

# The Science Of Happiness



PSYCH 1101: DAY 31

PROF. DAVID PIZARRO  
[CORNELLPSYCH.NET](http://CORNELLPSYCH.NET)

# "Common Unhappiness"



SIGMUND FREUD

The goal of psychoanalysis: to convert "...neurotic misery into **common unhappiness**"

...But can't we do more? Shouldn't we try to move people from *unhappy* to *happy*?

# Pleasure?



# Higher Pursuits?



# “Eudaimonia”

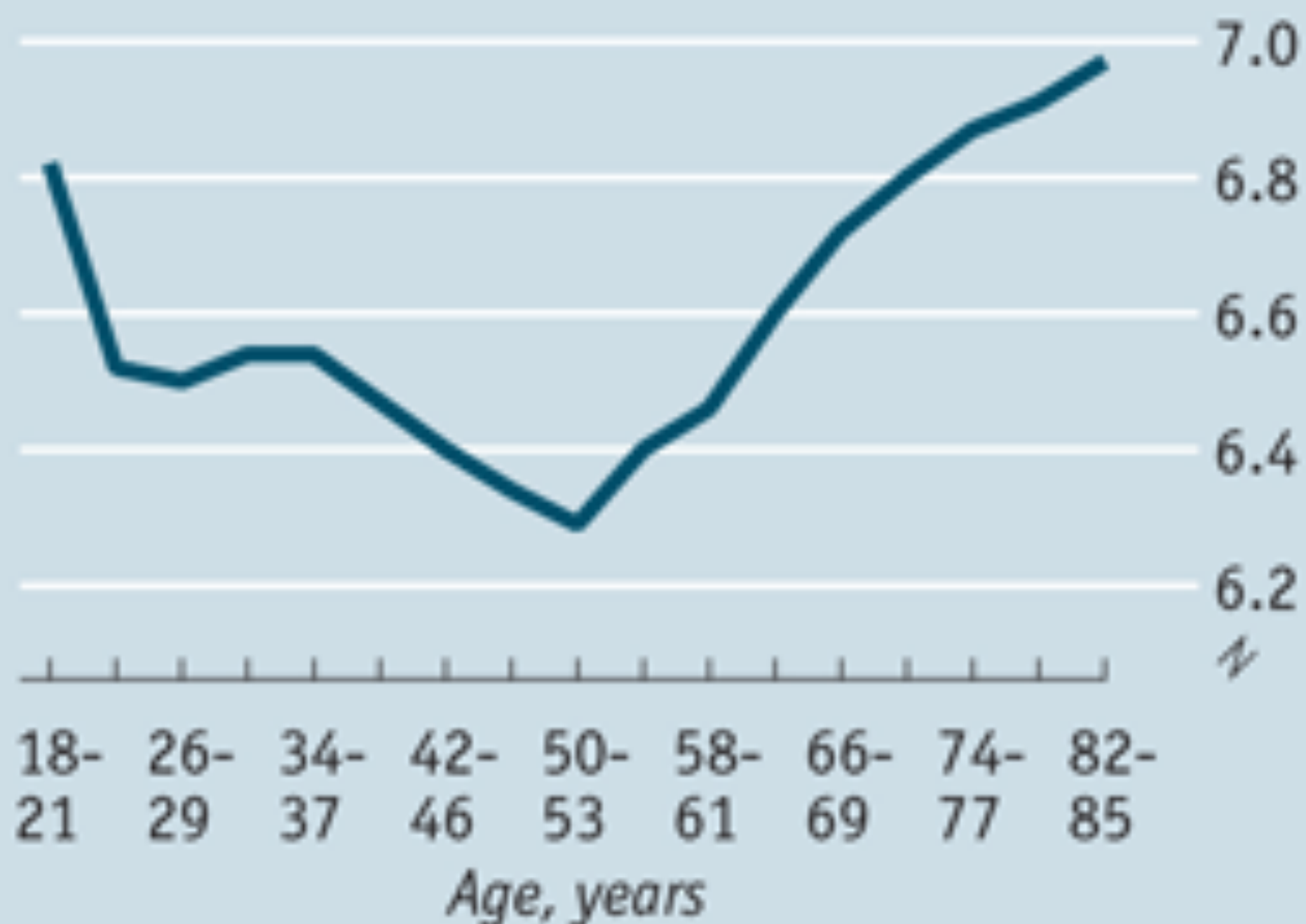
- “eu” - good
- “daimon” spirit
- modern definition—human flourishing

# How Do You Measure It? Ask

- Happiness as *Subjective Well-Being*
- Affective/Emotional component:
  - Taking all things together, how would you say things are these days — would you say you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?”
- Cognitive Component
  - “How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?”

## The U-bend

Self-reported well-being, on a scale of 1-10



Source: PNAS paper: "A snapshot of the age distribution of psychological well-being in the United States" by Arthur Stone

How Can We Improve Happiness?





"I've Always Been Happy, But Lately  
I've Turned It Up A Notch Or Two."

# The Difficulty

- We seem to have a “set-point”
- Genetically-determined range, highly heritable
  - estimates around 50% of the variance
  - happy people seem to stay happy
  - This stability is evident across the lifespan
- Happiness Paradox”- Trying to be happy can make you *unhappy*

# Example: Genuine Smiles As Indicator Of Happiness

- Harker & Keltner (2001) coded high-school yearbooks for genuine smiles
- genuine smilers: 30 years later
  - happier marriages
  - greater levels of subjective well-being
  - less stress



Does Money Make You Happy?

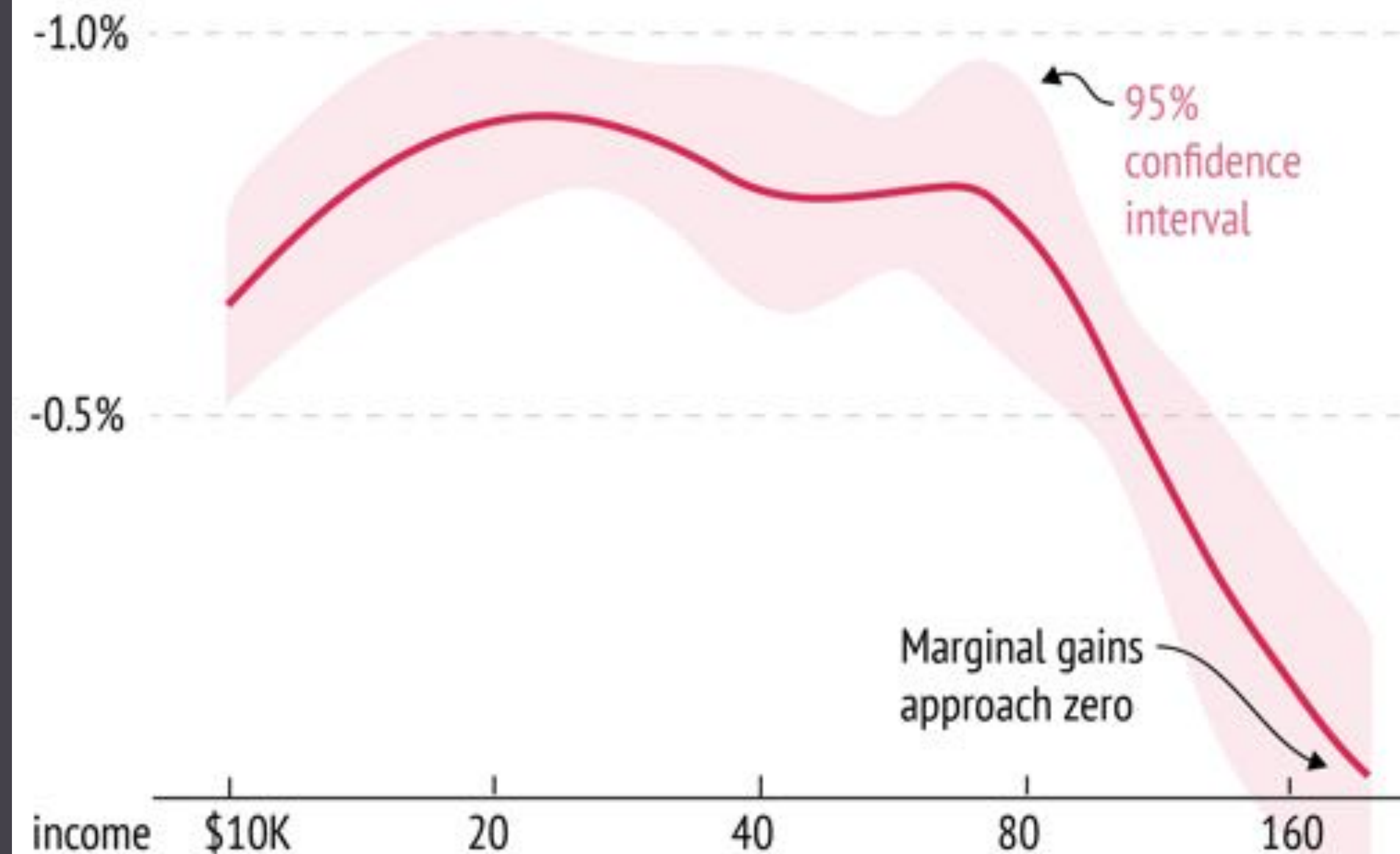
# Does Money Make You Happy?



# Does \$ Make You Happy? (Personal Level)

## Diminishing returns

The richer a family gets, the smaller the reduction in negative emotions gained by the marginal dollar increase in household income. Gains disappear around \$200,000.

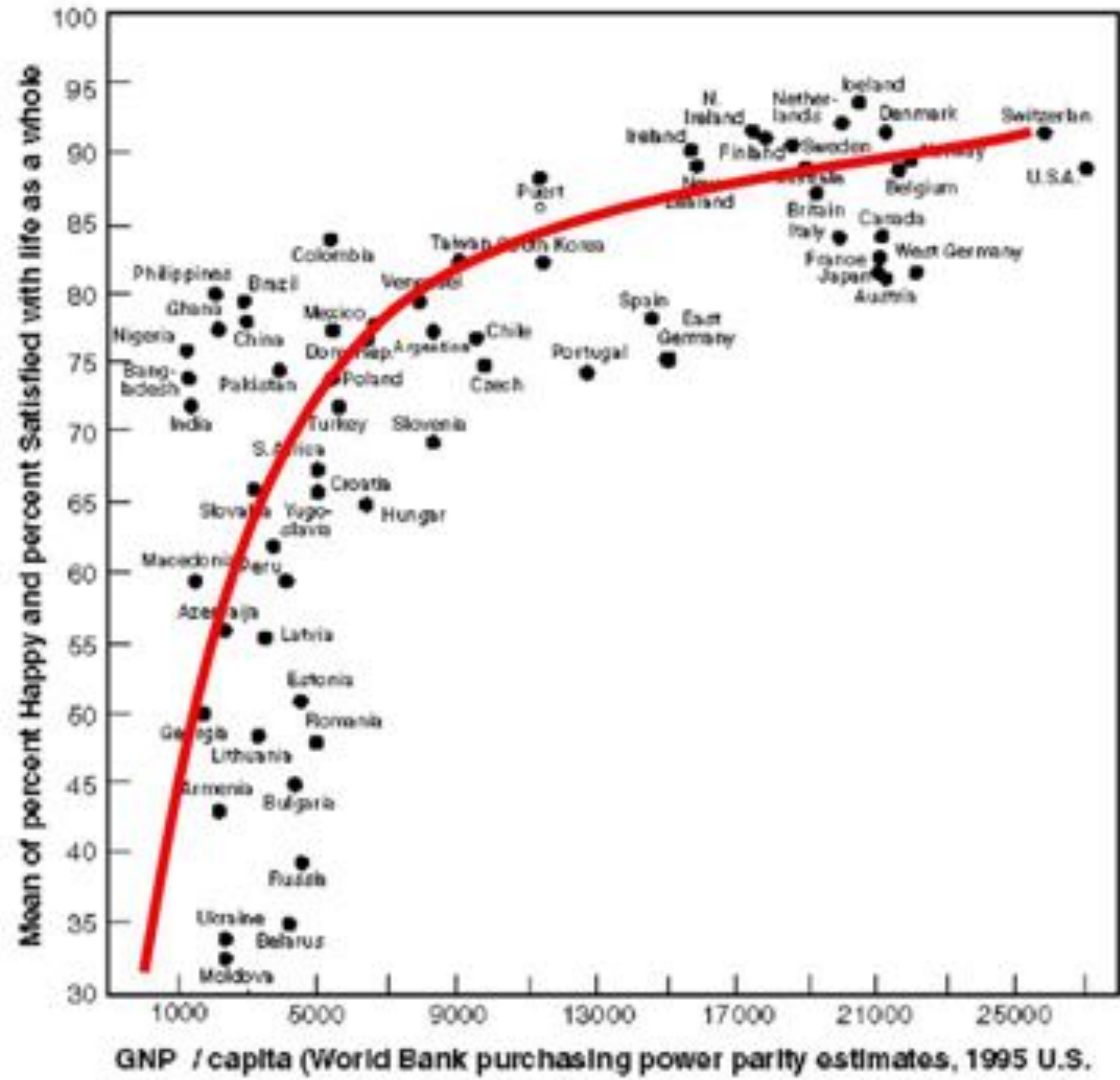


Note: X axis scale is not linear.

Source: Clingingsmith (2015): Negative Emotions, Income and Welfare



# Does \$ Make You Happy? Country Level



What About Life Events?



# What Is The Worst Thing That Can Happen To You?

- How much would it change your happiness?

# What Is The Best Thing That Can Happen To You?

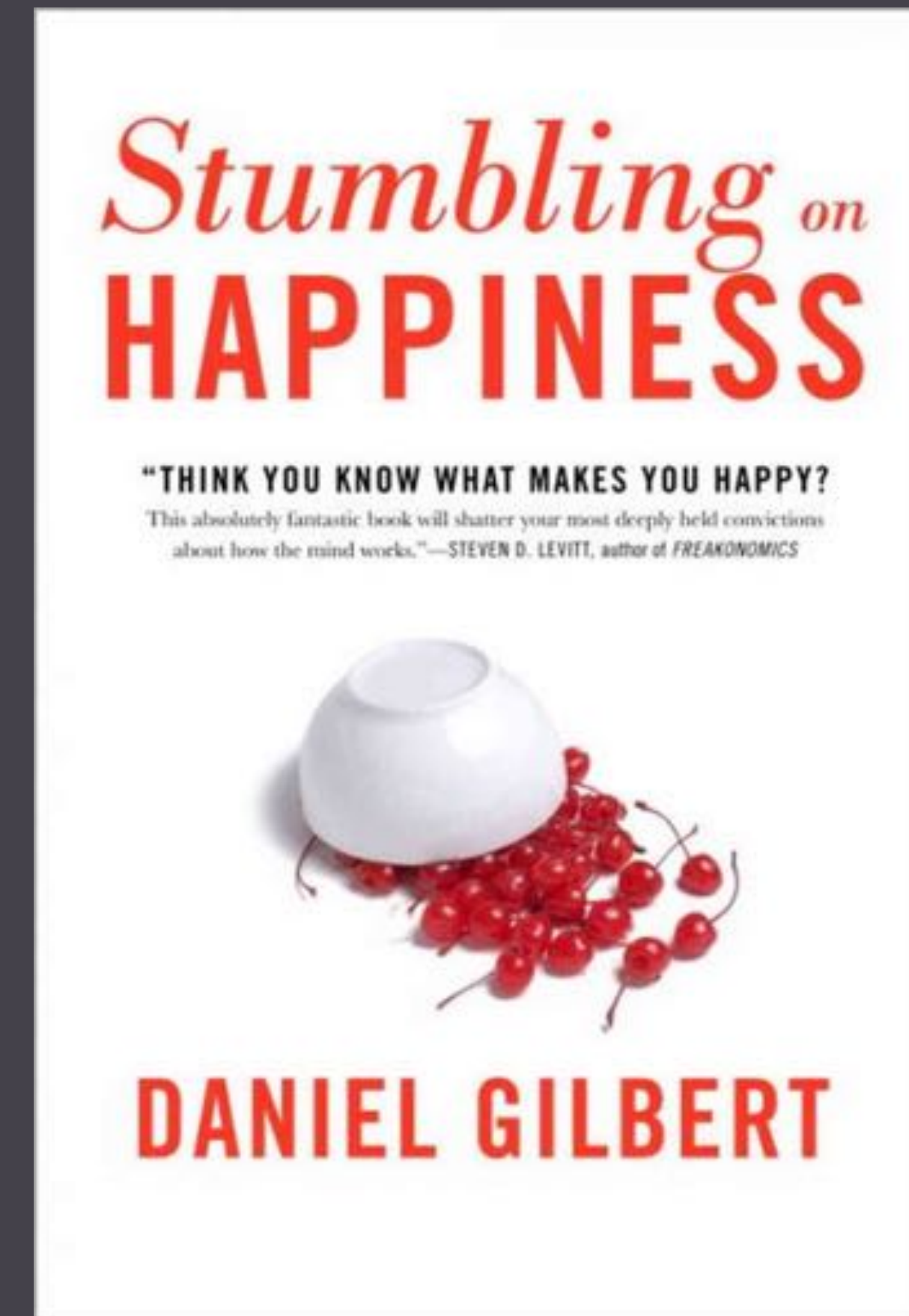
- How much would it change your happiness?

# Life Events

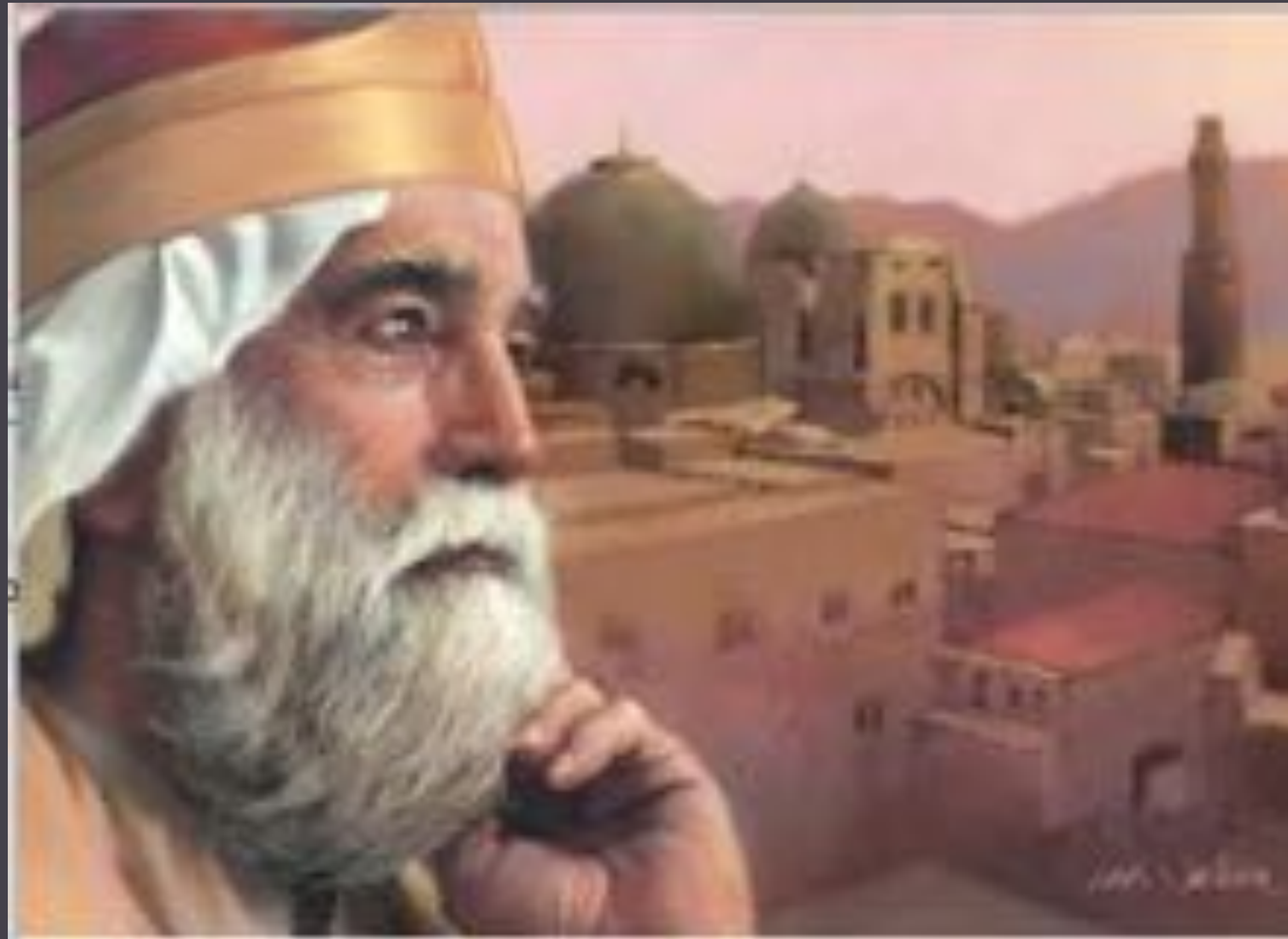
- Paraplegics
- Lottery winners
- Getting or not getting tenure
- Breaking-up
- President Romney versus President Obama

# Why Don't These Events Matter As Much We Think They Will?

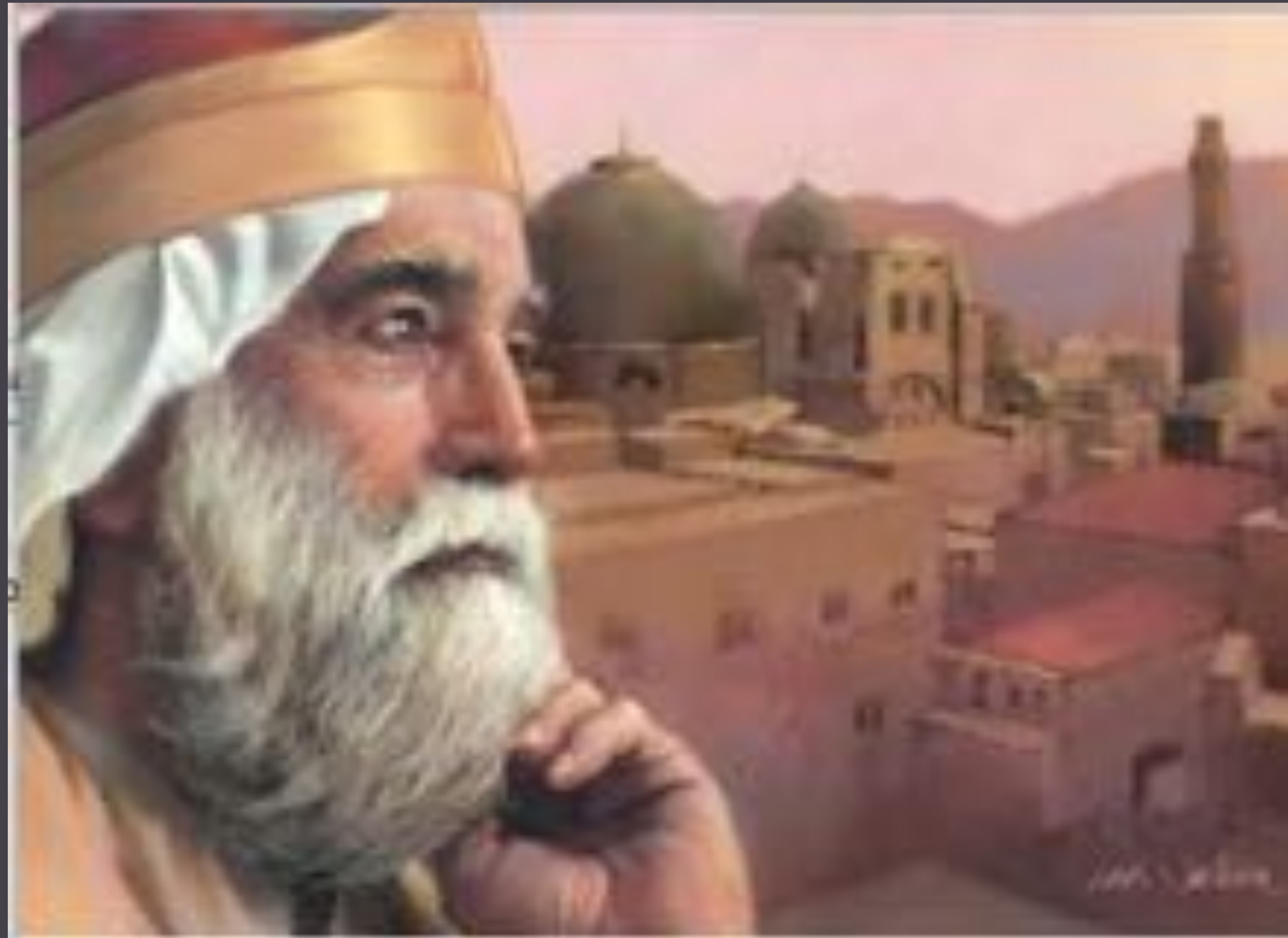
- adaptation
- we adapt to good and bad events with efficiency
- *psychological immune system*

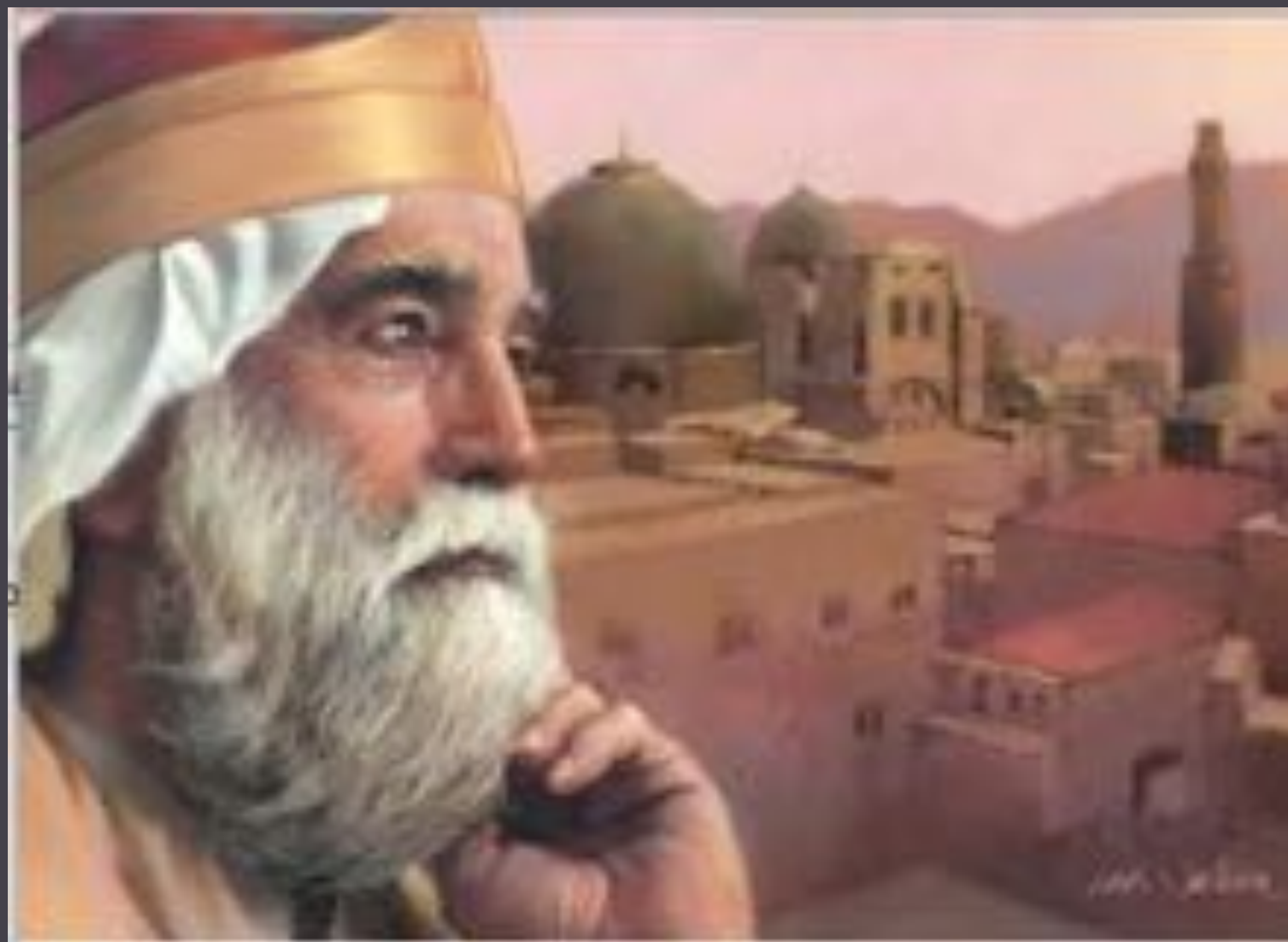


# The Hedonic Treadmill

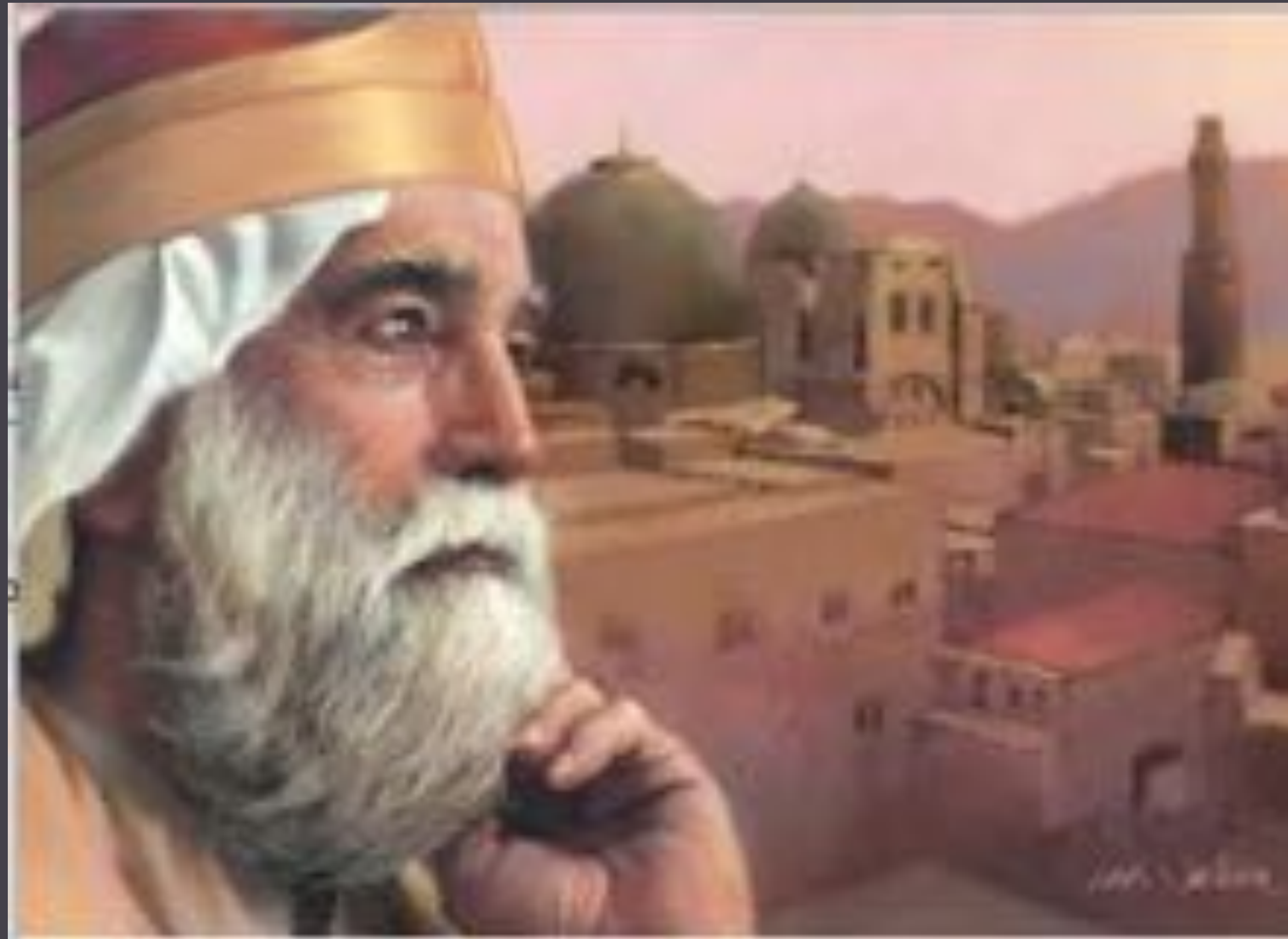


Gardens, Parks, Vineyards, Castles, Slaves, Concubines ...



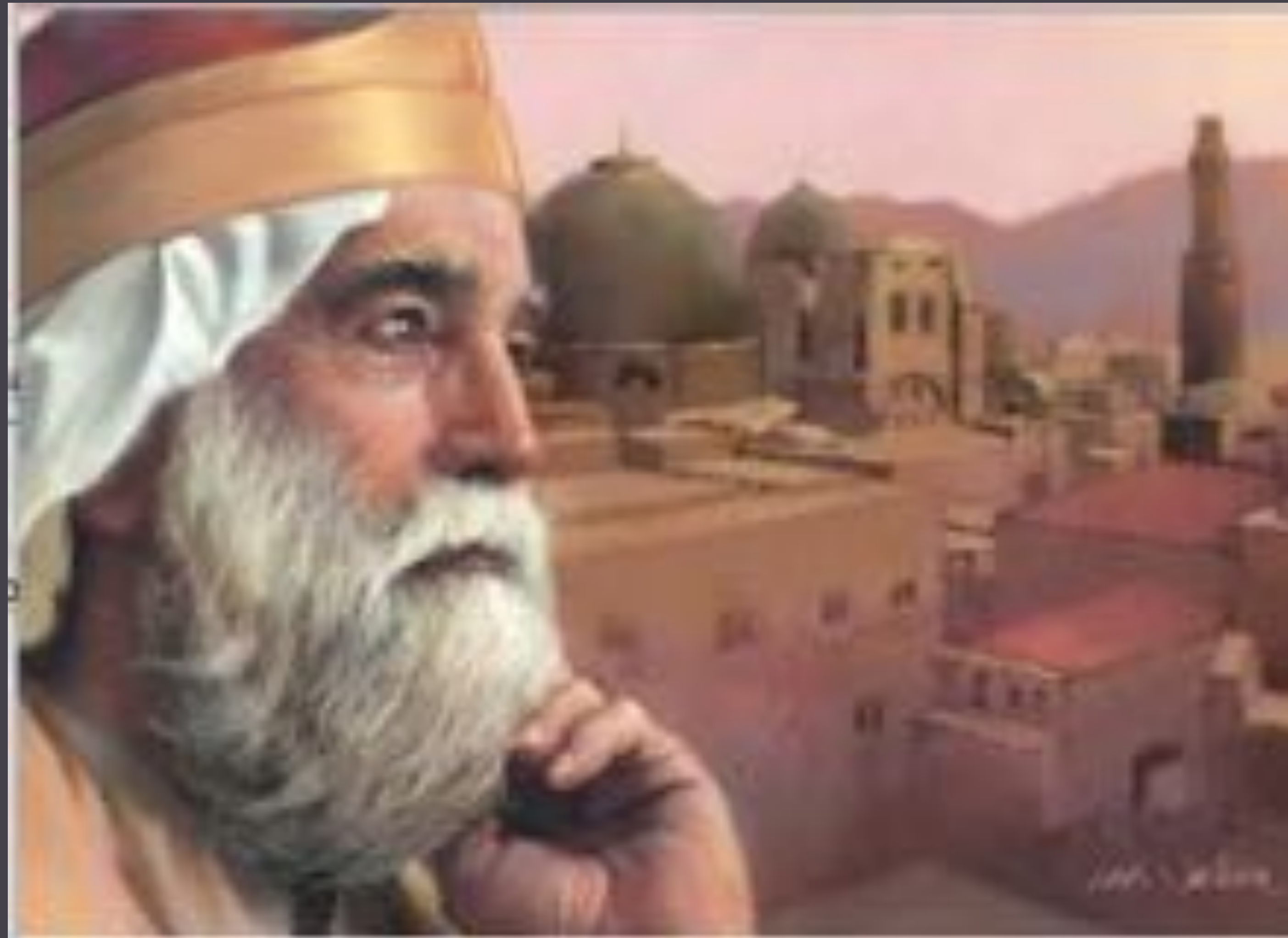


"I Hated Life ..."





**“All Is Vanity And A Chasing After Wind, And There Is Nothing To Be Gained Under The Sun.”**



# How Do We Fix This?

- Endlessly seek novelty?
  - buy every new iPhone!
- There are better strategies