

WHEN ARE YOU SATISFIED?

A GUIDED CONVERSATION



WELCOME

Before we begin, let's review the brit—the covenant—that animates our time together:

1. **Accountability:** I'll show up to our agreed-upon meetings. I'll let the host know the (good) reason I will be absent. I will also be punctual and respect everyone's time.
2. **Presence:** When we're together, I'll be present and mindful. I will listen and share. Life (and our mobile devices) offer many distractions, but I will stay present and engaged.
3. **Double Confidentiality:** What I hear and say stays here. If I see another group member in a different context, I will not bring up anything they said here unless they do first.
4. **Vulnerability:** I'll stretch myself to be as open and honest as possible with my perspectives and experiences in order to create a safe environment that might encourage others to take risks as well.
5. **Respect:** I will remember that all of us are here for a common purpose and I will respect and acknowledge everyone in my group.
6. **No Fixing, Advising, Saving or Setting Straight:** I will give each person the gift of true attention without trying to "solve their problem." No advice unless it's asked.
7. **Stepping Up & Stepping Back:** I understand that some of us are natural talkers while others are quieter. I'll pay attention to how much I am contributing, and will seek to balance how much I am talking with how much I'm listening.
8. **Curiosity:** Judaism is a religion of exploration; of big questions more than answers. I will get the most out of my group by being open to our discussions and the people around me.
9. **Ownership:** This is our community to create. While we have guidelines and suggestions, it is ours to shape and form. We will get out of it what we put into it.

ASK & SHARE

Welcome, and thank you for joining our conversation. Take a moment to recall a time when you felt truly satisfied. What was it that allowed you to feel so content? When everyone is ready, you will have the opportunity to share with the group.

You can use the space below to make some notes to yourself.

LEARN

Author Geneen Roth has written a number of books on desire and satisfaction—particularly related to food, money and spirituality. We’re going to read her essay “The Naked Truth.” Please read this essay aloud, as a group.

Back in the last century, I weighed almost twice as much as I do now—and I desperately wanted to be thin. So desperately that if a genie had appeared (and I'm not exactly proud of this fact) and offered me one wish, it would have been to wake up thin the next day. World peace could wait. Since I was convinced that being fat was the cause of my suffering, I was also convinced that if I was thin, my problems would disappear, and happiness would be mine.

When I lost weight, my focus changed and I became a serial monogamist in the “If only I had” department. The belief that my suffering would end when I got thin was transferred to “when my book got published” which (after publication) was then transferred to “when I fell in love” which (after marriage) was transferred to “when I live in the right house.” (There were, of course, a few articles of clothing thrown in the mix of I-will-be-happy-when: I get the perfect black boots, the sassy-but-not-too revealing dress, the earrings that were big but not gaudy).

What I didn't realize was that I had become so entranced with the belief that happiness was in the future that I walked through my life as if I was jet-lagged and living in an airport shopping mall with the same stores, smells, sights as all the other airports I'd visited. Within a few days of arriving at the place or situation I thought was going to fix everything, the landscape of my mind felt exactly the same as it did before. Same thoughts. Same discontent. Even though I'd waited so long to get from “here” to “there,” I always ended up in the same place -- “here.”

The possibility of stopping the search, or that there was nothing to fix and nowhere to go didn't occur to me. (Okay, maybe it did occur to me once or twice during my thirty years of meditation practice, but the truth was that sweetness and quiet and stillness weren't as compelling as angst, drama and the chatter of discontent). I mean, seriously: “now” just wasn't sexy or appealing. It didn't hold promises of splashy parades with cymbals and drums and opera singers thrashing about. The naked now, the one without frills, the one that was always here, just wasn't as interesting as what could be. What should be. What I wanted to be. I was enthralled, as the Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa described it, with the process of “putting make-up on space.”

Finally, and this is going to sound a bit more linear than it actually was or is, love pierced the trance. I realized I wanted something more than I wanted to keep walking through the airports of my mind. I wanted to be here. For the purpling of sunsets and the clanking of dishes. For the soft way my husband's hand feels in mine. I wanted to breathe when I breathed and eat when I ate. I wanted to live in and through my body, not my mind. And, not only did I realize I wanted that, I knew without a doubt that I already was that. Am that.

It's not a done deal over here, however. The pull of my thoughts is still strong, but the love for this moment is stronger. The pull of drama still compels me, but the love for showing up where I am is bigger. Nothing can compete with the love of this life blazing in and through me, which, along with the depth of night-sky stillness, also includes outrageous laughter, salted chocolate and occasional swoops of sadness.

Every time I find myself wandering away, I bring myself back to what I love: to this very moment, these exact sensations, this coolness on the surface of my right arm, the sound of a single bird cheeping, the low thrum of the heater. I take, as Eckhart says, one conscious breath and return to where the feast is: here.

And when I do—when thoughts drop away and the one I refer to as “I” disappears—what remains is contentment itself. And it is enough.

Link: <http://geneenroth.com/the-naked-truth.php>

As we reflect on this text, here are a few questions to consider:

Interpretive Questions

- What does Roth mean when she says that she became “a serial monogamist in the ‘If only I had’ department”?
- What appealed to her about thinking about future events? What was the problem with it?
- What did she change? How? Did she find satisfaction?

Reflective Questions

- Do you relate to Roth’s description of the “airports of [her] mind” and living in the “if only”? If you do, how does it feel for you?
- Does her way of finding satisfaction—by appreciating the present moment—work for you? Why or why not? Are there certain aspects of your life in which it’s easier to come by than others?

- Are there times when it's a good thing to not be satisfied? When can dissatisfaction with what currently is be beneficial?
- What's the difference between satisfaction and complacency or resignation?

You can use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

PERSPECTIVES FROM JEWISH TRADITION

Consider the following text, from the Mishnah, Pirkei Avot (ca. 200 CE):

Who is rich? The one who is happy with their lot.
--Mishnah Pirkei Avot, 4:1

Discussion Questions:

- Do you experience this to be true?
- How easy or difficult is it to obtain the “riches” suggested in this text?
- How does this text relate to Geneen Roth's understanding of satisfaction?

Now read the following passage from Proverbs:

Those who scatter [their grain] will increase, and those who withhold tend only to want. The beneficent soul will be made rich, and the one who satisfies [others] abundantly will be satisfied. The one who withholds grain--the people will curse him, but blessing will be on the head of the one who distributes it. The one who earnestly seeks good pursues favor, but the one that seeks evil--it will come for him. The one that trusts in riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

--Proverbs 11:23-28

Discussion Questions:

- How does one become satisfied in this text? How does one become not satisfied?
- Does this understanding of satisfaction resonate with your own experience?
- How does this text fit into the conversation so far?
- How does Judaism understand what satisfaction is? How do you understand what satisfaction is?
- When are you satisfied?

You can use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

DO

As we conclude the conversation, here are a few final questions to consider.

- What's one insight that you've gained from this conversation?
- What is one action you might take, or practice you might try, before we meet next time, based on what you're taking from this conversation?
- What's one obstacle to taking that action? How can you overcome it? Who might you need help from in order to do so?
- What could we do together as a community based on what we talked about today?

You can use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

Thank you for being part of this conversation.



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