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Research Article

An Ancient Interpretation of the Right to Happiness in Contemporary International Law

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Abstract

This article reassesses the 'right to happiness' by reading Achaemenid royal inscriptions alongside contemporary international instruments (UNGA resolutions and the 2030 Agenda). It advances two claims. First, a semantic and philological reading of Old Persian (notably the lexeme *šiyāti-/šiyāta-*) and close readings of Darius the Great and Xerxes' inscriptions show that Achaemenid kings framed collective welfare – peace, subsistence and moral order – as a governmental obligation grounded in divine legitimacy. Second, when mapped onto modern frameworks, this tripartite ancient schema (security against violence, protection from famine and material want, and the suppression of institutional falsehood/corruption) anticipates key duties now articulated across human-rights instruments and the Sustainable Development Goals. Where Achaemenid inscriptions explicitly invoke 'happiness', contemporary international law increasingly seeks to preserve analogous aims under the rubric of 'well-being', translating ancient normative commitments into modern duties enforceable through rights and SDG frameworks.

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Methodologically the study combines lexical reconstruction, textual exegesis of primary inscriptions (DNa, DNb, DPe/DPd, XPh) and doctrinal comparison with UN resolutions and SDG indicators to identify continuities and measurement gaps. The article argues that Achaemenid *šiyāti* functions as a proto-right that clarifies why governance, justice and resilience must be central to any legalized conception of wellbeing; it also proposes targeted sub-indicators (disaster resilience, rule-of-law metrics, transparency measures) to better align SDG monitoring with the normative content of the right to happiness. The intervention contributes to the history of human-rights ideas and to debates about operationalizing wellbeing in international law.

Keywords: Right to Happiness, Human Rights, International Law, Sustainable Goals, Ancient Persia

Introduction

Happiness, recognized by the United Nations General Assembly as the 'universal goal and aspiration of all people around the world' (UNGA Res 66/281, 2012), has profoundly influenced the course of law and politics throughout human history (Wan, 2023: 1209). In recent decades, there has been growing enthusiasm for the idea that happiness can serve as a cornerstone for public policy formulation, reigniting interest in the complex relationship between happiness, law, and politics (Ott, 2011: 354). Many countries and organizations, including the United Nations, have sought to integrate the concept of happiness into their agendas, driven by the idea that happiness represents the ultimate human goal.[1]

However, happiness is a concept that is influenced by various aspects of human life and, in turn, affects all aspects. However, happiness is a multifaceted concept influenced by various aspects of human life, which in turn impacts all facets of life (Miruh and Minhyung, 2014: 44). Given its intricate and asymmetrical nature, along with its humanistic dimensions, happiness has garnered significant interest from researchers and scholars. From 1995 to 2023, over 257 research publications have examined how a happiness-based framework might inform governmental policies.[2] This illustrates the diverse approaches and perspectives involved in defining indicators for happiness. A brief review of policy-making documents over the decades reveals shifting paradigms in how nations evaluate and pursue happiness.

Historically, with the advent of monetary systems, societies developed indicators to measure well-being in terms of economic growth (Tideman, 2009: 223-25). Drawing from the mathematical methodologies of the

1. For example, see the recent proposal of the government of China on how happiness is under the agenda of humanity: The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. (2023). A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions.

2. Shruti Agrawal et al., in a collaborative effort across multiple universities, have conducted a thorough review of the literature on happiness. Their article offers a comprehensive summary of existing studies, investigating how a happiness economy framework can support sustainable development. The authors performed a systematic literature review of 257 research publications, identifying five key thematic clusters: (i) Transitioning beyond GDP to a happiness economy, (ii) Rethinking growth for sustainability and ecological regeneration, (iii) Policy considerations beyond money and happiness, (iv) The role of health, human capital, and well-being, and (v) Policy advancements for a happiness economy. Additionally, the study suggests future research directions to assist researchers and policymakers in developing a robust happiness economy framework. *see:* Agrawal, S., Sharma, N., Dhayal, K. S., & Esposito, L. (2024). From Economic Wealth to Well-Being: Exploring the Importance of Happiness Economy for Sustainable Development Through Systematic Literature Review. *Quality & Quantity*, 58(6), 5503-5530. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-024-01892-z

economic sciences, these indicators often involve quantifiable metrics with monetary values. The most basic measure of a nation's economic performance is *Gross National Product* (GNP) or *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP), calculated from all recorded economic transactions within a specific period (Clark and Senik, 2016: 407-8).[1]

However, GNP and GDP have significant limitations and no longer provide a complete picture of the perceived well-being or welfare of a nation's citizens (Krishnan, 2024: 13). Their shortcomings include: (i) failure to differentiate between economic activities that contribute positively to development and those that result from exploitation of natural resources, waste production, pollutant emissions, or habitat destruction; (ii) inadequate valuation of natural, human, and social capital; and (iii) lack of consideration for justice and equity. Nonetheless, all of these factors are crucial for human well-being and happiness (Ura, 2015: 1).

In the mid-1970s, Bhutan introduced a new paradigm for measuring national prosperity that prioritized people's welfare over mere economic productivity. This approach, known as *Gross National Happiness* (GNH), emerged as an alternative to GDP. GNH emphasizes that GDP alone cannot guarantee happiness and well-being, and incorporates a wider range of criteria such as resource allocation, sustainability, health, human rights, and education (Daga, 2014: 26).

In response to the rapid depletion of natural resources driven by economic development, the concept of *sustainable development* has emerged (Tideman, 2009: 229). The 1987 UN World Commission on Environment and Development report, *Our Common Future*, popularized this term (UN WCED, 1987: 16, para. 27). Following the 1992 UN Rio Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the concept became a focal point for national policies, with signatory States expanding their statistical accounts to include sustainability factors (Tideman, 2009: 229). Sustainable development and sustainable happiness are often seen as two sides of the same coin, with the argument that sustainable development provides a foundation for considering happiness as a right. Through this approach, it is hoped that global well-being and happiness can be achieved (Tabibzadeh and Lorinejad, 2024: 2082).

1. GDP is a standard benchmark to measure economic growth and in turn prosperity in most countries of the world.

Methodology of the Research

In this article, I explore the contemporary understanding of the right to happiness, with a focus on its historical dimensions. Rather than delving into current trends, I investigate whether this right was addressed at governmental and administrative levels in ancient times. Before presenting the core findings of this research, I will outline the methodology used.

This study examines the concept of happiness as reflected in the royal inscriptions of the Persian Empire and compares these ancient perspectives with modern international frameworks, such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goal is to understand how the notion of happiness has evolved or whether there has been a continuity in its conceptualization and implications for modern international law. To achieve this, a multi-faceted approach was employed.

The primary sources for this research include royal inscriptions from Achaemenid kings, particularly Darius the Great and Xerxes. These inscriptions were chosen for their direct references to happiness and their importance in understanding Achaemenid legal and administrative practices. They offer insights into how happiness was perceived and promoted by the government in Persian Empire. A detailed semantic and linguistic analysis was conducted to interpret the meaning of happiness in Old Farsi. This involved examining the specific terms and phrases used in the inscriptions and understanding their context within the linguistic and socio-cultural framework of the ancient Persian. By analyzing the language and content of these inscriptions, the study aimed to reveal how the concept of happiness was conceptualized as an administrative responsibility of the government in ancient era.

In addition to the primary sources, secondary literature on Achaemenid governance and legal practices was reviewed, including scholarly commentaries and historical analyses that provide context and interpretation of the inscriptions. This combination of primary and secondary sources offers a comprehensive view of how happiness was integrated into the legal and administrative systems of the time.

The study then compares the ancient Persian perspective on happiness with contemporary international frameworks. Relevant UN General Assembly Resolutions on happiness and well-being were examined to identify how modern notions align with or differ from those of the Achaemenid Empire. Additionally, the SDGs were analyzed to assess their compatibility with ancient perspectives. This comparative analysis aims to highlight both the continuities and divergences between ancient

and modern views on happiness. By integrating findings from the semantic analysis of ancient inscriptions with contemporary international standards, the study seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of the evolution of the concept of happiness.

Structure of the Research

To achieve aims of this research, Section 1 will first outline how international law has addressed and recognized the issue of happiness as a legal human right. This section will review the development and current status of the right to happiness within the framework of international law. In Section 2, I will delve into the concept of happiness in the texts, culture, and administration of ancient Persia. This section will explore how the right to happiness was conceptualized in antiquity. To facilitate this, I will start with a brief cultural, linguistic, and semantic analysis of the term happiness and related terminologies in Old Persian, the language of the inscriptions, noting that it has since evolved into modern Farsi. Following this, I will examine how happiness was addressed as an administrative obligation by investigating royal orders from the Achaemenid kings found in their inscriptions. Finally, I will compare the ancient understanding of the right to happiness with contemporary perspectives to assess how our worldview on this issue has evolved over time.

By examining the elements of happiness as perceived in the ancient era and contrasting them with modern interpretations of the right to happiness, we can gain a clearer understanding of how legal concepts are shaped and redefined across different historical contexts. This comparative analysis will provide insights into how our views on legal notions, such as the right to happiness, have evolved or remained consistent despite the passage of time over millennia.

1. The Right to Happiness in International Law

The right to happiness is not explicitly stated in any human rights covenant or convention; rather, it is implicitly addressed within the framework of other rights. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights has no direct or precise article on right to happiness, nonetheless, there are certain rules on conditions which entails well-being for humans

(Liao, 2015: 80).[1] Among the documents that have been adopted after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, only the preamble of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child pays attention to the *happiness* of children within the family environment. It recognizes that for the full and harmonious development of their personality, a child 'should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding' (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989: preamble).

In 19 July 2011, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 65/309 titled 'Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach to Development' recognizing happiness as a fundamental human goal and calling for a more inclusive, equitable, and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes the happiness of all people (UNGA Res 65/309, 2011). The resolution declares that 'the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal' and emphasizes that 'the gross domestic product indicator by nature was not designed to and does not adequately reflect the happiness and well-being of people in a country' (UNGA Res 65/309, 2011: preamble).

The resolution 65/309 acknowledged that there is a 'need to promote sustainable development' and accordingly, asked the UN-member States 'to pursue the elaboration of additional measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and well-being in development with a view to guiding their public policies' (UNGA Res 65/309, 2011: art. 1). The UN General Assembly also 'invites those Member States that have taken initiatives to develop new indicators' on the pursuit of happiness and well-being and to communicate such views to the General Assembly (UNGA Res 65/309, 2011: art. 2).

Following the adoption of this resolution, the first United Nations conference on happiness was held in 2012 at the initiative of Bhutan (Norren, 2020: 434).[2] The conference was entitled 'Wealth and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm' (Corlatean, 2019: 49).

1. Although there is no expression of happiness as a right in the UDHR, Liao argues that mankind has human rights to what he calls the *'fundamental conditions for pursuing a good life'* and this foundation grounds human rights.

2. This session was initiated by Bhutan. In 1970, Bhutan has introduced a new system for measuring national prosperity, focused on people's welfare, which gradually replaced indicators that economic productivity, resulted in an indicator called *'Gross National Happiness'* as an alternative to microeconomic *'Gross Domestic Product'*. One such indicator considers criteria other than strictly economic, such as the distribution of resources, sustainability, health, human rights and education.

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution according to which the 'International Day of Happiness' is celebrated on March 20th annually (UNGA Res 66/281, 2011; UNGA Res 65/309, 2011).[1] In the same month, the first World Happiness Report was published in April 2012 by the Earth Institute (Helliwell et al., 2012). On 20 March 2013, the then-UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon stated that:

> "At last year's Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, United Nations Member States agreed on the need for a balanced approach to sustainable development by integrating its three pillars: economic growth, social development and environmental protection" (Corlatean, 2019: 49).

Since 2015, the annual report has been published by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (Tabibzadeh and Lorinejad, 2024: 2094-95). UN Example was followed by other international organizations. Since May 2011, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has proposed the *Better Life Index* to support policymaking aimed at improving the quality of life and happiness of individuals (Greco et al., 2017).[2] In June 2014, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), a consultative body of the European Union, which organized a debate called *Let's talk about happiness – beyond the GDP* (EESC Report, 2014). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) believes that education and work are of particular importance for the happiness, well-being, and welfare of individuals. Quality education is a fundamental condition for providing the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve suitable employment and empower individuals to shape a better future. UNESCO also proposes global access to quality education and freedom of expression as indicators for measuring the happiness of a

1. The UN General Assembly recalls the Resolution 65/309 of July 19, 2011, and acknowledges that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal. Additionally, it should be noted that March 20th marks the Persian New Year, Nowruz, a deeply rooted tradition from the Achaemenid Empire. This festival celebrates the arrival of the spring equinox.

2. In this regard, it has suggested eleven indicators: housing, income, jobs, community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, life satisfaction, safety, and work-life balance. *see:* Greco, S., Ishizaka, A., et al. (2017). Measuring Well-Being by a Multidimensional Spatial Model in OECD Better Life Index Framework (MPRA Paper No. 83526). University of Munich. The focus of this report is to evaluate the index based on tangible economic indicators.

society (UNESCO, 2024: 13). The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) has also focused on gender-related actions for happiness. The UN-Women concludes by acknowledging that women in countries with equal rights to men tend to have a relatively higher level of happiness and well-being (Ermiş-Mert, 2023: 1-2).

Further, the *Global Happiness Council* is also a new universal network of leading academic experts in fields such as psychology, economics, urban planning, and government representatives. This council provides recommendations and actions at national and local levels for participating governments on best practices for promoting happiness. At national levels, also, significant efforts are also underway to promote happiness and well-being. As of 2022, almost 110 States embedded the terms 'happiness' or 'well-being' in their constitutions (Wan, 2023: 1210).

All these initiatives and efforts underscore the importance of happiness and well-being as vital objectives that deserve serious attention. However, while the UN General Assembly's Resolution 65/309 acknowledges that GDP does not accurately capture the happiness and well-being of peoples and calls for the development of additional measures and new indicators, it raises the question of whether such *new* indicators are truly necessary? Do we need to devise new frameworks? Or, do we already have measures that might provide sufficient insight into and respect for the right to happiness, potentially negating the need for new approaches?

To explore these questions, I propose examining the right to happiness through the lens of ancient inscriptions. In particular, I will investigate how happiness was defined in ancient Persia by the Achaemenids in their royal inscriptions, and how these inscriptions mandated the government to foster the well-being of its people.[1] By analyzing the term for

1. The *Achaemenid Empire*, also known as the First Persian Empire, was an ancient empire that existed from around 550 to 330 BCE. It was founded by *Cyrus the Great*, who established one of the largest empires in history by conquering large parts of the Middle East and Asia. Orders of the *Cyrus the Great* were inscribed on a clay cylinder, widely considered to be by many scholars, the first declaration of human rights. The Achaemenid Empire stretched from the Indus River in the east to the Aegean Sea in the west and from the Caucasus Mountains in the north to Egypt in the south. Their capital was *Persepolis*, which is located near present-day Shiraz, Iran. For further information, please refer to: Llewellyn-Jones, L. (2023). *Persians: The Age of the Great Kings*. Wildfire.; Wiesehöfer, J. (2014, January 23). Law and Religion in Achaemenid Ira. in A. C. Hagedorn & R. G. Kratz (Eds.),

happiness in Old Persian, we can gain valuable linguistic and cultural insights over a legal right. This will lead us to a review of the governmental inscriptions that addressed the concept of happiness and the responsibilities of the State in ensuring the well-being of its citizens. In the next section, I will delve into these ancient texts to illustrate how historical perspectives on happiness and governance can inform contemporary discussions on the right to happiness in international law. This exploration aims to provide a deeper understanding of how ancient principles might inform current approaches to measuring and promoting happiness and well-being.

2. Happiness in Texts, Culture, and Administration of Ancient Persia

From the authentic and fundamental concepts of the Mazdayasna tradition or Zoroastrian mysticism, the importance of feelings of joy and happiness stands out.[1] This theme is so prominent and evident in this tradition that it is not an exaggeration to call the ancient philosophy of Persia, the idea of joy and happiness (Shagoshtasbi and Hasanzadeh Niri, 2023: 166). In the Avesta[2] and other middle age Persian texts, this recommendation for happiness and the avoidance of sorrow and grief is evident (Hartz, 2009: 12, 17-8, 108).[3] Zoroastrianism emphasizes virtues and righteousness in defining happiness and a good life (Joshanloo, 2015: 26). One of the most significant calendars used by Ancient Persia was the Zoroastrian calendar, which had several important festivals.[4] These

Law and Religion in the Eastern Mediterranean: From Antiquity to Early Islam [Online edition]. Oxford Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199550234.003.0003

1. Zoroastrianism also known as Mazdayasna.

2. The religious texts of the Zoroastrian faith of ancient Persia are referred to as the *'Avesta'*. The oldest part is the *Gathas*, which includes a collection of hymns and one of the oldest examples of religious poetry attributed to the prophet Zoroaster (ca. 630-550 BCE).

3. Zoroaster himself is seen as a prophet of joy and a messenger of happiness. In Zoroastrian beliefs, it is expected that every follower shares and spread happiness.

4. Among these festivals *'Nowruz'*, *'Mithraic Festivals'*, *'Sadeh'* and *'Yalda Night'* were notable. Nowruz was the Persian New Year, celebrated at the spring equinox, is one of the most important festivals. It marks the beginning of the new year and the arrival of spring. The festival is characterized by cleaning homes, wearing new clothes, and enjoying special foods. Mithraism was a major religion in Persia before the rise of Zoroastrianism, and it had its own set of festivals. Mithras, the god of light and truth, was celebrated with various rituals. Sadeh was a mid-winter festival that celebrated the defeat of darkness to celebrate discovery of fire by King Hushang, the 2nd king of the mythological Pishdadian dynasty, often marked by fire ceremonies. Yalda Night was celebrated on the longest night of the year. Yalda marks the victory of light over darkness. Families gather to read poetry, eat fruits, and enjoy each

festivals were deeply intertwined with Persian mythology, agriculture, and religious beliefs, reflecting the cultural heritage of ancient Persia (Brosius, 2023: Chapter 65). This philosophy is also one of the main comprehensible elements in the religious texts of ancient Iran (Malandra, 1983: 16). Therefore, given the importance and frequent occurrence of these signs in ancient Iranian texts, it appears that a study centered around concepts such as joy, peace, and happiness can enrich our understanding of ancient Iranian thought and worldview.

Before exploring the concept of joy and happiness in ancient Iranian texts, it is necessary to gain a preliminary understanding of the pertinent terms. In the ancient Iranian languages, there are various words that refer to feelings of joy and happiness, each chosen for a specific purpose depending on the semantic field and the contextual usage in which they are employed. Nowadays, in modern Farsi, the usage of some of these words has become completely obsolete or their meanings have evolved, while others have continued to be used with almost the same meaning and application (Shagoshtasbi and Hasanzadeh Niri, 2023: 166).

In linguistic studies, the *linguistic relativity* theory – or the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis* – indicate that language plays a role in structuring the worldview of the vocalist of that language (Perlovsky, 2009: 519; Regier and Xu, 2017: 1). That is to say that linguistic patterns shape individual and collective cognition. In this context, language has the potential to shape thought, beliefs, deeds and could determine actions (Carroll, 1956: 37). For instance, in certain societies individuals tend to assign adjectives to words that are in line with their assigned gender in a specific language. For example, German speakers describing the word 'key', which is denoted as masculine in German, tend to imply masculine aspects of 'ownership' (Cubelli et al., 2011: 455; Boroditsky et al., 2003: Chapter 4). Therefore, if the ancient Iranians had different words to express different joyful feelings, it indicates a unique worldview of the speakers of this language and also the quality of the world in which they lived (Altarriba and Basnight-Brown, 2022: 872).

Persian, with its literary and poetic traditions, has a nuanced vocabulary for expressing various shades of joy and happiness. Some of these terms might have overlapping meanings or subtle distinctions in connotation: *farroxīh* (joyful or happy, sometimes implying a sense of prosperity or success); *hunsandīh* (similar to *hušnūdīh*, conveying a sense

other's company. *see:* Boyce, M. (2005). Further on the Calendar of Zoroastrian Feasts. *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 43, 1-38. https://doi.org/10.2307/4300681

of happiness or pleasure); *hupassandagī* (pleasing or agreeable, potentially focusing on satisfaction); *huramīh* (cheerful or delighted, sometimes used in a more poetic or elevated sense); *hušnūdīh* (contentment or satisfaction, reflecting a deeper sense of happiness); *ramišn* (a less common term, possibly related to *tranquility* or calm joy); *šādīh* (joy, happiness, often used in everyday language); *šnāyēnišn* (likely a term with specific poetic or literary use); *spaxr* (an uncommon term, could refer to a specific or traditional concept of joy); *urwahm(an)īh* (might be an archaic or specialized term, possibly relating to a profound or spiritual kind of joy); *urwāzišn* (might relate to a concept or state of joy, possibly from historical or literary contexts); *urwāzistan* (seems to be a place name or a term related to a state of being, perhaps metaphorically); *wīdwarīh* (might be related to a traditional or cultural expression of happiness); *wiyufs* (another less common term, possibly indicating a specific type of joy or satisfaction); *wiyufsišn* (possibly a rare or archaic term with specific connotations of joy); *xwā(h)rīh* (could imply a more physical or sensory pleasure); *xwašīh* (pleasant, happy, and often used in a general sense of well-being) (Shagoshtasbi and Hasanzadeh Niri, 2023: 168).

As mentioned, in contemporary Persian, many words and concepts from ancient texts have undergone significant transformations. Over time, some terms have become obsolete, losing their usage and original meanings. This linguistic evolution can create challenges when interpreting historical documents, as the modern meanings of words may diverge from their ancient counterparts.[1] However, many ancient words still retain some correspondence with their historical forms. Despite changes in usage and meaning, these terms often preserve elements of their original significance. In some cases, modern Persian words are derived from ancient roots, allowing for a partial continuity of meaning. By examining these linguistic connections, scholars can gain insights into how ancient concepts were expressed and how they might align with contemporary understandings.

Interpreting ancient inscriptions involves not only decoding words but also understanding the cultural and contextual nuances that shaped their

1. For instance, certain words found in ancient Achaemenid inscriptions may no longer be in common use today. These terms might have had specific connotations and nuanced meanings in their historical context that are no longer directly translatable into modern Persian. This can make it difficult to fully grasp the intent and significance of these words as they were understood in the ancient period.

meanings. Scholars must navigate these linguistic shifts to bridge the gap between ancient and modern perspectives. In the next section, I will explore the meaning of the term *'happiness'* in Old Persian to establish a foundation for evaluating the inscriptions.

2-1. A Semantic Interpretation of Happiness in Old Persian

The word *šiyāti-* in Old Persian, derived from the root *šya\šā-*, is grammatically a noun meaning *welfare, peace (on earth), happiness (also after death)* (Kent, 1953: 210). Additionally, the word *šiyāta* is grammatically an adjective meaning *peaceful and happy (on earth)* (Kent, 1953: 210). The Avestan form of this adjective is *šyatā-*, and its later Avestan form is *šāta-*, which means to be happy or to become joyful. This word has evolved in Middle Persian and modern Persian into *šādīh*, meaning happiness (Shagoshtasbi and Hasanzadeh Niri, 2023: 168).

Today, in modern Persian, the word *šādī*, in its ancient form *šadīh-*, is a very common term with a specific meaning. It denotes *joy* and *happiness* and stands in opposition to sorrow and grief. As we go further back in time, the semantic load of the word (*šādī*) becomes richer and more complex. The meaning that comes to mind today is, to a considerable extent, different from its counterparts in Old Persian, *šiyāti-*, and in the Avesta, *šyatā-*. In simpler terms, the meaning of this word has become more specialized over time (Mitchell, 2015: 293).[1]

In fact, in ancient Iran, when the word was used, it encompassed a broad range of meanings such as well-being, peace, abundance, truth, and more generally, happiness. Over time, the meaning of this word has gradually narrowed, to the point where today in Persian, the word (*šādī*) covers only a fraction of its former significance.

In most ancient Iranian texts, the word (*šādī*) and many other words conveying meanings of happiness, success, well-being, and related emotions are found in a distinctly secular and mundane context. The worldly and joyful atmosphere in some ancient Iranian texts strongly supports the non-spiritual and material aspects of these words. This reflects a specific worldview within part of ancient Iranian philosophy that places great value on wealth, enjoying sublunary blessings, experiencing pleasures, and valuing the present moment. The word also has a specific semantic evolution when referring to the feeling of joy.

1. Christine Mitchell translate Šiyāti as *well-being* in his publication: "Šiyāti is usually translated happiness but has a more comprehensive semantic range."

In the Avesta, the sacred texts of Zoroaster, we observe instances where the Old Persian Avestan words *šyatā-* and *šāta-* specifically have non-spiritual and sometimes even erotic connotations (Shagoshtasbi and Hasanzadeh Niri, 2023: 169). In other words, while many religious traditions emphasize happiness as a spiritual or metaphysical state achieved in the afterlife, ancient Persian and Zoroastrian beliefs took a different approach. In these traditions, happiness was seen as a tangible experience rooted in the material world and everyday life. Zoroastrian teachings particularly highlighted the importance of living a righteous life and finding happiness through one's actions and experiences in this world. Unlike traditions that seek ultimate fulfillment in a transcendent or otherworldly realm, Zoroastrianism celebrated the pursuit of happiness and well-being within the tangible context of the material world.

2-2.Happiness in Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions

Among the limited texts preserved from Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions in Old Persian, one of the most striking themes is the concept of happiness and its repeated emphasis in these inscriptions. As previously mentioned, *šiyāti-* in Old Persian, derived from the root *šya- \ šā-*, is a noun meaning 'welfare, peace, happiness' and 'joy after death'. Additionally, *šiyāta* is an adjective meaning 'calm' and 'joyful'. This word and its derivatives appear frequently in Old Persian inscriptions, with the phrase *happiness for mankind* being repeated 22 times in inscriptions from ancient Iran.[1] In the DNa inscription, or the inscription of Darius the Great at *Naqsh-e Rostam* [lines 1-7], written in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian, the King of Persia says:

1.	*baga \ vazraka \ Auramazdâ \ hya \ im*	1. The great god is Ahuramazda, who created
2.	*am \ bumâm \ adâ \ hya \ avam \ asm*	2. This earth, who created yonder sky,
3.	*ânam \ adâ \ hya \ martiyam \ adâ *	3. Who created mankind,
4.	*hya \ **šiyâtim** \ adâ \ martiyahyâ *	4. who created happiness for mankind,
5.	*hya \ Dârayavaum \ xšâyathiyam \ ak*	5. Who made Darius king,
6.	*unauš \ aivam \ parûvnâm \ xšâyath*	6. one king of many,
7.	*iyam \ aivam \ parûvnâm \ framâtâ*	7. one lord of many (Kent, 1953: 137-38).

1. The general system for referencing Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions uses a three-letter format. The first letter denotes the king, such as ***D*** for Darius or ***X*** for Xerxes. The second letter represents the site, like ***B*** for Bisotun (Kermanshah, Iran) or ***P*** for Persepolis (Shiraz, Iran). The third letter is used to differentiate between inscriptions of the same ruler at the same site.

It would be beneficial to examine the fifth sentence in detail: *hya šiyātim adā martiyahyā*. The word ***hya*** is a relative pronoun in the nominative singular masculine form, meaning who, what, or which. The term *šiyātim* is a noun in the accusative singular feminine form, translating to welfare, peace, or happiness. The verb *adā* is in the 3rd person singular aorist indicative active form, derived from *dā*, meaning put, make, or create. Finally, *martiyahyā* is a noun in the genitive singular masculine form, referring to a mortal mankind or human being (Harvey et al., 2024: Chapter 9).

Additionally, in the DNb inscription of Darius the Great [lines 1-4], it is written:

1.	*baga* \ *vazraka* \ *Auramazdâ* \ *hya* \ *adadâ* \ *i*	1.	the great god Ahuramazda is the one, who
2.	*ma* \ *frašam* \ *tya* \ *vainataiy* \	2.	created this glory that is seen,
3.	*hya* \ *adadâ* \ ***šiyâtim*** \ *martiyahyâ* *hya* \ *xrathum*\	3.	who created happiness for mankind, who
4.	*utâ* \ *aruvastam* \ *upariy* \ *Dârayavaum* \ *xšâ*	4.	bestowed wisdom and capability upon Darius the King (Kuhrt, 2007: 502-5).

In the DSs inscription [lines 1-7], it is written:

1.	*baga* \ *vazraka* \ *Auramazdâ* \ *hya* \ *frasham* \ *ah* \ *yâyâ* \ *bûmiyâ* \ *kunautiy* \	1.	a great god is Ahuramazda, who created what is good on this earth,
2.	*hya* \ *martiyarn* \ *ahyâyâ* \ *bûmiyâ* \ *kunautiy*\	2.	who created mankind on this earth,
3.	*hya* \ ***šiyâtim*** \ *kunautiy* \ *martiyahyâ* \	3.	who created happiness for mankind,
4.	*hya* \ *uvaspâ* \ *urathâcâ* \	4.	who created good horses and good chariots.
5.	*kunautiy* \ *manâ* \ *haudish* \ *frâbara* \ *mâm* \	5.	he bestowed gave me the kingdom.
6.	Auramazdâ \ pâtuv \ utâ \ tyamaiy \ kartam \	6.	may Ahuramazda protect me and what I have made (Shagoshtasbi and Hasanzadeh Niri, 2023: 173).

The same theme is repeated across all Achaemenid inscriptions. The fact that, among all the blessings and creations of Ahuramazda, the god of ancient Iran, happiness is highlighted as a significant gift to humanity in the most important royal documents, underscores the importance of the meaning of the word (*šiyāti*-) and its associated philosophy in ancient

Iranian religion and culture. However, the meaning and implications of this word, given its elevated status, are worthy of careful consideration. Perhaps by examining the texts of the DPe and XPh inscriptions and comparing them with other texts, one might gain some insight into this purpose. In the DPe inscription, or the inscription of Darius the Great, which is written in 24 lines on the southern wall of the Persepolis Palace, it states:

19.	*Darayavaush \ xshâyathiya \ yadiy*	19.	Darius the King says:
20.	*avathâ \ maniyâhay \ hacâ \ aniya*	20.	if you shall think thus,
21.	*nâ \ mâ \ tarsam \ imam \ Pârsam \ kâram \ pâdi*	21.	may I not fear of any other, protect this Persian people,
22.	*y \ yadiy \ kâra \ Pârsa \ pâta \ ahatiy \ hyâ *	22.	if the Persian people shall be protected, thereafter
23.	*duvaishtam \ **šiyâtish** \ axshatâ \ hauvci*	23.	for the longest while happiness unbroken,
24.	*y \ Aurâ \ nirasâtiy \ abiy \ imâm \ vitham *	24.	and the favor of Ahuramazda will come down upon the royal house (Filippone, 2012: 101-19).

In this text, as observed, perpetual happiness is a gift bestowed by Ahuramazda upon a ruler or government that protects the people. Furthermore, DPe describes a form of social contract or symbiosis between the government and the people. The King is advised to protect the populace, which in turn helps the government shield itself from fear (Lincoln, 2012: 410).[1] This governmental protection signifies the adherence to rights of people expected from their government, and it must be given due consideration by the king. In the XPh inscription, or the inscription of Xerxes at Persepolis [lines 46-56], it states:

46.	*yâtâ \ kartam \ akunavam \ tuva \ kâ \ hya *	46.	[and] if you who [would come]
47.	*apara \ yadimaniyâiy \ **šiyāta** \ ahaniy *	47.	after [me] should think, may I be happy
48.	*jîva \ utâ \ marta \ artâvâ \ ahaniy *	48.	[as long as I am] living, may I be blessed [when I am] dead,
49.	*avanâ \ dâtâ \ parîdiy \ tya *	49.	[then] on account of that, honor the

1. By ensuring the safety and well-being of the people, the government also safeguards itself against potential threats and instability. However, the things that might cause fear against the royal empire are not named in that passage. Rather, it is the DPe inscription that provides a more detailed analysis, listing the three prime sources of fear in what seems to be the reverse order of their severity. Further elaboration on the DPe will follow.

	Auramazdâ \	laws which Ahuramazda has
50.	*niyaštāya* \ *Auramazdâm* \ *yadaišā* \	50. set down. You, being reverent, should worship Ahuramazda
51.	*artâcâ* \ *brazmaniya* \ *martiya* \ *hya* \ *avanâ* \	51. and truth. The man who, on account of that,
52.	*dâtâ* \ *pariyaita* \ *tya* \ *Auramazdâ* \	52. honors the laws which Ahuramazda sets down,
53.	*nîshtâya* \ *utâ* \ *Auramazdâm* \ *yadataiy* \	53. [who], being reverent, worships Ahuramazda
54.	*artâcâ* \ *brazmaniya* \ *hauv* \ *utâ* \ *jîva* \	54. and truth, both becomes happy [as long as he is] living
55.	***šiyāta*** \ *bavatiy* \ *utâ* \ *marta* \ *artâvâ* \	55. and becomes blessed
56.	*bavatiy* \	56. [when he is] dead ... (Harvey et al., 2024: Chapter 10).[1]

The phrase *may I be happy [as long as I am] living* suggests that happiness in the material world may be understood as a transcendent feeling akin to happiness and well-being derived from life's blessings. This joy or happiness, a natural right for the people of Persia, is seen as a divine rule that kings shall recognize (Lincoln, 2008: 224-25). Consequently, this concept is frequently referenced in ancient Iranian inscriptions and is likely intended to denote the joy experienced in this life rather than in the afterlife. Research by Iranologists supports this interpretation (Mitchell, 2014: 306).[2]

As previously noted, DPe discusses a governmental obligation that the king must fulfill to ensure lasting happiness for the people. In this context, some scholars argue that DPe should be interpreted alongside another royal text, the DPd inscription (Lincoln, 2012: 410). In other words, both DPd and its complementary inscription, DPe, address the protection of people from looming threats. In the DPd inscription [lines 12-24], Darius the Great appeals to Ahuramazda to safeguard the land of Persia from three specific disasters. The inscription reads as follows:

12.	… \ *Dârayavaush* \ *xshâya*	12. King Darius says
13.	*thiya* \ *manâ* \ *Auramazdâ* \ *upastâm* \	13. may Ahuramazda and the gods of
14.	*baratuv* \ *hadâ* \ *vithaibish* \ *Bagai*	14. the royal house comes to my aid.

1. It should be noted that the term *bavatiy* in line 56 of the inscription is a 1st person singular present verb meaning 'becomes'. For the sake of a clear translation in English, it has been replaced with the term *marta* from the previous line, which is a past participle passive verb meaning 'dead'.

. In the Old Persian creation formula, the creation of humanity by Ahuramazda is followed immediately by the creation of *šiyāti* for humanity.

15.	*bish \ utâ \ imâm \ dahyâum \ Aura*	15. may Ahuramazda protect
16.	*mazda \ pâtuv \ hacâ \ hainây*	16. this country from the enemy army,
17.	*â \ hacâ \ dushiyârâ \ hacâ \ dra*	17. from famine,
18.	*ugâ \ abiy \ imâm \ dahyâum \ mâ *	18. and from the lie. may there never be
19.	*âjamiyâ \ mâ \ haiânyâ \ mâ \ dush*	19. upon this country
20.	*iyârâ \ mâ \ drauga \ aita \ adam *	20. the enemy army, famine, or the lie.
21.	*yânam \ jadiyâmiy \ Auramazd*	21. this I pray as a favor from Ahuramazda
22.	*â \ hadâ \ vithaibish \ bagaibish \ a*	22. and the gods of the royal house.
23.	*itamaiy \ yânam \ Auramazdâ \ dadât*	23. may Ahuramazda and the gods
24.	*uv \ hadâ vithaibish \ bagaibish*	24. of the royal house do me this favor (Filippone, 2012: 101-19).

On the other hand, the DPe inscription indicates that the happiness of the people will remain undisturbed if they are protected. From the texts of these two inscriptions, it can be concluded that the ancient Iranians' happiness could be disrupted by three specific calamities: army of enemies (*hainâyâ*), drought and famine (*dushiyârâ*), and falsehood (*drauga*) (Lincoln, 2012: 415).

While the first two are straightforward, the concept of *falsehood* – or *lie* in the text of the inscription – as an evil that can disrupt happiness is less clear. It seems that falsehood is a disastrous phenomenon that undermine justice. This understanding comprehends from the text of another royal inscription. In the DNb inscription, which is a comprehensive account of how a ruler should govern justly, Darius the Great describes his approach to justice and governance. He proclaims:

5.	*… \ thâtiy \ Dârayavaush \ xshâya*	5. … King Darius says
6.	*thiya \ vashnâ \ Auramazdâha \ avâkaram \ a*	6. by the favor of Ahuramazda,
7.	*miy \ tya \ râstam \ daushtâ \ amiy \ mitha \ na*	7. I am of such a kind that I am a friend of the right,
8.	*iy \ daushtâ \ amiy \ naimâ \ kâma \ tya \ skauth*	8. of wrong I am not a friend. (it is) not my desire
9.	*ish \ tunuvatahyâ \ râdiy \ mitha \ kariyaish *	9. that the weak one might be treated wrongly, for the strong one's sake,
10.	*naimâ \ ava \ kâma \ tya \ tunuvâ \ skauthaish \ r*	10. nor the strong be treated wrongly by the weak.
11.	*âdiy \ mitha \ kariyaish \ tya \ râstam \ ava \ mâm *	11. what is right, that is my desire.
12.	*kâma \ martiyam \ draujanam \ naiy \ daushtâ \ am*	12. I am not a friend to the man who follows lies,
13.	*iy \ naiy \ manauvish \ amiy \ tyâmaiy \ dartana*	13. I am not hot-tempered,

14.	*yâ \ bavatiy \ darsham \ dârayâmiy \ manahâ *	14. I control my anger through thoughtful consideration,
15.	*uvaipashiyahyâ \ darsham \ xshayamna \ amiy *	15. I am firmly in control of myself.
16.	*martiya \ hya \ hataxshataiy \ anudim \ hakarta*	16. the man who cooperates is rewarded, for him, according to his cooperation,
17.	*hyâ \ avathâdim \ paribarâmiy \ hya \ v*	17. who does harm is punished
18.	*inâithayatiy \ anudim \ vinastahyâ \ avath*	18. in accordance with the damage.
19.	*â \ parsâmiy \ naimâ \ kâma \ tya \ martiya *	19. it is not my desire for anyone to harm another,
20.	*vinâthayais \ naipatimâ \ ava \ kâma \ yadi*	20. nor for those who do harm, not to be punished.
21.	*y \ vinâthayaish \ naiy \ frathiyaish \ martiya *	21. I do not consider a man's accusations
22.	*tya \ patiy \ martiyam \ thâtiy \ ava \ mâm *	22. that does not convince me,
23.	*naiy \ varnavataiy \ yâtâ \ uradanâm \ hadu*	23. until I have heard the statements of both.
24.	*gâm \ âxshnautiy \ martiya \ tya \ kunau*	24. what a man achieves or brings
25.	*tiy \ yadivâ \ âbaratiy \ anuv \ tauman*	25. according to his natural abilities, [and]
26.	*ishaiy \ xshnuta \ amiy \ utâ \ mâm \ vas*	26. by that I become satisfied, and it very much my desire;
27.	*iy \ kâma \ utâ \ uxshnaush \ amiy \ avâkaram*	27. and [when] I am pleased, my generous is abundant.
28.	*camaiy \ ushîy \ utâ \ framânâ \ yathâmai*	28. of such a kind (are) my intelligence and (my) command
29.	*y \ tya \ kartam \ vainâhy \ yadivâ âxshnav*	29. when you shall see or hear what has been done by me,
30.	*âhy \ utâ \ vithiyâ \ uta \ spâthma*	30. both at court and in battle,
31.	*idayâ \ aitamaiy \ aruvastam \...*	31. this is my capability over thinking and judgment (Baghbidi, 2009: 57-8).

From this inscription, it is clear that Darius the Great places a strong emphasis on justice and integrity. Falsehood, or lying, is viewed as a serious impediment to justice and, consequently, to the happiness of the people. Therefore, the disruption of happiness by falsehood likely refers to how unfairness or lack of justice in ruling undermines fair governance and justice, which are crucial for maintaining societal well-being. Consequently, the core of the *social contract* between the people and their king in ancient Persia was revolved around life and peace, or in Old

Persian terms, *šiyāti*, meaning life and well-being. This right of people was established by Ahuramazda and protected by the Achaemenid king, who ensured its preservation by enacting laws (*data*) and maintaining proper order (*arta*) (Mitchell, 2015: 304).[1] The ruling government was expected to take measures to safeguard against these trio threats. In contrast, the benefits that ensure the preservation of happiness include peace, well-being, and justice (Shagoshtasbi and Hasanzadeh Niri, 2023: 175).

Thus, it is clear that in ancient Persia, the concept of happiness was considered a divine human right, and it was incumbent upon the sovereigns to actively uphold and provide conditions for the realization of this happiness. This perspective emphasized that the well-being of the populace was intrinsically linked to the effectiveness and moral integrity of governance, as we now refer to it as *good governance* (Fellmeth and McInerney-Lankford, 2022: 1; Addink, 2019). Although the conceptualization of happiness and its association with governance in ancient Persia might appear rudimentary, it still reveals a profound understanding of the interrelationship between government and the governed. In essence, the ancient Persian approach to governance reflects a belief in the government's obligation to actively contribute to the right to happiness for its people. The rules and principles, while foundational, indicate a sophisticated view of rights, responsibilities, and the role of leadership in enhancing public welfare. This historical perspective highlights a long-standing tradition of recognizing and formalizing the connection between effective governance and the happiness of the populace, demonstrating an early awareness of the importance of public administration in ensuring societal well-being.

3. From Ancient Principles to Modern Standards

Transitioning to the modern era, we can draw parallels between these ancient principles and contemporary human rights. Considering their modern equivalents, it becomes evident how the ancient Persian focus on safeguarding happiness through protection from specific threats has evolved into a broader human rights discourse. Understanding these connections, even in their rudimentary form, helps illuminate how ancient thoughts and principles continue to shape our current human rights standards and practices.

1. Christine Mitchell translate Šiyāti as *'well-being'* in their publication.

In my viewpoint, the aforementioned ancient principles – peace and security, adequate living conditions, and justice – align with the pillars of the *sustainable development goals*, which aim to improve the quality of life for people around the world. Not only they are still relevant, but also, they are pillars of all efforts have been being done to provide an adequate standard of living for peoples all around the world for decades (De Neve and Sachs, 2020: 1-2). To this end, it could only be possible to talk about sustainable welfare and happiness for all when and if we achieve sustainable development through good governance (Omri and Mabrouk, 2020: 106388-1).

Researchers have suggested two main approaches for the overall measurement of well-being, the objective and the subjective well-being (Voukelatou et al., 2021: 280). With the purpose of identifying objective, scholars have focused on dimensions that are considered essential for the improvement of the societal well-being and its comparison between countries and years. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has identified 17 sustainable development goals and 232 indicators, labeled as SDGs (OECD, 2024: 11).[1]

Additionally, with regard to the subjective elements, researchers studied subjective well-being and have identified the dimensions and the relevant determinants that can positively or negatively affect human well-being (OECD, 2024: 3). For instance, evidence shows that one of the most important predictors of happiness is a social trust between population of a country and their authorities, and in general the government quality (Ott, 2011: 354).[2] In this context, it is important to recognize that *Gross National Happiness* is primarily determined by criteria that directly influence changes in the overall sense of happiness within a nation (Chetri, 2024: Chapter 7).

To explore how ancient people believed happiness could be achieved through government measures, I will examine the overarching goals of the SDGs. This will help determine if there is a significant difference between contemporary views on happiness and those held by people from 25 centuries ago, in their basic forms though. I start with the SDGs.

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1. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has identified 11 essential topics labeled as OECD well-being framework. *see:* OECD. (2024, April 2). Measuring Well-being beyond GDP in Asia, South-East Asia and Korea (OECD Papers on Well-being and Inequalities, No. 22). OECD Publishing.

2. The author argues that "the quality of governance may also have a positive impact on happiness … since governments can provide for additional conditions, like safety, healthcare and a minimal level of social equality and justice."

Established in 2015, the SDGs represent a universal pledge to address ongoing human rights issues, environmental degradation, and economic advancement, seeking to facilitate transformational change and to create an equitable world for all (Guiry, 2024: 2).

It should be noted that many of the indicators used in the SDGs are directly related to those measuring happiness. SDGs indicators that are widely adopted by institutions, governments, and communities around the world (Duvic-Paoli, 2021: 9). Therefore, we can rely on these indicators to understand to what extent realization of these criterion will affect the happiness of people. An empirical analysis reveals that the SDGs cover 66.7% of the domains and indicators included in a happiness-related index (Iriartel and Musikanski, 2019: 115).

It is important to note that SDG Goal 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, does directly reference the concept of *well-being*.[1] This alignment suggests that while the SDGs addresses many aspects that contribute to overall happiness as measured by related indices (Kubiszewski et al., 2022: 146). Nonetheless, this framework has its own flaws as well. The 2020 SDGs Report emphasized that the absence of access to justice and weak governance were significant obstacles to sustainable development (Bantekas and Akestoridi, 2023: 503-4).

All in all, as the UN General Assembly declared, SDGs were designed to have a better balance of the three dimensions of sustainable development social, economic, and environmental – and their governance aspects (UNGA Res 70/1, 2015). Notably, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is built on five foundational pillars: *people*, *planet*, *prosperity*, *peace*, and *partnership* (UNGA Res 70/1, 2015: Preamble).

To highlight the remarkable similarities between ancient and modern views on governance, justice, and human well-being, we can compare the core values and objectives of the Achaemenid principles from over 2500 years ago with today's SDGs. These parallels reveal a persistent thread in human thought regarding the creation of stable, prosperous, and just societies:

a. *Protection from Calamities and Basic Needs*

In the ancient DPe inscription, one of the primary concerns of the ruler's was to protect the people from three specific threats: drought and famine.

1. Considering that the SDGs do not explicitly aim to address *'happiness'* as a primary objective, this overlap is noteworthy.

This emphasis on safeguarding against these calamities reveals a deep commitment to ensuring basic security and stability for the general population. Similarly, the SDGs focus on ending poverty and hunger (Goals 1 and 2), ensuring access to clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), and promoting sustainable agriculture. These goals reflect a modern recognition of the need to protect individuals from deprivation and environmental threats, directly aligning with the ancient concern for safeguarding the basic needs from *dushiyârâ*.

b. *Good Governance and Justice*

The DNb inscription from the reign of Darius the Great emphasizes the ruler's duty to uphold justice, maintain order, and enact laws that promote the well-being of the people. In the words of the Great King, *šiyāti* would establish by *data* (enacting laws) and *arta* (maintaining proper order) based on the righteousness. This principle is rooted in the belief that a just and orderly society is essential for the ruler's legitimacy and the people's happiness. In contemporary terms, the SDGs stress the importance of promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (Goal 16) and building effective, accountable institutions (Goal 17). These goals highlight the ongoing relevance of good governance as foundational to societal well-being, reflecting a shared understanding that administration and justice are critical to achieving a harmonious society.

c. *Mutual Interaction and Collective Responsibility*

The ancient principle that the ruler's security is tied to the people's happiness reflects a mutual relationship where both governance and societal well-being are interdependent. In the modern context, this mutual interaction is mirrored in the SDGs' emphasis on [global] partnerships (Goal 17) and collaborative efforts among all stakeholders to achieve sustainable development.

d. *Long-Term Sustainability and Stability*

Both ancient and modern frameworks demonstrate a focus on long-term stability and prosperity. The DPe inscription's concern with preventing disasters and falsehoods implies a vision of enduring stability and contentment. Similarly, the SDGs are designed to address present and future challenges by promoting sustainable development across social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The emphasis on sustainable practices and resilience in the SDGs reflects a commitment to ensuring

that the benefits of development are enduring and equitable, resonating with the ancient emphasis on long-term societal stability.

Conclusion

The earliest historical references to happiness can be found in the inscriptions of the Achaemenid Empire. These inscriptions often include a recurring phrase indicating that *Ahuramazda*, the greatest God, created happiness for humankind. This article investigates whether the concept of happiness, as understood from these ancient texts, aligns with contemporary definitions or whether the notion held a distinct meaning for the ancient people. Firstly, a linguistic analysis of the term *happiness* reveals that it was derived from Persian rituals and imbued with a concrete and practical significance. In the Achaemenid worldview, happiness was to be achieved during life, as opposed to being deferred to another realm. This conception was integral to their governance model, which prioritized ensuring peace, justice, and prosperity for their citizens. Also, with the establishment of the Persian Empire, the realization of happiness for its people emerged as a significant mission of governance. The Persian kings such as Darius the Great and Xerxes frequently emphasized this idea in their proclamations. It is important to note that the concept of happiness during this era was deeply rooted in the culture of ancient Iran and Zoroastrian religious beliefs. The Achaemenids, however, incorporated and operationalized this notion within the framework of their administrative policies.

The Achaemenid rulers recognized that enduring happiness and stability depended on key pillars: maintaining peace by avoiding *hainâyâ* (hostility), ensuring adequate living conditions by addressing *dushiyârâ* (poverty), and upholding justice by combating *drauga* (falsehood). These principles underpinned the administration of Persian Empire, fostering stability and legitimacy while promoting long-lasting happiness among the populace.

The ancient principles of governance aimed at securing the people's right to happiness exhibit a striking alignment with the modern Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the modern era, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development echoes these timeless aspirations. Contemporary SDGs focus on eradicating poverty, ensuring food security, promoting justice, and fostering peace and resilience. Both ancient and modern societies share a common goal of creating

environments where individuals can thrive, contribute to the collective good, and experience stability and justice.

Despite advancements in technology and the availability of more precise strategies, the fundamental aspirations of humanity have remained consistent. Ancient societies understood, as we do today, that collective well-being hinges on peace, justice, and prosperity. This enduring continuity underscores the timeless nature of our pursuit of happiness.

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