



e-quilibrium

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Savoring

The extent to which we automatically find an experience to be pleasant or unpleasant is related to how it is different than what came before it. Temperature is a good example. Whereas a 60 degree day in August feels cold (and perhaps unpleasant) compared to the heat of the summer, a 60 degree day in February feels warm (and pleasant) compared to the cold of the winter. I remember asking a friend, who had grown up in Ohio, how he liked the weather in San Diego (where he was living at the time). His response was, “What weather? Everyday is the same.” Although he didn’t necessarily find the sameness to be unpleasant, it struck me that he wasn’t enjoying the weather as much as he would have if there were more unpleasant days in San Diego.

When referring to some condition in life that is steadily good, people often acknowledge that they “take it for granted.” This may mean that the situation is undervalued. Good health is often taken for granted. However, after recovering from an injury or illness, individuals usually are more aware of how pleasant good health actually is. We don’t have difficulty appreciating some change for the better, but we often under appreciate something that is constantly good. Given our natural desire to be happy, taking something “for granted” essentially represents a missed opportunity.

Savoring is a way to increase our appreciation of good things, and thereby gain more satisfaction and happiness. Fred Bryant of Loyola University Chicago defines savoring as processes through which people actively derive pleasure from a positive experience, and make it last longer. Not surprisingly,

people who savor things regularly tend to be happier, more satisfied with life, more optimistic, and less prone to be depressed.

Savoring involves fully appreciating and enjoying the present. But while savoring can only occur in the present, the focus may be on past experiences (reminiscing) or hoped-for future events (anticipating). Whatever the temporal focus, intensifying awareness of the experience is a way to increase the pleasure and satisfaction.

Bryant has described different types of savoring, which involve different processes and feelings:

- Thanksgiving involves reflection and gratitude (e.g., telling others how much you appreciate them)
- Marveling entails reverent absorption and awe (e.g., viewing Niagara falls)
- Basking includes self-reflection and pride (e.g., receiving social compliments)
- Luxuriating consists of physical absorption and pleasure, incorporating as many senses as possible (e.g., soaking in a hot tub)

Intention is necessary to increase one's savoring. Savoring does require time, as it involves sustained attention and perhaps some extension of an experience or period of thought.

To increase your savoring, notice and appreciate ordinary experiences (such as a quiet breakfast). Share experiences with others (including reminiscences of the past, delight in the present, and anticipation of hoped-for events). Be reflective on what has happened, is happening, and will happen. And embrace the bittersweet in events (such as the ending of a wonderful vacation), because attention on the sadness can serve to further highlight the positives and joy of the experience.

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