

Savoring: The road less travelled for peace

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Abstract: We encounter both peaceful and stressful events in our lives, but we tend to give more attention and importance to the negative ones. Our preoccupation with coping strategies makes us overlook the enjoyment of the good things which can enrich and enlighten our lives. Sir John Lubbock rightly said, “Happiness is a thing to be practiced, like a violin.” For this, one must learn to savor the positive and the peaceful events. What coping does to stressful events, savoring does to positive events. Savoring is the appreciation of the enjoyment of any experience. Peace is associated with terms like harmony, happiness, love and wellbeing (Sarrica, 2007). Conscious savoring of peaceful positive events would elevate the awareness of such events to the point that their enjoyment becomes reflexive. Just as charity begins at home, for peace to prevail in the society, it must first prevail in the minds of the citizens. Therefore, the main focus of this paper is to highlight the concept of savoring and the use of various savoring strategies and beliefs in the academic settings, to bring about acknowledgement and appreciation of peaceful positive events with the ultimate aim of promoting peace.

Keywords: savoring, peace, happiness

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I. INTRODUCTION:

An anonymous writer very rightly said, “Your life becomes a masterpiece when you learn to master peace.” Peace is an umbrella term covering aspects like harmony, justice, wellbeing, happiness, absence of violence, serenity, satisfaction, etc. Most of these terms find reference in the discipline of Positive Psychology, a branch of Psychology that focuses on optimal human functioning, the study of strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. Positive psychology is the scientific study of what goes right in life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The realization that some goals of Psychology (to identify and nurture talent and strengths) were overpowered by the preoccupation of treating illness led to the development of this field in 1998. Resonating with this, the meaning of the term peace also evolved from earlier being merely the absence of war to being associated with harmonious relationships, justice and wellbeing now.

Johan Galtung (1969), the father of peace studies, distinguished between two types of peace, namely positive and negative peace. While negative peace according to him focused on the absence of war and conflicts, positive peace meant the presence of desirable states of mind and society like harmony and justice. From a psychological viewpoint, peace would include prevention of direct and structural violence, and promotion of non-violence and social justice (Christie et al. 2001). The preventive aspect of peace is related to coping with the negative and stressful events. This overemphasis and preoccupation with the coping strategies makes us overlook the many positive experiences in life which need to be savored for sustaining happiness. What coping does to stressful events, savoring does to positive ones.

Savoring, the positive counterpart to coping, means to attend to, appreciate and enhance the positive experiences in one’s life (Bryant and Veroff, 2007). Attending to and concentrating on threats and negative events due to our survival instincts come naturally. However, this is not the case with the positive events, which pass by without receiving any attention from us. Savoring is that blessing which makes people identify and sustain any positive experience to elongate the positivity associated with that event. The cognitive reflection of the word savoring is consistent with its etymology, which comes from the Latin word sapere meaning “to taste”, “to have good taste” or “to be wise.”

II.SAVORING BELIEFS AND PEACE

People differ in their abilities to savor positive experiences. The subjective perception of people’s ability to enjoy positive experience is termed as savoring beliefs, which can be assessed across three time frames. The ability to savor future events is called anticipation (prospective savoring). Savoring the moment (concurrent savoring) involves savoring the ongoing positive events and reminiscence (retrospective savoring) is savoring of past events. Bryant (2003), from the reports of people found that they feel most capable of reminiscing positive events and least capable of anticipating positive events. Higher perceived savoring ability is related to mindfulness (Ritchie & Bryant, 2012), wisdom, affect intensity and optimism (Bryant, 2003), which in turn promote peace internally as well as externally.

There is a lot of emphasis on money being a source of pleasure. This is true till money becomes a source of fulfilling our needs. But when wealth becomes an irresistible magnet, it brings both, a mental and physical upheaval in the lives of individuals. DeVoe & House (2012) found low savoring ability in wealthier individuals. This shows that affluence and lavishness may reduce our ability to enjoy simple pleasures of life and eventually prevent us from leading happy, peaceful lives. Perhaps that is why it is said

that there is no greater wealth than peace of mind. The importance of savoring in leading happier lives must be realized and emphasized. In a study on adolescents and college students, savoring ability was related to greater happiness, life satisfaction and perceived control (Bryant, 2003).

III.SAVORING STRATEGIES AND PEACE

Savoring responses or strategies refer to the cognitive and behavioral reactions to positive experiences. There are ten savoring strategies out of which nine are amplifying strategies of savoring (sharing with others, memory building, self-congratulation, comparing, sensory-perceptual sharpening, absorption, behavioral expression, temporal awareness and counting blessings) and one is a dampening savoring strategy (kill-joy thinking).

Sharing with others includes telling your positive experiences and feelings to others. Memory building is actively creating and storing memories for later recall. Self-congratulation implies celebrating personal success. Sensory-perceptual sharpening denotes focusing attention on specific positive events only. Comparing implies downward comparison of positive experiences. Absorption involves getting fully immersed or engrossed in the moment. Physically displaying positive feelings is what is termed as behavioral expression. Temporal awareness means being mindful of the fleetingness of the moment. Counting and being grateful for the positive experiences is denoted by counting blessings. Kill-joy thinking involves devaluing any positive experience, thinking of ways in which the experience could have been better.

Research evidences suggest that amplifying savoring strategies lead to greater life satisfaction and positive affect, while dampening savoring strategy of kill-joy thinking leads to lesser life satisfaction and positive affect (Quoidbach et al., 2010). Szondy et al. (2014) found that elevated use of amplifying strategies predict greater happiness, life satisfaction and vitality whereas greater use of dampening strategies predict the vice-versa. All these are both, the pre-requisites and the results of experiencing peace since peace is associated with terms like harmony, happiness, freedom, love and wellbeing (Sarrica, 2007).

Humor, a facilitator of effective social relationships, which in turn lead to peaceful coexistence, also finds evidence in the literature of savoring. Maiolino & Kuiper (2010) found a link between the use of amplifying savoring strategies and higher levels of affiliative and self-enhancing humor, and lower levels of aggressive humor.

IV.SAVORING INTERVENTIONS FOR PEACE

Going by the numerous benefits of the various strategies and beliefs of savoring, we can say that an activity as simple as sharing a positive experience with others can bring about a great positive change in the lives of people. Infact, studies report that it is the single best predictor of level of enjoyment and it is associated with more subjective wellbeing (Lambert et al., 2012). The mere sharing of any positive experience will make the other person rejoice in the happiness of the narrator, which will further amplify the happy moment and result in a long-lasting positive emotion to the extent that a slight reminiscence of this positive event would bring back all the happy and peaceful memories associated with the event itself and the happiness that sharing that experience brought. Moreover the role of reminiscing has been depicted by Bryant et al. (2005), in a week-long experiment where participants who reminisced twice daily showed greater increases in happiness as compared to participants who thought about current events.

Mindful photography is another savoring technique in which the individual is supposed to take pictures of whatever elicits positive emotions in them (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Focusing on such positive moments or objects in a way corresponds to the meditative process of focusing on one's breath or any particular word, which in turn results in a calm, peaceful mind. Experimental evidence suggests that people engaged in mindful photography of specific subjects like friends or architecture, show greater positive moods, compared to people who take neutral, factual photographs (Kurtz, 2015).

Also, Schueller (2010) carried out a savoring exercise in which people had to spend some time reflecting on two pleasant experiences and tried to extend pleasure as long as possible. Results showed that the participants reported a significant increase in happiness after 1 week. This ultimately boils down to the fact that these happy stated promote an atmosphere of serenity and contentment, which further ameliorate peace internally as well as externally.

V.CONCLUSION:

Peace denotes cooperation among major human groups, constructively interacting with people, where there are no winners and losers – all are winners. It also involves the search for positive conditions which can resolve conflicts that produce violence. Savoring, as a strategy and belief, can be considered as that positive condition which would amplify and elongate the positive mood state. Savoring interventions seem to play a vital role in the upliftment or upregulation of mood, which in turn increases wellbeing, stronger relationships and strengths ultimately promoting peace at the individual and societal level, both.

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