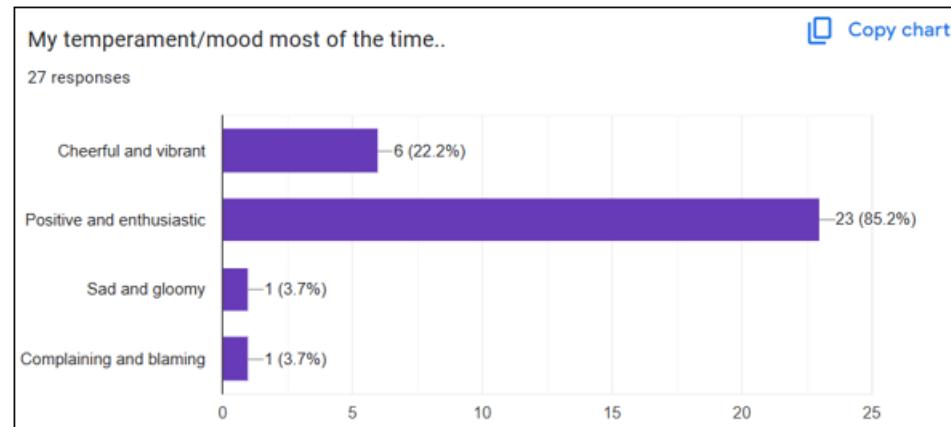
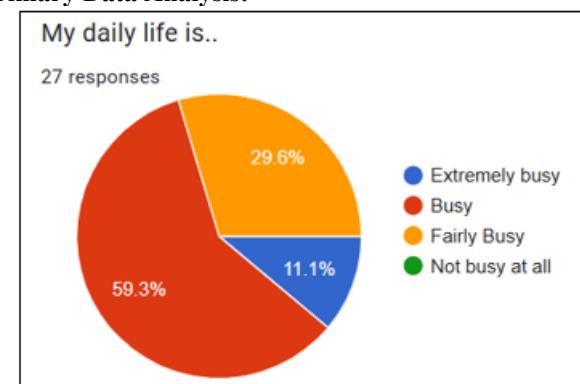
Sample Size- A sample of 40 respondents was selected based on convenience and judgement, out of which 27 responded. A thoughtfully designed questionnaire yielded more of qualitative data than quantitative data.

Google forms were used to elicit information. Simple mathematical tools were employed for data analysis.

Findings are based on Primary Data and concluding observations have been recorded.

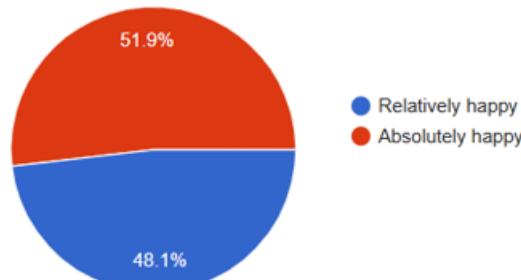
5. Results and Discussion

Primary Data Analysis:



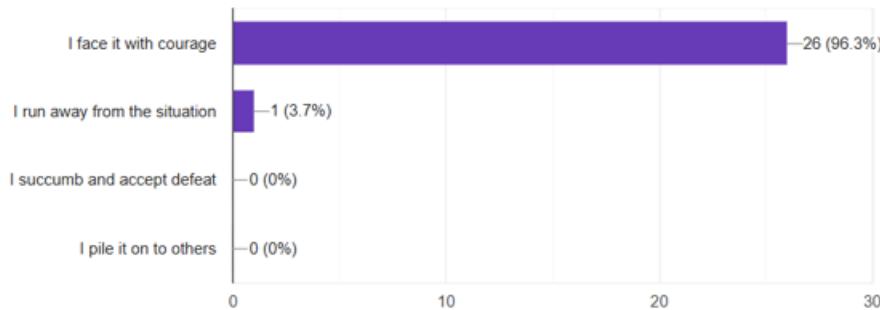
I am..

27 responses



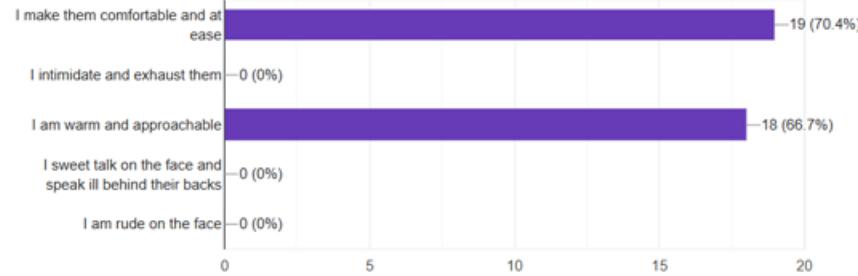
When in a difficult situation..

27 responses



When with friends/colleagues/relatives..

27 responses



6. Findings

- Most respondents were introduced to the philosophy when they were faced by a difficult situation in life by a concerned friend or relative. Almost every respondent was seeking inner peace.
- Most respondents were introduced by a childhood friend or a concerned relative.
- 11.1 percent of the respondents have extremely busy lives, 59.3 per cent are busy, 29.6 per cent are fairly busy. But, their lives are without complaints and at the end of the day they have a sense of satisfaction and achievement.
- Despite the challenges of daily life, 85.2 per cent of the respondents are positive and enthusiastic and joyfully carry out their daily chores.
- The respondents derive joy from social interactions and helping others
- 96.3 per cent respondents have said they face difficult situations with courage.
- Over 70 per cent people make others feel warm and comfortable and are warm and approachable.

- Many respondents attribute the good and bad in their personalities to themselves. It is a powerful indication of taking charge of their lives.
- Respondents could clearly articulate the difference between relative and absolute happiness. 51.9 per cent feel they are absolutely happy and the remaining 48.1 per cent feel they are relatively happy.
- Almost everyone attributes their happiness because of the philosophy they follow.
- Almost every respondent feels empowered because of their spiritual practice.
- Everybody has said that their practice has given them inner peace, they have calmed down and become wiser in handling people and problems.
- All respondents fulfil the five conditions of Happiness viz: 1) Fulfilment 2) Profound Philosophy 3) Conviction 4) Cheer Vibrancy 5) courage 6) Tolerance. The sample chosen was of people following a philosophy and it has indeed empowered them.

7. Concluding Observations

All of us seek happiness. Happiness means different things to different people. Happiness could be fleeting and temporary. Happiness can be absolute or permanent. Followers of philosophy are striving for this absolute happiness. Material possessions, social status, comfortable living everyone desires, these are not only desirable but essential. Striking a balance between the temporary and the permanent is what people aspire.

“Buddhism is a teaching of life. Viewed subjectively life is a matter of self- of how we experience our own existence. Viewed objectively from the outside, it is how we live-our daily activities. Buddhism speaks of attaining a state in which all our wishes are fulfilled. Wishes relates to the objective world. Being fulfilled means a sense of satisfaction experienced in the subjective realm. When these two are fused harmoniously, we attain the state of Fulfilment of all wishes, this is a condition of Happiness”, Josei Toda, Second President SGI.

Empowering our life is the foundation of all philosophies. The true benefit from these doctrines are cleansing and revolutionising our lives. These philosophies are not

divorced from real life; they help people to unleash their fullest potential & realise concrete improvement in their lives.

8. Future Scope

Propagation of the philosophy is the way to make people lead happy lives. It has a ripple effect, one life is touched, and that life touches many more lives. Absolute happiness for the coming generation is under the scope of this research paper.

References

- [1] The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra - Daisaku Ikeda, Katsuti Saito, Takanore Endo, Haruo Suda
- [2] The Wisdom for Creating Happiness and Peace - Selection from the works of Daisaku Ikeda
- [3] Official websites of ISCKON, Art of Living, Sri Sathya Sai of Putthaparthi

Author Profile



Dr. Shilpi A. Lokre is a professor in BMCC, Pune. She is a Marketing Teacher with avid interest in Spirituality and Inner Engineering. She is a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra and an active member of Soka Gakkai International (NGO - Value Creating Society).

Annexure - Questionnaire

Enablers of Empowerment

A study of People's Life Experiences based on the foundation of Empowering Philosophies

This research is for academic purpose, please feel comfortable to pen your innermost thoughts and opinions. The information will be kept confidential. This questionnaire will give you an opportunity to introspect and bring about your human revolution. Thank you for your time and efforts!

1. Email
2. Name
3. Gender
4. Age
5. Profession

6. My daily life is... (Mark only one option)

- Extremely busy
- Busy
- Fairly busy
- Not busy at all

7. At the end of the day, I feel... (Check all that apply)

- A rewarding sense of exhilaration
- Sense of task(s) accomplishment
- Deep fulfilment
- Emptiness in life
- A day completely wasted

8. My temperament/mood most of the time... (Check all that apply)

- Cheerful and vibrant
- Positive and enthusiastic
- Sad and gloomy
- Complaining and blaming

9. The following makes me happy:

10. I am... (Mark only one option)

- Relatively happy
- Absolutely happy

11. Explain, why do you say so?

12. When in a difficult situation... (Check all that apply)

- I face it with courage
- I run away from the situation

- I succumb and accept defeat
- I pile it on to others

13. When with friends/colleagues/relatives... (Check all that apply)

- I make them comfortable and at ease
- I intimidate and exhaust them
- I am warm and approachable
- I sweet talk on the face and speak ill behind their backs
- I am rude on the face

14. The good and bad in my personality, I attribute it to...

15. What spiritual practice/philosophy do you follow?

16. Since when are you in the practice/philosophy? (In years)

17. The reason for you to join the practice...

18. Who encouraged you to join the practice/philosophy?

19. Describe yourself and your life before you joined the practice/philosophy.

20. Describe the changes/benefits (after joining the practice/philosophy at your

- a) Workplace

21. Describe the changes/benefits (after joining the practice/philosophy at your

- b) Home

22. Describe the changes/benefits (after joining the practice/philosophy at your

- c) In yourself

23. My spiritual philosophy/practice has empowered me by...