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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 daily 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. There is one method to grasping this happiness however, something created by a man named Dr. Seligman. It is called the Three Good Things. This practice should be undertaken by everyone who finds themselves struggling to find a smile from the day to day. Overcome by stress and under pressure of the day to day. Its been proven in studies that people who try the Three Good Things have bettered their state of well being and have become generally happier. My goal over the course of this paper is to share the experience of my attempt at the Three Good Things and why I think it was successful for me on some days, and maybe why it wasn't on others. The question that I hope to find an answer to is, "Why does positive thinking have longer lasting effects than just experiencing good things?".

To being I would like to share a statement from an actress named, Marla Gibbs. It reads as follows, "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." . 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 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 effects 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 effect 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 on the vaccine's success had immune systems working on a very high level. Their antibody response was stronger than the researchers had even anticipated. 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. If being in this state can have so many benefits, how do we begin to grasp it to be in it more often?

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. 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 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.

To go more in-depth, we'll start with day one and go all the way to day seven to see the difference in what doing this exercise has brought into perspective. On the first day, it was becoming official that the store I work at, Best Buy, was kicking into full seasonal gear and the stress levels were going into overdrive. Not just myself but everyone around me were like walking storms of negativity and despite my usual happy-go-lucky nature, I was being caught up in everyone's winds. My mind was just as under pressure as the rest of them and that made attempting this exercise very trying. But it was also thinking about this exercise that made things stand out to me that I hadn't noticed before. Subtle interactions with friends on the job kept me from walking around with a persistent scowl on my face and replaying those encounters kept my head above the stressful waters drowning my environment. Instead of being like others and worrying about what hardship was coming next, I noticed that I was instead smiling which was different. The exercise was working.

Though despite how successful day one was, the second day was more havoc ridden than anything. The following day was nothing short of less than average. The only highlight that really stood out for me was how despite how tired I was from the previous day, I still woke up early enough to make it into work on time with the beginning of our store's holiday hours. The third day was just like the second day. Slow paced and the positives were kind of short lived as far as bringing up a smile goes. My car was inspected, talked to my dad for the first time in a while and watched a show to end the day off. Even though some things were still amiss, I found myself still smiling about things from the first day rather than day three or two. Days both four and five were spent similarly. Nothing really to make a big deal out of and still nothing as substantial as the first day. I found myself searching a dry terrain for something or anything to do but ended up doing nothing but similar activities found in day three and two. Some of the

day being spent in thought, the rest being spent indulging in hobbies I hadn't had the time for. But one thing can be said about day five, spending time doing something you enjoy will always bring a smile to your face with little to no struggle at all.

For me, that was singing along to my track of the week. The song "Thank You" by the artists named, Logic. When all else fails, sometimes just doing the regular is enough. Day six expanded on this idea as I spent an hour or two of my day playing a game I hadn't touched in a long time. Though in this state of I'll say, average positivity, I found myself trying to become happier than necessary. As if I was trying to improve from a neutral state. It was different from looking for something positive from a stressful or even depressed state, it made the reach for happiness almost seem pointless as I wasn't unhappy or depressed at all. From day 4 to 6 I was mellow and already spending most of my time being calm and collected. Day one had already given me the formulae for surviving work hours, but because I'm generally already a mellow or happy person at home the exercise was hard to complete.

Day seven, the last day, was only significant to me because I had stuck with the exercise and completed the full length over a whole week. Seeing something to its completion was always something that made me feel, accomplished. Accomplished, a piece of what makes happiness. This feeling alone made it worth mentioning that to me day seven was equally as exciting as day one and what made it different is that I wasn't in a low state to feel the effects. Accomplishment is one of those feelings that can bring up spirits regardless of how you feel now. So like day one, day seven was a success.

After all was said and done, 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. Going into this project with an open mind did give me a difficult to configure an argument against this process and why it doesn't or could not

work. But I think those were the wrong questions I was attempting to ask myself. What I should have asked was “How long does it take”? Save for a few instances that go beyond just living a hard life, its not so much a question of if it works or not. In any person’s life happiness can be experienced, and if they do, when? When and how does the Three Good Things capitalize on it? I will say one thing about this project that did become apparent to me. Like myself and maybe for others, doing it for one week might not be enough. Some of us could attempt this but come out with a bitter taste because we denied ourselves a longer length to really feel the change. In the above passages, I mention that days one and seven are really the only two days that made a difference. Some could have even less or no days to reflect on at all within such a short period. For myself and others like me, I think doing the exercise in a longer duration would be the better choice than just doing the standard.

However, I did manage to find the answer to my question in the beginning of this paper. Positive thinking has longer effects because that is where a person goes to find peace. When all else fails, we retreat to our thoughts and if we cloud them with nothing but the things that made us smile throughout the day, we can’t help but truly maintain a sense of happiness. To physically experience a good moment is has lesser meaning because that is all we see it as, a fleeting moment. Without the teachings of Three Good Things we don’t take the time to savor each moment as it comes and passes. Seligman’s method teaches us to look past the face value of the day and relish in the seconds of the major, or mundane that gave us a genuine sensation of happiness and let it linger in our minds. Every day brings forth a hurdle, but it is at the end of those hills that we can experience moments of happiness. The Three good Things gives us the tools to carry these moments with us so that we may continue to climb the next slope with a smile on our faces.

To prove this I went two weeks of refreshing my day to day by forgetting the Three Good Things practice to gauge how different I really was during that one week. The notice in change wasn’t so much from myself but from others around me. People I had interacted with during that week noticed that unlike before I was back to being stone-faced and hard to gauge

because I would hardly smile. But when I was participating in the project my smile was strong enough to make others respond in kind even without saying a word at times. This brought a quote to my head once said by Napoleon Hill. "What the mind believes the body achieves.". I wasn't just being happy in a thoughtful state, but my whole physical energy was also different, and different enough for those who know me well to be able to pick up on the change. In conclusion, I would like to say that positive thinking can in-fact change a person's wellbeing. Even if you can't pick it out on your own, let the ones who see the change in you tell you how far you've come.