

LASTING AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS – ACHIEVING IT!

(based on the book “Authentic Happiness” by Dr Martin Seligman)

In modern Western society the pursuit of happiness has often been characterised by shortcuts to fleeting pleasure, eg material consumption, overeating, loveless sex, drugs, and mindless television watching. Unfortunately this has only led to a sense of emptiness and depression.

In fact, research shows that the things Western society values as prerequisites for happiness have little impact on it, eg wealth (as long as you are not below the poverty line), education, attractiveness, even health (as long as there is no severe, chronic illness).

The conditions that are correlated with happiness include:

1. A happy marriage (? cause ? effect ? correlation)
2. A rich social network
3. Living in a prospering democracy
4. Religion (possibly because it promotes a healthy lifestyle, good relationships, altruism and charity; it also provides hope, meaning and purpose).

The aspects of our life collectively determining our happiness, are:

SATISFACTION WITH THE PAST

Forgiveness and gratitude increase life satisfaction. Spend five minutes each night being grateful for all the good in your day and life.

OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE

Optimists make personal, pervasive and permanent explanations for good events / and non-personal, specific and temporary explanations for bad events.

Pessimists do the opposite. Cognitive therapy is helpful.

ENJOYING THE PRESENT

The temporary pleasures of emotional highs and of indulging the senses can be maximised by spacing to avoid habituation and savouring. However, for lasting happiness, personal authenticity and the fulfilment of our potential, we need the gratifications – joy in activities where we use our unique personal strengths and virtues.

Twenty four character strengths are listed as the moral traits we can acquire to develop the six main virtues prized in the main religions and world philosophies of history:

1. Love / humanity
2. Spirituality / transcendence
3. Justice
4. Temperance
5. Wisdom / knowledge
6. Courage.

Happy people are altruistic, have good relationships and a sense of personal achievement in what they do. They use their unique strengths daily in all life's areas, eg relationships, leisure, hobbies/creative expression, health, work, etc. Happiness involves being yourself and the best you can be, not in comparing yourself with others.

IN WORK

Any job becomes a calling when you enjoy and take pride in it to make the world a better place.

IN LOVE

Love your partner for the unique and irreplaceable person they are. Express your affection with tenderness. Forgive when they do something that displeases you, use non personal, specific and temporary causes to explain it (s/he was tired / it's a mood / s/he'd had a bad day). When they do something admirable, explain it in terms of permanent character traits (s/he's always been reliable). Appreciate and admire them. Part and reunite each day with affection. Schedule one weekly date.

The pursuit of a 'pleasant life' involves the temporary pleasures of the senses and emotional highs.

The pursuit of Aristotle's 'good life' means using your unique strengths daily to produce happiness.

But greatest of all, pursuit of the 'meaningful life' is using your unique strengths in the service of something larger than yourself, a transcendence beyond happiness.