

Introduction: My Entry into Three Good Things

Can doing the "Three Good Things" gratitude process really have a positive effect on a person's overall well-being? Well, it depends on who you ask, to say the least. The reason for this is because despite that terms like "gratitude" and "well-being" each have their own separate ideal definition, there are a class of people who have their own scholarly opinion on what each means. For example, when we think of the word "gratitude" our minds generally think of appreciating something or giving someone a wholehearted "thank you" when she gives you a compliment or gives you her cell phone charger to borrow. However, psychologists would argue that "gratitude" has a far deeper, much more intuitive meaning behind it while agreeing with the overall "thank you" ideology. Having said all this, some may say that the "Three Good Things" gratitude process is ineffective in improving a person's well-being if some unfortunate events happened during someone's week that may cause her mind to focus more on the unfavorable events rather than the favorable ones, in which case the "Three Good Things" gratitude process may become a rote, chore-like routine.

Literature Review

First, let's take a look at some important terms before we really examine whether or not the "Three Good Things" gratitude process improves someone's well-being, the first of which being "positive psychology," which Christopher Peterson, a University of Michigan psychology professor, defined in 2008 as "the scientific study of what makes life most worth living." According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, gratitude "cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude." Also, a blogger describes gratitude as meaning "thankfulness, counting your blessings, noticing simple pleasures, and acknowledging everything that you receive. It means learning to live your life as if everything were a miracle, and being aware on a continuous basis of how much you've been given. Gratitude shifts your focus from what your life lacks to the abundance that is already present. In addition, behavioral and psychological research has shown the surprising life improvements that can stem from the practice of gratitude. Giving thanks makes people happier and more resilient, it strengthens relationships, it improves health, and it reduces stress." As for the definition of "well-being," Stephen Joseph Ph.D. wrote and published a blog at psychologytoday.com, describing well-being as "fourteen distinct and recurring constructs that are used to describe well-being: happiness, vitality, calmness, optimism, involvement, self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-worth, competence, development, purpose, significance, congruence, and connection."

A blogger at happierhuman.com believes gratitude does in fact improve well-being. Interestingly, they state in a paragraph heading "We already have all the toys we need." The blogger goes on to write, "This exercise, called "Three Good Things" fights [the feeling of the loss of a valued toy] and counteracts adaption. By taking the time to consciously express gratitude, we remember that we already have in our lives things we should be grateful and happy for. Doing this exercise actually feels good," believing the "Three Good Things" exercise to be effective. However, a research study done at ncbi.nlm.nih.gov conflicts this. In the section of the article entitled "Conflicting Empirical Data" there is no correlation or connection between

gratitude and well-being, or at least not much. Here are their findings: "Gurel Kirgiz compared a gratitude condition (i.e., composing a letter to someone who made a positive difference in the life of the participant) with a neutral emotional condition, but present levels of gratitude did not evidence a relationship with well being. Among divorced middle-aged women, Henrie compared those who journaled gratitude experiences with those who read educational materials and those on a wait-list group; the treatment groups showed no improvement in their satisfaction with life. Finally, Mallen Ozimkowski examined the effect of a "gratitude visit" (i.e., the writing and delivering of a letter of gratitude to someone in their lives who was never properly thanked) in children and adolescents. In this study, the gratitude exercise was not associated with enhanced well being."

Despite this one portion of the article makes the claim that gratitude does not improve a person's overall well-being, I'm inclined to agree, as the "Three Good Things" process did not improve mine as as the week went on, the process felt more and more like a chore.

Personal Findings

Based on my personal findings, gratitude does little to nothing to improve someone's well-being. I will go further as to say that it is not enough to improve a person's well-being. Why? I will speak from personal experience: if something negative happened during my day that has a negative impact on my emotional or physical well-being, the good things that happened that same day are overridden, though I may be grateful they happened, but feeling grateful for these experiences do nothing to improve how I may personally feel. The themes I've experienced during the collection of this data is feeling "forced" into doing this to see if there will in fact be a change to my well-being (there was none), and there being an effort in looking at things in life from a new perspective. The ideology behind this is similar to gratitude but I find this to be more effective and is what I personally would recommend if someone wants to improve their well-being. As an example of this, and the aforementioned data, let's say someone discovers her spouse has been unfaithful toward her. She may feel devastated, heartbroken, emotionally hurt, angry, sad, etc. depending on how long she and her significant other has been romantically/sexually committed to each other. But at some point during the relationship, this person bought her her favorite assortment of chocolates, roses, and took out the time and effort to build a beautiful birthday cake the year before. The example I am making here is though she may be grateful and feel the gratitude for the birthday gifts as well as the lengths and time her spouse has gone to produce them for her, the gratitude does next to nothing to override the pain and hurt she would experience from this person being unfaithful to her. So, no, gratitude does NOT necessarily improve a person's well-being.

Will I continue with the "Three Good Things" process? Most likely not with my current emotional status. Why? Because my emotional outlook isn't at a high-enough state for me commit to doing a "Three Good Things" process. Once I begin looking at things in my life from a more positive perspective and outlook, I highly anticipate the "Three Good Things" process to feel good for me to commit to.

Conclusion

What are your main take-aways from your research project? This research project has given me reminders of some of the teachings of Abraham-Hicks: the reason why we want anything in life, ever, is that we believe we will feel better in the acquisition of having it. How does this relate to gratitude? I've learned while working on this that gratitude is a feel-good state. It is widely believed that when we receive something we want in life, we feel better emotionally. When we do not acquire that thing, we do not feel that feeling of positivity or that of gratitude. Also, despite committing to feeling grateful for what is already possessed, the feeling from such a practice is generally not all that great due to that feeling of lack. So therefore, the phrase "gratitude improves well-being" should be reversed into "well-being improves gratitude." Questions for more research? Who coined the ideology or belief that gratitude improves well-being? What was their state or belief system when they started that ideology? Lastly, what was this person's outlook on life in general? What do they suggest for people who are not very happy in life and would like to change this?