

The Fayetteville Observer

Op-ed: Gautam - Make choice to improve your life

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Sid Gautam

"To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle." - George Orwell

Long before our forefathers included "the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence, human beings relentlessly pursued the search for happiness. This quest keeps us actively engaged in professions, businesses and industries. Since there are no generally accepted standards of happiness, materialistic success is accepted as a reasonable proxy for happiness.

In the last century, the world witnessed a historic advancement in materialistic success. Few countries achieved the level of economic growth and prosperity that our country attained in the 20th century. The average standard of living increased significantly. Home ownership and per-capita consumption of consumer goods as well as convenient household appliances increased sharply. Rising income and easy availability of goods and services gave a big boost to the American standard of living.

More Americans started eating out. Products and services were standardized. Customers were greeted with a smile, and service was prompt and courteous. This was the start of the fast-food revolution. We started filling out our bellies fast with empty calories while watching our favorite television shows. Processed and packaged food liberated housewives from the daily chores of cooking and cleaning.

Americans found their lives without much physical exercise. Hectic schedules and intense competition in the business world created a life of stress and its adverse consequences. Statistically, longevity had increased enormously, but the heavy toll of stress caused serious wear and tear on the body, mind and spirit. Consequently, our health and well-being started going downhill. Our sedentary life was turning America into a country of obese people highly susceptible to the ravages of type-2 diabetes, cardiac attacks and other serious health complications.

Unwanted fruits of the economic progress and prosperity were not noticed until the end of the last century. Health care costs in our country were rising faster than anywhere in the world. Today, we spend more than \$2.7 trillion a year on health care. But even all this money has not improved our health ranking in the developed world.

It is never too late to correct the mistakes of our yesteryears. Medical research confirms that if someone has lived a sedentary life with too much alcohol, tobacco and junk food, he can still change his lifestyle completely and bring back health and vitality, and a very active, alert and vivacious life.

The turnaround will require close monitoring by medical professionals, expert nutritionists to devise a healthy diet, and exercise coaches to guide the person through the right exercise to improve his cardio and other vital functions.

Vote for happiness

Several years back, I read a best-seller by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. He made one thing clear - all of us have a very simple choice either to be happy or unhappy. He said, "I am not dumb. I decided to be happy." Prominent preachers, teachers and motivational speakers have told us for centuries that happiness is a matter of choice. The latest research findings confirm it again.

Harvard-trained psychologist Shawn Achor wrote a best-seller, "The Happiness Advantage." He emphasizes that happiness is a fuel that enhances your performance and influences your chances of success.

Several public and privately funded academic studies in the field of positive psychology, neuroscience and behavioral sciences lend strong support to the thesis that happiness is a matter of choice. These studies have also confirmed that only 10 percent of our happiness is based on genes, and the remaining 90 percent is based on our attitudes and how we see this world.

The heart of "Happiness Yoga" is to develop a regular habit of happiness. As we grow older, we learn little new and forget a lot. Therefore, we emphasize building a default mechanism so people don't drop out of the journey of happiness. It is essential to cultivate good habits and practices to invigorate our minds, bodies and spirits to enjoy every day of our precious lives. We have been living lives of unintended consequences for very long. The time has come to empower ourselves with our own lives.

A presentation on "Happiness Yoga" will be held Saturday, at the Kiwanis Recreation Center in Fayetteville, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Yoga instructor Andre Joseph will teach the easiest physical movements, which anyone can do while sitting on a chair.

The latest medical research confirms that simple, easy movements for as little as 20 minutes a day while sitting in a chair can create magic for people who have led sedentary lives. Also, we will discuss the main causes of unhappiness and how can you remove them to attain happiness.

The program is free. No sugary drinks or foods are allowed inside the hall. You are free to bring bottled water. Since space is limited, please call Kiwanis Recreation Center at 433-1568 to reserve your place.

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