

## The First Rule of Happiness: Appreciate the Little Things

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### **Introduction**

They say to appreciate the little things in life. But why should the little things matter? Aren't the big things more important?

People spend their days worrying and thinking about the big things: acing that big test, getting that big salaried job, going on that big date. They fail to notice the sweet little things that make life so special. The bird that is warbling in the tree branch outside of your office window is a call to enjoy the prettiness of Nature rather than the stress of work, yet you probably do not take the time to notice it because you just have to get your proposal done for your demanding boss. The smell of baked bread can awaken pleasant memories of your childhood visiting Gramma, yet you are too busy thinking about what you will make for dinner to enjoy the nostalgic loveliness. Life is full of small, beautiful things but you fail to notice them because you are so focused on the future. As a result, you feel harried and depressed. The world seems dark. Where did all the beauty that you remember from your childhood go?

The world is not actually dark and the beauty that you saw as a kid did not go anywhere. You have simply stopped seeing the world's subtle beauty. Noticing a million little things that make you feel joyful can sum up to one big joyful mood in your heart. The little things really do matter. You should open your eyes and ears and take in the little things in life. When you appreciate the little things, you begin to appreciate life as a whole. You become happier. Throughout the day, you receive little tidbits of happiness

to even out the stress and depression that your job and other worries poisons your heart with.

I found out the hard way how important the little things are. When I lost my child and my husband in the same year, I thought that I might break. All I could focus on was the huge, intense tragedy that had blown a hole through my world. Life would never be the same, that much I knew. I felt that the world was evil and that I did not want to be a part of it anymore. It can be hard to enjoy life after a trauma or tragedy shows you that the worst that you can imagine is indeed possible.

After my loss, I had little to live for. But I needed some sort of relief. I remember one day, while crying, I noticed how the crystal charm in my windows was breaking the sunlight into a million rainbow flecks across my room. It was so beautiful. For just a second, I began absorbed in that prism light, and I did not feel sad for the duration of my absorption. When I returned to focusing on my grief, I was slightly less sad because I had had a chance to feel happy for at least just a moment.

That taught me to appreciate the little things in life. Just a moment of happy observation could do wonders in lifting my mood. The little things in life gained a certain importance to me. I am frequently surprised at how blind others are to the most special moments in life. People make the mistake of thinking that these little things are not important, but they are.

The first rule of happiness is to appreciate the little things. The little things really do matter. A thousand little things add up into one big thing. So be sure to appreciate

the little things in life and let the brief moments of happiness that the little things give you lead to a great deal of happiness.

With this book, I hope to teach you how to appreciate the little things. I hope to reawaken your interest in life and your appreciation of it. I hope to help you find happiness in what you already have. Just a few moments of happiness throughout the day is better than no happiness at all. Take a few moments to reflect on the beauty of the world around you, and you will begin to fall in love with life.

### **Chapter 1: The Ease of Appreciation**

Once you begin the habit of appreciation, it becomes quite easy. It is a preferable way to look at the world, rather than ignoring the beauty in life to focus on the bad and the worries swirling your head.

All you have to do is appreciate the little things that you encounter throughout your journey on Earth. Your appreciation will make you feel happier and more fulfilled. You will feel better, and so will the people around you who have the privilege of experiencing your joy.

There is nothing hard about appreciating life, except maybe getting out of the habit of negativity. As adulthood has put distance between you and your child self, you may have fallen into the habit of worrying about things and thus taking the world for granted. By doing this, you have created some very bad habits. But these habits can be broken. Just by taking the time to survey the world around you once a day, you can begin to take on the better habit of loving life and loving yourself.

Anyone can do it. And everyone should do it. But we often overlook things or take things for granted. As a whole, the world is very preoccupied. People hurry along, looking at their phones, worried about dinner or the upcoming meeting. They fail to consider that these worries they have are not very significant at all. The worlds that they have built with their worries, their responsibilities, and their smart phones is not actually grounded on anything concrete. Half of the things they worry about will not even come to pass, or will not be relevant in just a year. Yet people give a massive amount of power to these worries and fail to focus on what is real and what is concrete.

Many people get into the terrible habit of ignoring the world around them. They get so wrapped up in their worries and concerns that they no longer appreciate the looks on their children's faces in the mornings or the sound of birds singing in the trees in the park. They think that the world will hold still for them while they take care of the next big project or concern. They take the stillness and security of their worlds for granted. Then, one day, a terrible tragedy alters their world completely. Or they wake up and realize that a lot of time has passed and they have missed out on so much out of willing blindness. They wish that they had paid a little more attention and appreciated the things and people around them more.

The large amounts of mental illness like anxiety and depression often arise from this habit of ignoring the world around us. As people fail to appreciate the beautiful little things in life, they give all of their mental energy to trivial worries that seem so monumental at the time. Usually they devote this energy to work, because we all need money to survive. Unfortunately, the need for money can grow into the inadvertent abandonment of life outside of work and non-material things that have nothing to do

with money. There is no happiness in that cold world of worry and work that offers no play. It is a fake world, and a sorrowful one. No one can stay full of vitality and lust for life if they focus on such a world.

Depression and anxiety grow because people lose what is most important to them. They stop really living, and they stop enjoying life around them. They become automatons, and they hate every minute that they are stuck in. All they think about is the little fake world that they have created, which offers none of the warmth of Nature and family. These poor people do not realize that a simple readjustment in thinking can reawaken their spirits and their will to live.

I do not want to see you become depressed and empty as you focus on a world that offers you nothing beyond the material. I do not want to see you wake up one day with the world as you know it gone, and your heart full of regret that you never once stopped and smelled the roses. I am sure that you do not want those things for yourself, either.

After reading this book and learning to appreciate the little things in life, you can become at least ten percent happier. But I'm sure that you will become even happier than that. You will renew your lust for life as you realize how much there is to live for. Your gratitude and positivity will flourish, and there will be no more room for depression and boredom.

I suggest that you begin to treat every day as a new adventure. Imagine yourself as Indiana Jones, undertaking a new treasure hunt the moment you wake up. Instead of just hurrying to work or going about your normal routine feeling like you do not have

time for anything special, go try that new coffee place, sniff the roses in the park, or stop to admire a scenic view. Instead of crashing in front of the TV with a beer after work, too exhausted to do anything, actually start to undertake that project that you have been putting off, play a new game with your kids, or try to cook a new kind of food that you have never attempted to cook before. I guarantee that your energy will grow exponentially when you start to act, because you are not tired after work, you are just drained of energy and uninspired.

Start trying new things and exploring yourself and the world around you. Have conversations with strangers and try new classes and new workout routines. The world offers a great deal to explore, and you may just find something you really enjoy doing. There is no need to lie around, doing nothing and feeling trapped by your mental blockages, when the world is ripe for the picking.

But you do not have to try anything new to renew your interest in life. Just taking a moment to appreciate the activities you already do and the things you already have can restore your vigor and vitality. Your life is actually quite full and wonderful, you have just gotten used to it and you have started to ignore it. You will be surprised when you look around and realize all the joyful, beautiful things that you do have that are there to make you happy.

## **Chapter 2: Appreciate that You are Alive**

Why not start with your appreciation journey with the most fundamental thing of all? The fact that you are alive. You are actually alive! You are still breathing and your heart is still pumping blood. No matter what you have been through or how poor your

health is, you are still here, ready for another day. If there is something more to be grateful for, I sure do not know what it is.

Being alive technically is not a little thing; rather, it is a pretty big thing. But your survival often feels like a little thing because you take your bodily functions for granted.

Appreciate each day you wake up is a new chance to do better. You woke up this morning and there is a whole new day ahead of you. You can do whatever you want with this new day. You can actually do better than you did yesterday, if you put your mind to it. Just be grateful that you still have a chance.

Appreciate the things that give you sustenance. You have the elements needed to keep your body alive for another day. You have food, and you have clean drinking water. Appreciate those things. Not everyone is as blessed as you. Life may be bad in some ways, but at least you get to taste yummy, nourishing food on your tongue. You do not have to go to bed with your stomach panging in hunger. You also do not have to feel the raspiness of your parched tongue as you trek twenty miles to get water that you may get dysentery from. As you eat and drink water, enjoy the taste and the nourishment that you gain. Let it fill you and sustain you for another day of wonderful life.

Appreciate shelter. The roof over your head may not be perfect for whatever reason, but it is a roof. You are shielded from the blazing sun, the cold wind, and the heavy rain. You have a place to keep your possessions, no matter how few or many things you own.

Appreciate breath. You are able to enjoy the beautiful things in life because you are still breathing. You would not be here if it was not for the constant rhythm of breath

that goes in and out, in and out, in and out of your chest, even while you are sleeping. You have been breathing all day and every day of your life so you probably do not even notice your breath most of the time. Your breath is an automatic function that your body performs for you. But with that breath, you keep going. The day that breath stops is the day you no longer can appreciate life and rise up each day to greet new opportunities and possibilities. As you breathe, really feel the rush of air along your throat and the way your chest fills and then collapses. Appreciate every breath as it seeps oxygen into your bloodstream and regulates your body temperature.

From there, you should go on to appreciate the rest of your body as it toils just to keep you alive. Your heart, your brain, your nerves, your liver, your kidneys, your bones, your lymph nodes, and the countless other parts of you are all performing the miraculous task of life as you read this. They have since you were conceived. You do not have to even think about your body to make it work. It just does what it supposed to do. Even in sickness, your body tries to keep going. Even when you are injured, your body tries to heal itself. Your body is a complex organism that runs on its own and actually grew from just one cell. It is nothing short of miraculous that you are even here.

Appreciate the disasters that you have narrowly escaped. Almost all of us have had near-death experiences. Somehow, you are still here. You have survived stupid stunts and accidents and the bad intentions of others. You overcame bacteria and viruses that invaded your body, and you healed from injuries that could have become infected and killed you otherwise. You are here, despite the many threats and dangers made against your life.



Appreciate the people that make your life possible. Your parents, however close to them you may be or may have been, gave you life. Your employer, even if he or she is unbearable, helps keep your lights and your heat on and food in your refrigerator. Even your kids and your spouse, if you have a family of your own, give you the motivation and the purpose you need to go on.

There has been a very long chain of other people who have also made your life possible, though you may not even know them personally. Farmers, truck drivers, AC installers, home builders, doctors, nurses, and countless other people have tirelessly worked and contributed to your life somehow. The way you live now is all because of their efforts. If they had not been there, would you be as comfortable? Would you even be alive? Take a long moment to appreciate the vast network of people responsible for your life as you know it.

Finally, appreciate that today you are alive on this Earth. No one is in your exact position on the Earth right now, looking at the world the way you do. No one is you. You are unique and you have a definite place in the cosmos, however small that place may be. You are lucky to be alive, and you are lucky that this planet is inhabitable. You would not be alive otherwise. Appreciate that Earth is your home, that the atmosphere is breathable, and that you are here today reading this book.

### **Chapter 3: Appreciate the Good things in Life**

The good things in life are often the small things, the things you do not have to buy for a lot of money. They are there, even if you can't see them right now. They are

things that give you joy and pleasure and fill you with excitement. They make life enjoyable.

When you were a kid, you were more in the moment. You found that the small things made the world go around. For example, if you found out that your favorite food was going to be served at lunch at school, you appreciated that very much and your excitement to eat washed out any sadness or stress that you may have been feeling at the time. Now, as an adult, you may gotten out of this habit. So take some time to appreciate the good things in life and regain your appreciation for life as a whole.

Appreciate the smell of food. The smell of baked bread or chocolate chip cookies, filling the air and making your salivary glands activate. The smell of a freshly sliced tomato or cantaloupe. Let these smells consume you as you cook or as you walk through the aisles of the grocery store. These foods give you life and they are so yummy. Their pleasant aromas provide you with at least a brief moment of olfactory pleasure.

Appreciate the first sip of coffee or tea. Appreciate how the taste overwhelms your senses. That first taste only happens once a day. Enjoy it, savor it even.

Appreciate laughter. Hilarious comedy routines, inside jokes with your friends and family, and laughing with your kids are all times when you abandon the world's worries and have a good time at the soul level. You reach a point where you feel nothing besides the force of your laughter and the sore feeling that a good laugh leaves in your belly muscles. You may even cry a little. In this moment, you are gone, in a good, happy place.

Appreciate feeling of your first morning stretch when you first get out of bed. Your muscles are stiff and stubborn but you make them comply. The feeling is so comforting that it is hard to describe. The stretching sensation reaches deep into your cells, into your core. You feel it all over and it feels good. You then feel refreshed and more prepared for the day ahead.

Appreciate the feeling of the cold, bright and fresh on your exposed skin. Appreciate the pretty way that your breath plumes in front of you. There is nothing like cold to wake you up and give you vitality. Then appreciate how good the warmth of a fire or heater and a hot drink like cocoa feels when you break out of the cold outside.

Appreciate the sensation of a pool enveloping you in its cool, inviting water on a hot summer day. You may have been burning up getting to the pool, and the soles of your feet may feel burned from the concrete at the pool side, but now you are refreshed and relieved from the heat.

Appreciate the scent of your fabric softener, so familiar yet so sweet. Appreciate the smell of your favorite fragrance as you first spray it on and it cloaks your body in scented mist. Appreciate the smell of your lover's fragrance too.

Appreciate the comfort of an old movie. You have seen it a million times, but it brings back nostalgia from childhood or a different era in history. Appreciate your popcorn and your loved ones around you as the TV makes the walls of your living room flicker different colors. This is home. This is comfort.

Appreciate the smooth, soapy feeling when you first slide into a bubble bath or when you take a hot shower after a long day. Feel the suds race down your skin and over

your feet before they swirl down the drain. As your tension and your dirtiness drains away, you can clear your mind. Appreciate the softness of your towel as you get dry, and the sensation of your clothes sliding on over your clean skin.

Appreciate having a picnic or barbecue with the people that you love. While you try to fend off flies and ants, you connect with Nature and your family. You enjoy good food and the sunshine. You make a memory. You enjoy the smell of barbecue smoke and meat dripping with sauce, or else you enjoy the skewered veggies if you are a vegetarian. Appreciate how you have all united to share this experience and to enjoy the sustenance of life, food.

Appreciate that moment that your favorite song randomly comes on. You have your iPod on shuffle or you are listening to the radio and out of nowhere, you hear those familiar first few chords. Your soul alights in excitement for the rest of the song.

Appreciate opening a box of chocolates and trying to select one that you like. You feel suspense. What if you picked one of the nasty ones? Then, when you get the tasty one that is your favorite, appreciate the delight of the bright sweetness and the resulting pleasure of each bite.

Appreciate every moment of sex. The sweat, the body scents, the pleasure, the breath, the sense of being close to someone. Sometimes the best things in bed are not sex itself, but the sensation of skin contact and tactile touch. Appreciate how just the brush of a fingertip or the flick of a tongue can feel so purely and shockingly amazing.

More than anything, appreciate what seems good to you. Appreciate the simple and even weird pleasures that make you smile and feel whole. We are all unique. Some

of us love certain sensations that are inexplicable to others. Find that happy sensation or activity, where your cares fade away and you feel only satisfaction, enjoyment, and contentment flood your body.

#### **Chapter 4: Appreciate Nature**

Nature is all around you and it is beautiful. Nature offers you a free show every day. Learn to watch the show and appreciate it. You will be filled with awe more often than not.

The stars are perhaps the most spellbinding elements of Nature. Take some time to stargaze. Appreciate the way that the stars twinkle. Appreciate the random constellations that they form. Make up some constellations of your own. Appreciate that many of the stars we see now are in fact dead, and that the true picture of the sky is unknown. What a great mystery. Appreciate that you got to see the radiance of these stars before they died. They got to be a part of your life, even when they are no more.

Appreciate the rain. Appreciate its soothing pitter patter. Appreciate its clean scent. If you live in the desert, you can appreciate the scent of rain even more than those that live in other climates. Appreciate how rain nourishes the Earth and gives life to the greenery around you and the food that you eat.

Also appreciate the snow. Appreciate its fluffy coldness and how it transforms the world around you into a snowy winter wonderland. It can change the shape of buildings and trees and the land itself as it makes drifts. It serves as a canvas for snow angels and as a material for making snowballs. You can even make sno-cones or molasses candy with it! Appreciate the fun that snow offers for sports like skiing and sledding.

Appreciate how snow days used to be Heaven for you as a kid, and is or will be Heaven for your kids as well.

Appreciate rainbows. The simple science of a sun ray refracting into all the colors of the spectrum on the prism of raindrops creates beautiful spectacles. Appreciate the fact that you can never reach the true end of a rainbow.

Appreciate the sun and the way it feeds the plants around you without even trying. Appreciate the bursts of color the sun makes when it sets and rises. Appreciate how the sky transforms and you can see the stars and the moon once the sun gives up its reign over the sky for the night.

Appreciate the feeling of the air on your skin as you jog or as you power walk to your next destination. The cool breeze or the hot, muggy air always has a unique quality to it. Every climate is different. We get so used to living in our particular climate that we forget to feel it in its full splendor.

The feeling of water on your hands and on your skin in the shower, or when you wash your hands, is unique. Nothing feels quite like water. Other liquids or sticky or toxic or feel heavier than water. Appreciate its unique, life-giving qualities and its special texture.

Appreciate even the ground under your feet as you walk to the grocery store or work. The solidness of the ground is something reassuring and easily taken for granted. Take a moment to really feel this solidness, and to appreciate it for being the one sure things that you have always relied on. Sometimes the earth does collapse or an

earthquake turns it to dubious solidity, but usually the earth is always there, solid beneath your feet, holding you up.

Appreciate gravity. This may seem so silly. But Earth's gravity is perfect. It is preventing you from floating up into space and freezing to death as you drift into nothingness, and it is keeping you from tumbling down to the ground, unable to breathe as the atmosphere crushes you.

On any other planet, you would not be able to survive. The particular chemical cocktail of our atmosphere and the level of gravity and the heat we get from the sun makes Earth inhabitable for you. Appreciate this.

Appreciate flowers. They are beautiful. They smell sweet. They add bursts of color to yards and walkways, and they grace Nature with unabashed, brilliant beauty. Because of flowers, bees and other pollinators are able to eat, and keep foods like avocados and mangos on your table. They also keep plants alive, which enable you to breathe the right level of oxygen. Flowers play a more major role in your life than you realize.

You should also appreciate animals, and the birds and the bees. The fragile ecosystems of the world sustain you. Your pets love you and keep you from feeling alone sometimes. Animals are your fellow souls. They come in all shapes and sizes. They share the earth with you and provide you with food, pets, and amusement. Your survival is dependent upon them in some way or another.

Appreciate the ocean. The way it smells, the sound of the waves caressing or even striking the beach. Appreciate the vast depths of the ocean that we have not been able to reach even with sonar, and appreciate the secrets and mysteries that these depths must

hold. Appreciate sea creatures, funny looking as they are, and the yummy seafood that the ocean yields for humans to eat. Appreciate how the ocean catches fire with the colors of the sunset or sunrise, and how it turns amethyst or black with nightfall. Appreciate how it caresses you, and how salty it tastes when you accidentally swallow some of its brine.

The exotic animals that you see at the zoo are bizarre and beautiful. They are unlike you have ever seen in your environment. Appreciate them. Appreciate that they grace this Earth and that they are here for your viewing pleasure. Take a stroll through the zoo for no reason except to enjoy all the mysterious, amazing, and inexplicable things that Nature has to offer. Whatever you believe in. creation or evolution, you should find this spectacle awe-inspiring.

Appreciate the birds and their songs. Appreciate how they toil to build nests that balance perfectly in tree branches. Appreciate how they can fly effortlessly, and how they teach their babies to fly too.

Appreciate how predators like owls and hawks can spot tiny prey in the grass. Appreciate how woodpeckers can hear worms tunneling in tree bark. These animals have very fine senses that enable them to provide population control for many species. They are essential links in the food cycle.

Appreciate the changing of the seasons. Just as you start to get tired of the weather of one season, another comes around to relieve you. The spring builds you up with excitement for the fun of the summer, like playing in the pool and floating on the river. Meanwhile the fall builds you up for the excitement of trick-or-treating, carving



pumpkins, building snowmen and staying in by the fire or woodstove with hot tea or cocoa. Through the seasons, you watch the tree foliage and the garden plants change. You witness the migration of birds and butterflies as they head south and then north. Every year, the cycle is the same, yet you experience it through new eyes. As you mature and change, you enter each year and go through the seasons just a little bit different and a little bit the same. The cycle of the seasons never grows old.

Appreciate the very cycle of life. For every death, there is also birth. In Nature and in your home life, youth and old age form an endless cycle of give and take. A balance is always struck between loss and gain. While this cycle can be bittersweet and even painful, it is also necessary for life. Appreciate how it keeps populations balanced and gives new people the gift of life and old people the gift of experience and wisdom.

### **Chapter 5: Appreciate Comfort**

Comfort makes you feel good. It also separates you from extreme hardship. Comfort is essentially a luxury that you are lucky to possess. Even just having a comfortable couch sets you apart from people who are homeless and have no comforts in life. Comfort can give you something to look forward to, and it can make you feel better after a long, hard day. It is something that you should definitely appreciate.

Appreciate warmth in winter. Whether you get warmth from a heater or a woodstove or a fireplace, this heat is comfortable. Appreciate the comfortable warmth that coats, mittens, boots, and hats can provide your body when you venture out into the

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