The Goodness Experience

Each of us literally chooses, by way of attending to things, what sort of universe he or she shall appear to inhabit. —William James

In almost any moment, there is goodness waiting to be noticed. Noticing it can create an opening to wellbeing, greater resilience, and connection.

To notice goodness is to receive a gift and the value of that gift is greater in challenging times. It may come naturally in easy times, but when a challenge arrives, the mind can clamp down on the problem such that we miss the good that remains. This is okay for a while, but if we knew that the challenge would last for 30 years, would it not be clear that we need some goodness along the way?

A Thought Experiment

Imagine gathering all the things happening to you in this moment and sorting them into three baskets. Put everything that's going wrong in basket 1. Give basket 2 all of the things that *could* go wrong and haven't. Basket 3 will receive the things that are good.

Perhaps I develop a flat tire on a dark desert highway—basket 1. Until the scorching sun rises, there is cool wind in my hair—basket 2. I feel air flowing in and out, the simple breath that keeps me alive—basket 3. Looking deeper, some of the 2nd basket items seem to belong in the 3rd. Is it not good that those things could be worse and aren't?

Why Noticing Goodness Is Needed

What tends to capture attention most readily is what has or could go wrong, what isn't quite right compared to *our expectation*. We can relax this attentional bias by noticing the good and momentarily immersing in its pleasant feelings. The challenges will wait and we'll come back to them refreshed. It's like driving. Stopping at an intersection and looking around before crossing is a small part of driving, but I won't make it far if I leave that part out.

If I notice just three good things each day and take in how the experiences feel, that noticing can anchor me in a more accurate perspective of my world, build resilience, and even improve connections with others. Our natural ability to notice goodness can become a durable skill. The Goodness Experience offers simple exercises to build that skill.

The Practices: Noticing, Recalling, Conveying

Noticing: When a moment of goodness is recognized, perhaps attractive scenery, a pleasing taste, or an act of kindness, the practice is to notice the related sensations, both through the 5 senses and the bodily sensations. We rest our attention in those sensations and savor them. It can work to notice one at a time and then notice the feel of all of them at once. As we notice there might be a shift in how we feel, so we notice that too and carry it into the day, as if it were a shadow or a friend.

Recalling: Later that day we recall the moment of goodness by remembering the pleasant sensations like the colors, sounds, and bodily sensations such

as softness or levity. When recalling, we might savor the memory of one sensation and then the next and then, with each enlivened in our memory, noticing all of them. This might cause a shift in our feeling state that is pleasant, so we notice this, too.

Conveying: As we recall the moment, we can convey the feeling memory, perhaps by writing, drawing, or speaking. However we choose, we keep the emphasis on vivid recollection. The act of conveying helps us stay with the feelings and shift our whole system toward recognition of the goodness that is present, despite the challenges.

If we struggle for a more just world, this helps us reconnect with why we engage and gives us the needed break from challenge so that we can persevere.

Make it Social, Share With a Partner

Conveying our goodness experience verbally differs from normal conversation. The goal is not to convey information and "get the story told", but to:

- Focus inward on the memory of sensations
- Say words that come from the recollection.
- It's ok if what you say makes sense, but that's not the goal.

When Speaking:

- Immerse in the recollection
- Share descriptions of sensations instead of telling a story or evaluating it: It was "red and sweet" rather than "I ate a good apple."
- Pay particular attention to your pleasant feelings.
- Let yourself enjoy remembering the experience of goodness.

When Listening:

- Notice what you feel hearing the speakers words
- If impulses arise to understand, compare, or respond, relax back into your sensations.

Tips:

- Connect daily for quick recollections of goodness —make it a routine
- Acknowledge your intention to re-experience your goodness experiences
- Save normal dialogue until after this practice— treat the sharing of goodness experiences like a rich greeting—we start here
- It only takes a few minutes each—share vivid recollections, not stories

Summary

We didn't ask for it, but our nervous systems are biased towards perceiving threat and lingering on what isn't going as well as expected. By richly noticing goodness, re-experiencing it through vivid recollection, and conveying that recollection, we can shift the balance towards more accurate perception of our life experience and grow our ability to live according to our values when times are challenging.

—somewhere a child is laughing, somewhere a gecko warms in the sun, somewhere a new day dawns that will hold immeasurable goodness, a portion placed perfectly for my noticing. What sort of universe shall I choose inhabit?

Connect: compassionmatters@proton.me