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The Pursuit of Happiness

There are a multitude of things in life that you interact with that draws forth a feeling. A sensation that builds up inside of us that many, if not all, can hardly find the words to describe. This same feeling gives us boosts in our mood, our attentiveness, and how effective we can be with our work. Be it school or paid. But what is this feeling that can have such major effects on us? What is this thing that we can hardly find the words to describe but we feel almost on a daily basis and some of us even more. What I am talking about, is happiness. A defining emotion that waves over many things be them human or animal. Happiness affects us in many ways and yet we can barely even begin to understand what this emotion really is and why it affects us so heavily. Rather we understand what this emotion is or not, it is unanimously decided that it has a big importance in living what many believe to be a successful life. Whenever people discuss having a positive future, the term “happiness” is often coupled into what their image of what a perfect future is. Having a job that pays well, a loving family and a house that makes them feel, happy. But viewing it as something that you can only experience when it pertains only to you isn’t exactly how it works. For example, this statement was made by an actress named, Marla Gibbs, and she says, “In my life I've learned that true happiness comes from giving. Helping others along the way makes you evaluate who you are. I think that love is what we're all searching for. I haven't come across anyone who didn't become a better person through love.”

And if these words are anything to go by, we can become happy just by bringing something positive to someone else’s world. Being caring and giving can inspire this feeling in not only yourself but to anyone whom you interact with. So if it can be triggered by just anything, how do you begin to understand something that can happen at

just any moment. Its not so simple that you can denominate it down to specific occurrences or even why it happens. This emotion does more than just affect our mood or how we approach the world around us or even look at it. Some people believe that happiness itself can also take the name of medicine and have positive affects on our bodies as well. In the article “Six Ways Happiness is Good For Your Health” written by Kira M. Newman, it goes in depth about how it can also be as much a physical positive as it is mental. There are two major ways worth mentioning that are discussed in said article. The first of them is how happiness can have an affect on your immune system. Written as the second positive affect on your health, the article explains how it conducted a study in the year 2006 based on the case of why people with negative moods are more susceptible to colds than others. During the study, 81 graduate students were injected with a Hepatitis B vaccine and were diagnosed with daily follow-ups. During this diagnostic the article tells us how the students that were high in positivity had immune systems working on a very high level. Their antibody response was stronger than the researchers had even participated. By their research, the students with high positivity didn’t have antibodies that were just defending against symptoms but were working as they claimed on a cellular level. For emotion to be strong enough to boost your immune system or even weaken it is a very curious thing and only strengthens how little we understand how strong or what this emotion is. The second is how happiness can help combat stress levels or for the most part level them out. Where as someone who is negative can have overwhelming stress levels because of how unhappy they can be. So if being in this state can have so many benefits, how do we begin to grasp it?

How do we try to make it a constant even if you live a life that you struggle daily to find anything positive in every waking hour? For instances, people who wake up early for a job that overworks and under pays them, people who see the next day as just another steep hill on the road called life or even people who are just generally unhappy. When the next sunrise has nothing but negative promise, how do you maintain a sense of happiness? This is where the study of man named, Martin Seligman comes into the fold. This man broke down the sensation that builds happiness into five major components, to simplify things. He affixes these components into an acronym and calls it, P.E.R.M.A. The meaning behind each letter is as follows, Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishments. Dr. Seligman believes that the core meaning of what happiness is can be tied to these five factors and that if all maintained, one can experience happiness in its truest form. This is the starting point to breaking down what happiness is and gets us a step in the right direction.

Another way to approach happiness, as described by Dr. Seligman is an exercise he calls, “Three Good Things”. In this exercise Seligman explains that for each passing day you should take the time to find three good things that stood out to you that may have made your day, which could have been hard, easy or even enjoyable. This was something even someone like myself could give a try, and so I did. Starting November 1st, I wrote down three things that evoked a smile from me or even lifted my spirit for seven days straight and really took the time to sit and think about why those things made me feel happy. The things that I ended up writing about weren’t major events or anything out of the ordinary. In fact, some of them maybe two out of three were things that have become a constant in my life. Though because I have a habit of letting the negativity of my mind trickle into my thoughts every chance I get, I often overlooked these moments. After taking on this exercise I started to realize just how important these moments were in breaking up the stress living the day to day can bring. After the last day, I sat down and assessed my writings for all seven days and evaluated them in accordance to P.E.R.M.A. My finding was in fact positive and gave me something to smile about when thinking about the past week instead of focusing on everything that made each day that week negative. Even if the negative moments outweighed and numbered the good.

After it all I felt like there were instances where I should have written down more things, but more than that I feel like the exercise could take longer for the effects to kick in. For myself, I think it should be undertaken longer than seven days for your outlook to truly begin to change on a day to day basis. Overall, I had to agree that there was indeed a positive effect and that the exercise does work. In conclusion, I’m starting to think that we may be closer to understanding happiness than I formally thought. Maybe happiness isn’t just for those who can afford it but can even be grasped by the everyday person.