



We've been sold a bill of goods in our 'right to pursue happiness', and, in fact, have been robbed of our freedom to build competencies that might lead to 'true happiness'. The American life is imbued with pleasure-seeking consumption, TGIF, big gulp, binge watching, more is better, youth obsessed, death denying, she with the most toys in the end wins kind of mores. As [Robert Bly](#) spoke of in his national book award speech in 1969, *"... As Americans, we have always wanted the life of feeling [pleasure] without the life of suffering [pain]. We long for pure light, constant victory. We have always wanted to avoid suffering, and therefore we are unable to live in the present..."*. To each their own of course, but we can't have 'our own' if not given a choice. We won't be able to choose happiness until we define it. The limited view of 'pleasure-seeking' leaves us at the beck and call of billion-dollar industries that know we are looking for the next trick, the next portal for escape into entertainment. Candy won't build strong bones but it sure does feel good at first, and then the incessant want for more, and we're hooked. We are weakened – Complacent. Compliant. Controlled. Addicts – attenuating the pain found in a life, fortifying our limitation in the habits of avoidance. **I think we missed the memo: "Life will be painful."** Game on is not to protect against pain and pretend a perfect life. You are doing nothing wrong if you feel the pain of unhappiness. No need for the sense of failure if the weekend is not jammed packed with record making recreational activities or you feel insecure and uncertain. **The game is not more pleasure less pain, but how might I discover the meaning in fully experiencing the truth of being human** – you, like me, will know Love and Loss. 'It' is already here, how will it change me, what does it offer, what does it require of me, how is this not even about me? How might I become robust in the competency of pain? Call pain by its true names, anxiety or stress or loss ... Happiness has much wider a capacity than assumed. It includes the whole 'enchilada', finds sustenance in what is often discarded. We can be nourished into a deep satisfaction by consuming the bitter along with the sweet. This happiness has certain ingredients, skills that we can build such as, intention, focus, meaning, purpose, committed action to stay, taste, chew, digest, metabolize, and find the nutritive possibility. We have a recipe for a meal, if we stay and savor it regardless of feelings of pleasant or unpleasant we might cultivate the true meaning of happiness. But here's the secret sauce of true happiness – the 'action' is beyond self-gratification only, it is contributive, creative, generative to the thriving potentiality of others. Wow, that kind of flies in the face of the typical self-protectionist view that motivates cultural systems. Typically, our systems are competitive, critical, condemning, comparison-based, compelled by fear of not enough to go around. For me to rise you must fall. Healthy systems of happiness depend upon the difference in and between self and other – your happiness is my happiness, and rather than the pain as problem, or those other people as problem, it, them, us, all point us in the direction of well-being. When [Jacinda Ardern](#) Prime Minister of New Zealand quoted Islamic scripture, "When any part of the body suffers the whole body feels pain", she encapsulated this connected sensibility. Suffering as opposed to pain stems from two things: disconnection and stagnation. There is a self-trust that begins to develop when we learn how to stay the course no matter the urges to escape. It's time now for the 'Take Back' – The inalienable right to cultivate 'True Happiness' found in our robust nature. Freedom found in the choice to develop muscularity in meeting the pain of living this life.

