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BAEP 450

Meaning, Purpose, and Happiness Paper

I chose to write about Robert Waldinger's Ted Talk because I felt connected to what was being said and because it was backed by a thorough and extensive research study. I think ever since early high school I've understood the fact that it matters much more who you are doing things with than what you are doing. My immediate family has always been close, supportive, and loving with each other. My parents set a great example of what things could look like if you find a partner that you have a really strong bond with. My close family life and parents' relationship have guided my ideas of the importance of who you spend your life, so the main message of the video really struck home with me that, good relationships lead to a good life.

Moreover, it was intriguing to find out that after 75 years of studying 724 men, in a quite comprehensive way that included many questionnaires, video interviews, blood draws, medical records, brain scans, and etc., the results were extremely conclusive about the power that quality relationships have in our lives. Although, as Robert said in the video, "this message, that good, close relationships are good for our health and well-being, this is wisdom as old as the hills," but it is "so hard to get and so easy to ignore" because "we're human [and] what we'd really like is a quick fix." Waldinger is right about this. As he puts it in his video, "relationships are messy and they're complicated and the hard work of tending to family and friends, it's not sexy or glamorous." I think so many of us, even if we do understand the value of our close relationships, choose so often to tend to other aspects of our lives because it is easier in the short term.

Most of this video for me was a kind of echo chamber reemphasizing ideas and thoughts that I already felt, but I think the most important part for me, when I look forward into my life

and think of ways to surround myself with good relationships, was Robert's advise to "lean into relationships." He talked about actively trying to find little things to change in your life so you can lean into relationships and more social connections, things like calling a relative you have not spoken to in years, replacing some screen time with people time, or livening up a stale relationship with some new activities. I think his advise to everyday actively try and find new ways to slowly move towards being more social is really smart. I am naturally a more social person, but when I am having lulls in my social life I always try to stand back and look at big reasons why this might be happening, when in reality I think more times than not it is the result of a lot of micro decision I am making on the daily.

I have never tried to look at my relationships through the lens of a micro level before. I do not have a lot of insight to conclude about how this will turn out being as I've never tried it before, but I am excited to start analyzing my social life in this new way. I'm not exactly sure what this will entail, but I think there is merit in the idea that small changes are more easily attainable and may in the long run be much more affective than many failed big changes.

I hope that my efforts to "lean into relationships" more will help with my quality of connections. I do agree with Robert Waldinger's Ted Talk, "What Makes a Good Life? Lessons From the Longest Study on Happiness," that good relationships keep us happier and healthier, and I hope one day to surround myself with a core of family and friends like my parents have.

I chose the article "There's More To Life Than Being Happy" by Emily E. Smith because I both strongly agree and strongly disagree with the article. I strongly agree with what I believe the main ideas are that Emily is trying to deliver, that pursuing trivial, fleeting happiness is bad

and not having a purpose or meaning in life is also bad. However, I strongly disagree with the way the article presents this message. Emily Smith twists the definitions of happiness and meaning around so much so that it is actually a confusing read at times. She characterizes the pursuit of happiness as a selfish pursuit while she characterizes meaning as a selfless pursuit. I totally disagree. I look at happiness and meaning as being closely related. The way I would describe it is that meaning/purpose is a division under happiness, or a large branch from the happiness tree. You can not pursue meaning without finding happiness along the way and you can not fully be happy without pursuing meaning along the way.

I argue against this article for the pure reason that I think it confuses the two definitions of meaning and happiness. Why would you lead a meaningful life at all if not for the fact that it invokes feelings inside you that are powerful, powerful enough to even survive the Holocaust as a survivor named Frankl is referenced talking about in this article. These powerful feelings are knowing you are doing good and helping where you can and I argue that that is happiness. The writer of the book and this article categorize it into a different definition but I believe it is of the same essence. It feels good to lead a meaningful/purposeful life... being happy.

I think that by analyzing and critiquing some quotes from the article I can further emphasize my differing of opinion from the author.

"People whose lives have high levels of meaning often actively seek meaning out even when they know it will come at the expense of happiness. Because they have invested themselves in something bigger than themselves, they also worry more and have higher levels of stress and anxiety in their lives than happy people."

I totally disagree with the above excerpt. The way the author is using the term happiness here is like it is only the get rich quick, superficial, me me me, short-lived version of happiness. People

who seek out meaning are in search of a more full and complete happiness. To believe people can only search out one or the other is short-sighted thinking in my opinion. Those who realize meaning's place on the happiness tree are not less happy but more so, and high stress and anxiety does not have to come along with the feelings of meaningfulness or purpose. Combating stress and anxiety is just another division and branch of what I like to refer to as the happiness tree. I see no merit behind any of this above quote.

Here is another quote from that I disagree with entirely:

"Happiness without meaning characterizes a relatively shallow, self-absorbed or even selfish life, in which things go well, needs and desire are easily satisfied, and difficult or taxing entanglements are avoided."

First of all, pursuing happiness without meaning is almost impossible and quite frankly a near oxymoron. Meaning is one of the branches of the happiness tree. It is human nature to pursue a higher purpose or meaning in life, even if for some that meaning is just to be happy. The next part that talks about happiness being "self-absorbed or even selfish" is also extremely wrong. So wrong it is almost comical how inaccurate it is. There is tons of research pointing to the fact that people experience much higher levels of happiness when they are giving vs. when they are receiving. It is ingrained all the way down to our DNA, we are social creatures looking for symbiosis to protect each other and survive as a species. And the last part of the above quote that states "difficult or taxing entanglements are avoided" by people pursuing happiness, I don't buy into either. The Ted Talk I analyzed first was all about how good relationships keep us happy and healthy, and we all know the fact that quality relationships are not easy to maintain or upkeep, in fact they are one of the most taxing entanglements, but oh so worthwhile when pursuing happiness. There are more individual quotes from this article that I would like to dispute, but I think by now you understand the contrasts of opinion between the author and I.

Here, let me try my hand at twisting a definition around just as this article has. Happy people are “selfish”. To be happy you need to be self aware and understand when you are feeling more or less happy, and if you are feeling less happy you need to take steps to change this. You have to ask the selfish questions like have I been kind and generous enough lately, have I spent enough time around people I really care about, do my day-to-day actions and long-term goals feel meaningful? This is the kind of selfishness that secures you the most happiness in your life, and it just so happens that by being “selfish” in trying to be as happy as you can, you also increase the happiness of those around you.

I do not think the author, Emily E. Smith, is a bad or misguided person, but I do think this article she wrote will misguide some of her readers. I agree with her main message that finding your meaning/purpose in life is an important piece of your overall happiness, but I disagree with the way she presents her ideas. It comes off as confusing that the pursuit of happiness is wrong and that those who are happy are shallow and that those who have found meaning are stressed, to me it even seems pessimistic and unintelligent. Happiness and meaning are not two different paths of pursuit that must be chosen between, but rather, meaning is a division of happiness and is important when trying to attain a lasting and well rounded feeling of happiness.

What role might entrepreneurship play in the achievement of a life full of happiness, meaning, and purpose?

To be able to pursue your own individual happiness and meaning you need to have more freedom within your career than what most jobs allow. Being an entrepreneur allows you to control how much you are involved and in what aspects of the business you are involved in. I

want to have the freedom to be around my family often and engage in other fulfilling activities in life. Yes, there may be times when you have to dedicate everything you have, time and energy wise, to make sure a project gets finished on time or an operational dilemma gets solved within your company, but for the most part a good entrepreneur has the insight and vision to hire the right people to keep their company moving forward.

Additionally, I am currently passionate about sustainability and especially how it relates to my home in Alaska. I have commercial fished every summer as a job since I was young and really enjoy the sustainable harvesting of Alaska's seafood, but I think there are many opportunities for sustainability within the state that are untapped. Not only within the aquaculture and commercial industries, but within timber, sea life harvest, and renewable energies. I believe I will be entering the job marketing bringing a unique set of skills to the table, where I am both an Alaskan born and raised and I will have a prestigious college education and experience. This uniqueness will hopefully allow me to implement areas of sustainability into Alaska that are innovative and welcomed. These applications, once developed and perfected, I strongly believe will be able to be replicated among many places in the world. Approaching sustainability through entrepreneurship will be a way for me to make a living and experience more freedom and time to pursue things that bring my life happiness and meaning, while also being in a career that is meaningful to me and has a lot of purpose for the world.

Works Cited

Smith, Emily Esfahani. "There's More to Life Than Being Happy." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 5 Jan. 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/01/theres-more-to-life-than-being-happy/266805/>.

Waldinger, Robert. *What Makes a Good Life? Lessons From the Longest Study on Happiness*. TED.com, TED, 23 Dec. 2015, <https://www.ted.com/talks/>