



IN THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Happiness is something we have all experienced, be it continuously or occasionally. To some, happiness is elusive and a territory for the blessed. Others spend half of their time experiencing happiness and the rest of their time pursuing it with vigour. But one thing's for sure, happiness is difficult to quantify and even more difficult to come by when you are experiencing a deficit. So, what is it that we can do to change our happiness levels, you ask?

Many scientists believe that 50% of your happiness is inherited from your parents – it's in your genes. However, other scientists including David Lykken – researcher at the University of Minnesota - believes that “we can change our happiness levels widely – up or down”, that happiness is a choice.

Recently, a collective of philosophers and great thinkers of our time joined together to reveal what they believe to be the ‘secret to happiness’ in a documentary film literally called: *The Secret*. This secret to happiness builds on two theories - the power of thought and the Law of Attraction. They believe that we all hold the key to our own happiness, success and destiny through the power of our thoughts, be they positive or negative. The law of attraction then explains that we attract to us positivity or negativity depending on what we focus on. Maslow once said: “The best way to predict the future is to create it”.

Martin Seligman, psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania and ex-president of the American Psychological Association, believes that there are three components to what makes people happy overall:

- (1) Pleasure (sensory)
- (2) Involvement and engagement in life activities (ie work, relationships, hobbies)
- (3) Purpose in one's life

From his research, Seligman revealed that “so many build their lives around pursuing pleasure (when it actually) turns out that engagement and meaning are much more important” in the pursuit of happiness. He said that interpersonal virtues such as generosity, love and kindness are more strongly tied to happiness than other more cerebral virtues (curiosity, hunger for knowledge). Thus, it makes sense that the following 2 components:

- (1) Gratitude; and
- (2) Giving

have been found to be the most reliable of happiness boosters - things that do seem to make a significant difference to one's level of happiness.



By being grateful, you learn to count and respect all the blessings you do have in your life. This instantly makes you focus on the good in your life which in turn makes you feel more positive about your situation as well as the world you live in. It has been found that being grateful not only increases your mood but it also improves your physical health and raises energy levels. For some suffering neuromuscular disease, it actually relieves pain and fatigue too.

‘Giving’ has multiple benefits as well. Giving

- (1) makes you feel better about yourself;
- (2) makes others feel thankful/grateful of your actions;
- (3) makes you feel more connected to others;
- (4) makes you feel a sense of purpose when helping others;
- (5) makes you feel that you matter to others;
- (6) sparks the feeling of gratitude and so the cycle of positivity and selflessness goes around again.

But what it really comes down to is allocation of attention. If you look for the good, you will find good. If you are happy, you will find more happiness.

Try and put 5 minutes aside each day to write down 5 points that you are grateful for. It may seem difficult to begin with, but by focusing on all the good things in your life, you are strengthening a muscle. In no time, you will find your mood is affected positively by this exercise and not just for the period of time that you are thinking and writing down your points. When you are in a state of gratitude, you are thankful and happy about the life you are living.