**Core Beliefs About Happiness in the West**

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**Abstract**

The present article examines three core beliefs about happiness in Western Culture that arose out of the Judeo-Christian narrative. With respect to each belief we will present a brief overview of its cultural roots while trying to understand the cultural construct created around it.

1. **Happiness as purpose and meaning** – The utopian notion that there is a time and place where perfect happiness exists is deeply engrained in Western thought and distances the individual from life in the here and now. This perception stems, among other things, from the foundational myth of the Garden of Eden. Happiness in this context is either nostalgia for the past or a longing for the future.
2. **Happiness equals success** – The assumption that success leads to happiness can be found in texts as early as the Old Testament[[1]](#footnote-1) and Greek philosophy. This view, which equates the race for success with the pursuit of happiness is referred to by Sandage as the “Holy Trinity” - life, ambition and the pursuit of happiness.[[2]](#footnote-2)
3. **Happiness as the opposite of suffering** – Many Westerners see happiness as the opposite of suffering. In reality, however, there is no happiness without suffering. Suffering is of value in the creative life. Suffering leads us deep into ourselves.[[3]](#footnote-3) Suffering and pleasure are not at all exclusive, in fact, every pleasure involves pain – happiness and unhappiness are “twin sisters” as Nietzsche calls them.[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. Bina Nir, *The Failure of Success*, Tel Aviv: Resling Press, 2016:117. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers – A History of Failure in America*, Harvard University Press, 2005:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be*, New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1952:35-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman, New York: Vintage Books, 1974: 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)