

A personal view of happiness

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A Personal View of Happiness According to Aristotle, while most of our daily pursuits are engaged in a pursuit of happiness, happiness is frequently pursued simply as an end in itself (cited in Bolt, 2004: 117). However, most people have no idea what happiness is or really how to attain it. This is first because happiness is a very subjective subject, meaning something different to different individuals, and second because the modern world offers so many distractions that are touted as being the path to happiness. In America, for instance, we are taught that happiness can be attained some specific material comforts. One study revealed that nearly three-quarters of college freshmen consider being ‘very well-off financially’ to be a ‘very important’ or ‘essential’ goal” (Bolt, 2004: 124). However, personal experience has taught me that happiness has nothing to do with any of these things.

My experience started one day when a friend of mine finally got tired of hearing me gripe about my many petty (and some important) irritations in life. He was my primary sounding board, so I felt abandoned when he told me he wouldn’t listen anymore until I had written down the 33 happiest moments of my life. I resisted, of course, but finally needed to vent so I sat down and started my list. It took me days of thinking, jotting down a note, thinking some more, scribbling and rearranging before I finally had a list I felt ready to show my friend. I didn’t really notice it at the time, but for the entire period I was working on my list, those problems I was always complaining about seemed to melt away.

This readjustment of my thinking was exactly what my friend explained he’d been going for. He had taken a class in which this exercise had been given and he’d learned that when you spend time focusing on the good things that

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have happened to you in life, you feel less negative and the outside world looks more positive. You start seeing the possibilities in life instead of the obstacles. I understood because I'd just experienced this, but he was right that I probably wouldn't have understood if he'd just told me.

When I showed him my list, he helped me go through it and grouped my moments into several categories. These ended up including accomplishments, gifts, helping others, family, trips, nature and miscellaneous. As we talked about my list, I realized that even in those areas that might sound more like a focus on material elements, the focus was clearly more on the experience involved rather than the item itself. Perhaps the most materialistic of these thoughts was my dad's purchase of my first car, a giant ugly machine that provided me with a safe, smooth ride and the ultimate sound system for my riding experience. I hated the car, but loved the experience and the thoughtfulness of my dad in making sure I was comfortable and safe. Trips may seem to be another category full of materialistic aims, but again, my memories are associated more with the way they made me feel about myself and the pleasure I had in experiencing these trips with someone I loved.

After placing my happy moments into categories, I discovered that most of my happy moments had nothing to do with material comforts and everything to do with spending time with family and helping others. Going through my list, I realized that I was trying to acquire things to make me happy but that took meant I had less time to do the things that actually made me happy. It seemed strange that a process as simple as drawing out a list could have such a tremendous impact on my life, but it changed my entire perspective. Dedicating myself to bringing others comfort has overcome any previous

thoughts that I had to acquire wealth before I could discover happiness.

References

Bolt, Martin. (2004). Happiness, Chap. 6. In Pursuing Human Strengths.

Worth Publishers: 117-137.