

Workout 1 ▪ Doing Intentional Activity

Prompt, Exercise & Practice for *Happiness*

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"He who lives well is blessed and happy." —Socrates

"Long is the path that leads to happiness through words alone. But the path that leads to happiness through the practice of daily deeds is short." —Crates of Thebes

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WORKOUT 1 is all about *intentional activity*, purposefully doing whatever it takes to be happy—or at least *happier*.

As we learned in the Introduction to *Happiness: What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Happiness*,* this particular notion of intentional activity comes from Positive Psychology's happiness formula: $H = S + C + I$.

In case you forgot, here's a quick recap of the formula: **H** signifies our long-term rather than short-term *happiness*. **S** is our *set point*, where we naturally stand relative to happiness. **C** means the *circumstances* or *conditions* of our lives. These may or may not be under our control. And **I**, the variable that's most under our control, is voluntary or *intentional activity*, which must be rationally determined, purposefully chosen and willed, and resolutely done.

We see, then, that *intentional activity* is the key to increasing our overall sense of happiness and well-being. Positive psychologists tell us it accounts for about 40% of H. The ancient Greeks—many, anyway—believed the same. Particularly the philosophers. Happiness is something we must thoughtfully choose to do and practice.

Take Aristotle, for example. For him, "happiness is an activity of the soul that accords with perfect virtue or excellence (*aretē*)." And what is virtue? "Virtue is a habit or disposition involving deliberate choice"—

Greek & English ▪ Epicurus uses *eudaimonia* for "happiness" and *kalōs zēn* for "living well." *Meletaō* is "to practice" or "to exercise

where choice is "a deliberate desire for things that are within our power." Choice, then, and the virtue or excellence that results from it, is intentional (deliberate) and voluntary (chosen) activity. One final point.

Aristotle tells us that "virtue is born thanks to habit." How? "We acquire the virtues," he says, "by doing them, by putting them into action, just as we do with various arts or skills," such as becoming a landscape painter or cellist. To summarize: virtue, which amounts to happiness, is something we intentionally choose to do time and again.

The philosopher Epicurus agreed. In a letter to his student Menoeceus, he writes, "We must practice those things that produce happiness since if happiness is present, we possess everything, and if it is not, we do everything to acquire it." He goes on to say, "Do and practice those things I continually recommend to you, taking them to be the basic elements of living well."

Finally, the Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope says we "must go for happiness . . . even if the going is through fire." For the Cynics, as with Aristotle and other Greeks, such happiness was directly connected to our own personal virtue or excellence. But "virtue," the Cynic Crates of Thebes observes, only "enters the soul by means of training—not automatically as happens with vice." And: "The path that leads to happiness through the practice of daily deeds is short."

WORKOUT 1 • DOING INTENTIONAL ACTIVITY

With these points in mind—that we must deliberate about, choose, and exercise ourselves in that which leads to happiness—let’s get to work. Let’s deliberate. Let’s choose. Let’s act. Let’s practice.

*You can read the Introduction to *Happiness: What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Happiness* in the Cave Library.

PROMPT ▪ Take a moment to look at your past, where you’ve been up to this point in your life. Where have you looked for happiness? How have you *intentionally* acted for happiness?

Where have I looked for happiness in the past? List ten things, people, places, etc., in the following spaces.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 7. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 9. _____ | 10. _____ |

 **Circle** your answer

In the past, to be happier I have been more focused on
the **circumstances-conditions** of my life or **intentional** (deliberate, chosen) **activity**.

I circled my answer because . . . _____

EXERCISE ▪ Now that you’ve looked at your past, take some time to consider your future. Going forward, **how can you engage in intentional activity to be happier?** Start off with **seven** ideas (more of a brainstorm). Then narrow these seven down to **three**. Finally, choose **one** that you will practice.

My Seven (Brainstorm)

How can I **engage in intentional activity** to be happier? The following are seven things I can do—things I can voluntarily choose to practice. Again, these seven are more of a brainstorm rather than a commitment.

For ideas, look to the positive psychologist **Sanja Lyubomirsky** and her book, *The How of Happiness*. There she gives the following **intentional activity examples**: express gratitude; develop and engage in friendship; learn to meditate; change the way I habitually think; exercise; be kind; savor the small things of life; learn to give. What else can you think of? Whatever comes to mind, remember that it should be something specific you can regularly practice.

- | |
|----------|
| 1. _____ |
| 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ |
| 4. _____ |

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5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

My Three

Now, **narrow your seven down to three**. This time, describe **how** you believe **each activity will contribute to happiness**. Why will deliberately choosing to do *this* or *that* activity make me happier?

1. _____

Why _____

2. _____

Why _____

3. _____

Why _____

The One Intentional Activity I Will Practice

Finally, **choose one** intentional activity to practice. Try to make it concrete, specific, and practical to do—the more so, the better. Again, keep in mind why choosing this one activity will lead to greater happiness. Name your one activity and offer an expanded explanation of why you're choosing it on the lines below.

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PRACTICE ▪ It's now time to “practice those things that produce happiness,” as Epicurus puts it. In this case, you'll practice the one thing you've deliberated on and chosen that will contribute to happiness. Again, make sure it is something concrete and specific, and, if possible, practical to do. First, **name** your intentional activity. Second, **determine how** you will practice—when, where, with whom, and so on. Finally, **evaluate** your practice. How is it going? Is there anything you need to change? Add or take away?

My intentional activity _____

How I will practice (when, where, with whom, and so on) _____

Evaluation _____

**“Practice those things that
produce happiness.” —Epicurus**

3 ACTION POINTS

- **Understand** the basic fact that intentional activity—activity that is under your control, and so activity you can choose to do—is the key to increasing your overall sense of happiness and well-being. Grasping this fact, **review** where you have looked for happiness in the past (in doing so, be kind to yourself if you’ve relied on unhelpful or even harmful things/activities).
- **Identify** what you can do—what intentional activities you can engage in—to be happier. **Look to** ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, Epicurus, or the Cynic Diogenes of Sinope for ideas. Or positive psychologists such as Sandra Lyubormirsky or Martin Seligman.
- In line with Epicurus’ counsel, “**Practice** those things that produce happiness.” **Deliberate** on and **choose** specific, concrete, practical ways to practice a happier life. Then practice.

Extra Space for Answers and Journaling

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