

Lesson 1 Happiness Just beside You

Reading 1

Can We Live Happily Ever After?

"And they lived happily ever after."

You're probably used to the quote above—the ending that concludes every fairy tale. However, do they live happily ever after? Is there truly nothing but happiness in Cinderella and Snow White's lives once the story ends? Only they will know, but I would say it's not likely. Why? It's because happiness is not a permanent state.

Just as the immune system defends the body when a virus invades, there is a psychological immune system in our minds. It protects our mental health by helping us adapt to feelings of sadness or fear whenever we encounter them. This essential survival mechanism relieves negative feelings and helps us continue functioning effectively in our daily routines. The problem is that this psychological immune system also prevents happier moments from lasting too long. This system creates a cycle in which we become dissatisfied with our current state and require more stimulus to stay happy. This is why the initial happiness of getting a new smartphone or achieving a perfect score on an exam diminishes over time.

Happiness is not something that, once achieved, lasts forever. Happiness is a state that we must put in constant effort to sustain. Then, what are some of the efforts we should make?

Diversify Your Everyday Experiences

Which do you think you'll enjoy more: continuously listening to the same song you love or alternating between listening to songs you like and songs you don't? Recent research suggests that if we are repeatedly exposed to either option several times, the latter becomes more enjoyable. How could that be? The answer lies in diversity. Humans enjoy engaging in a variety of activities. Therefore, to keep yourself entertained for a long time, you need to increase the level of variety in your everyday routine. No matter how interesting your hobbies are, your enjoyment will diminish if you repeat one thing for too long. Therefore, it might be a good idea to try new things. Try reading a novel—at least the first couple of pages—even if you don't want to. Even if you don't feel like it, try joining an astronomy camp and observing the stars.

Break out of your comfort zone and add a little bit of diversity to your life, rather than giving up without even trying and saying, "Ah, that sounds boring."

Even if the new activity that you try out turns out not to be so enjoyable, it is still worth trying. The reason? You have already enjoyed the happiness of going through the various experiences.

Never Lose the Small Joys in the Hope of Greater Happiness

Who would be happier—a person who occasionally experiences intense happiness or frequently experiences small feelings of happiness? Recent research shows that, when it comes to happiness, frequency is more important than intensity. In other words, happiness comes from accumulating small happy moments. We are often told that we have to sacrifice our present to reap the rewards of the future. To some extent, that's true. For greater happiness, you sometimes have to do what you don't want to do right now. However, that doesn't mean you should sacrifice every present moment for the future. Most of our happiness is in the "here" and "now."

Don't forget—you may not be happy every single moment of every single day, but moments that make you happy are always around the corner. You may find a webtoon that perfectly fits your taste, making you happy for a few hours each week. You may accidentally bump into someone on the street, and the person turns out to be a friend you haven't seen in a while. You may not realize it, but there are many small moments of happiness you encounter daily. To be happy, all you have to do is enjoy these small happy moments.

You have every right and all the potential to be happy. However, it doesn't mean that all you have to do is just sit back and wait for happiness to come to you. You also must put in constant effort, as happiness is not a destination but a journey. Don't put off what enriches the precious moments of your daily life until tomorrow. Don't hesitate to enjoy the small miracles of everyday life. As James Oppenheim said, "The foolish man seeks happiness in the distance; the wise grows it under his feet."

Reading 2

Dear Dr. Ko, I Need Your Advice!**Dear Dr. Ko,**

My name is Minjun, and I am a sophomore at Jackson High School. I'm writing this email to ask for your advice. I've been nominated as a candidate for the president of the student council, and I've been nervous ever since. I don't think I am cut out for such a position. I'm sure there must be a better candidate! Also, I'm afraid that even if I am lucky enough to win the election, I won't be able to meet everyone's expectations. I'm so confused about what to do—should I run or should I pull out of the race? I would be really grateful if you could offer me some advice. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards, Minjun

Dear Minjun,

First of all, congratulations on being nominated as a candidate for the president of the student council! However, it seems you don't feel up to the task. That is, no matter how much other people believe in your abilities, you seem to have doubts about whether you are worthy of attention and praise of others. It sounds like you might be experiencing what some experts refer to as "impostor syndrome." As surprising as this may sound, there's no need to worry. Studies show that more than 70% of people

report feeling impostor syndrome at some point in their lives. People with impostor syndrome sometimes believe that they lack knowledge, skills, and capabilities compared to other people. This makes them worry that they'll eventually be "found out." For example, there was an athlete who had won countless medals in international races. However, he believed that one bad race was all it would take for others to doubt his athletic abilities.

When you think of Albert Einstein, what comes to mind? A genius? An unrivaled legend? Well, Albert Einstein actually thought of himself, at least in his later years, not as a genius but as a fraud! He is known to have said, "The exaggerated esteem in which my lifework is held makes me very ill at ease." He apparently thought of himself as an impostor who was tricking everyone into thinking that he was a genius. Even the greatest minds like Einstein felt they were impostors; it's therefore unsurprising that we sometimes feel the same way.

Whenever you feel like you aren't good enough for the task at hand, here is my advice. Ask yourself, "Why not me?" There must be a reason that your friends chose to nominate you. Clearly, you've been doing something right. So get out there and do the work everyone feels you are competent enough to handle! Best regards, Dr. Ko