# Savoring

## A NEW MODEL OF POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

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*To*

MERRILEE MILES BRYANT,

*who showed me the secrets of savoring.*

—FBB

# 8

# Enhancing Savoring

*No day comes twice.*
*Each moment savored more precious*
*than a span of jade.*
—Zen tradition

How can people promote savoring experiences in their lives, as so many would like to do? How can people cultivate the capacity to appreciate the wonders of life, to cherish precious memories from the past, to anticipate good things the future may hold, to capture the joy of the moment? Are there simply people who can or cannot savor—that is, "savorers" and "nonsavorers," the way we speak of extraverts and introverts, or optimists and pessimists? Or is it possible for people to learn to think and act in ways that enhance the quality of the savoring experiences in their lives? If it is possible to become more adept at savoring, then what specific approaches or orientations should people adopt if they want to enhance savoring? And how can people learn these approaches to savoring?

This final chapter sets out some guiding principles that could enhance savoring for everyone, regardless of whether or not they easily or customarily savor positive experiences. Our deeply ingrained training as social psychologists makes us believe that under carefully crafted conditions, it would be possible to elicit savoring experiences in almost anyone, regardless of the individual's starting point. Accordingly, we consider this chapter a sort of beginner's guide to savoring. To add to our hubris, from time to time we suggest exercises one can do that embody some of the generalizations we make. These exercises are based on our earlier discussions of savoring, as well as on techniques borrowed from the literature on meditation, psychotherapy, and affect management. We close





by suggesting that true happiness lies not just in knowing how to savor, but also having the wisdom to savor in ways that provide meaning and purpose.

## CAN PEOPLE ALTER THEIR OVERALL LEVEL OF HAPPINESS?

### Happiness Set-Point and Savoring

To what extent is the capacity to savor determined by nature versus nurture? There is evidence that some people, compared to others, are genetically predisposed to feel positive feelings more strongly. Along these lines, theorists have proposed that people's long-term levels of happiness are largely stable and fluctuate only slightly around a genetically determined "set point" (Diener & Diener, 1996; Heady & Wearing, 1992; Lykken, 1999). In the same vein, Watson (2000) proposed that positive affect is a relatively stable trait or temperament measurable by a dispositional personality scale assessing what he calls "positive affectivity." But what does it mean to have a set point for positive affect that is genetically determined, and what are the implications of this notion for enhancing savoring?

Using a wonderfully insightful metaphor, Lykken (2000) suggested that all of us are born with a certain baseline level of happiness that he likens to a lake on which our ship is sailing—the higher the level of the lake, the better we feel. The baseline level (or set point) of the lake varies from person to person for genetic reasons. But given this baseline, the level of the lake also fluctuates within each person over time depending on one's energy level, stress, and recent events.

These latter transient influences temporarily alter the level of the lake, so that it is almost never completely calm. Although life events cannot permanently change the lake's baseline level, positive events create waves that temporarily raise our boat, whereas negative events create troughs that temporarily lower our boat. Big waves from particularly wonderful events, and big troughs from particularly terrible events, take longer to subside than their smaller counterparts. But eventually the level of the lake always returns to its baseline.

In its most extreme form, set-point theory maintains that it is useless to try to raise the level of one's lake permanently. Viewed from this perspective, "trying to be happier is as futile as trying to be taller" (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996, p. 189). Yet, a more accurate way of thinking about baseline levels of positive affect may be to conceive of them not as set "points" but rather as set "ranges." Indeed, Seligman (2002a) suggested that, "A set range is a more optimistic notion than a set point ... since you could live at the upper level of such a happiness range rather than the lower level" (p. 279).

Regulating one's level of positive affect within one's "set range" is the essence of savoring. To extend Lykken's (2000) lake metaphor, we suggest *coping* involves

sailing one's boat so as to avoid troughs and steer out of troughs that one cannot avoid, whereas *savoring* involves sailing one's boat so as to find the waves one wants to encounter and make them bigger and longer lasting, if one so chooses.

## Prior Work on Boosting Happiness

What does the empirical literature suggest concerning the notion that people's positive affect has a flexible set-range rather than a rigid set-point? Reviewing research on the pursuit of happiness, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) concluded that "emerging sources of optimism exist regarding the possibility of permanent increases in happiness" (p. 111). For this reason, it would seem all the more important for people with chronically low levels of enjoyment to "pay greater attention to the 'hedonic book keeping' of their activities" (Meehl, 1975, p. 305).

Many writers have offered recommendations aimed at helping people find greater joy in life. Indeed, there is no shortage of "pop psychology" self-help books and "how to" magazine articles offering tips for achieving happiness. Although much of this advice has been based on little more than intuition, some recommendations have been solidly grounded in theory and research.

In one of the earliest systematic investigations aimed at boosting happiness, Fordyce (1977, 1983) experimentally demonstrated the effectiveness of a semester-long educational intervention, consisting of 14 components designed to increase personal happiness. Fordyce's intervention involved teaching people to become more active, spend more time socializing, be productive at meaningful work, become better organized, stop worrying, lower expectations, increase positive thinking, become present-oriented, develop a healthy personality, become more extraverted, be themselves, eliminate negative feelings, strengthen close relationships, and place more value on happiness. Although one cannot be sure which particular aspects of the multifaceted treatment were responsible for increasing happiness, we note that at least half of the components of this intervention are variables we have linked to enhanced savoring— namely, socializing, avoiding worrying, thinking positively, being present-oriented, avoiding negative feelings, strengthening close relationships, and valuing happiness.

In a similar vein, Lichter, Haye, and Kammann (1980) experimentally demonstrated that people can raise overall levels of happiness either by replacing negative self-relevant beliefs and attitudes with more positive ones (through eight 2-hour sessions during one month), or by rehearsing positive feeling statements (10 minutes daily for 2 weeks). In addition, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) reported several experiments in which increasing the frequency of people's positive activities boosted happiness. Furthermore, across three experiments, Emmons and McCullough (2003) showed that increasing the frequency with which people experience gratitude can increase levels of well-being.



Reviewing the research on happiness, Myers (1992) offered 10 suggestions for achieving a happier life: (a) realize that enduring happiness does not come from success; (b) take control of your time; (c) act happy; (d) seek activities that engage your skills; (e) become more physically active; (f) get an adequate amount of sleep; (g) give priority to close relationships; (h) reach out to other people; (i) give thanks each day for the positive aspects of your life; and (j) nurture your spirituality. Again, notice that many of these suggestions are also relevant for enhancing savoring.

And yet, despite what positive psychology has discovered about the roots of happiness, it is not easy or necessarily effective to provide universal "rules" for finding joy in the moment. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argued, "A joyful life is an individual creation that cannot be copied from a recipe" (p. xi). As with the process of coping, there is no one general prescription that will optimally enhance savoring for everyone across all situations. What we offer instead are "steps toward enhancing the quality of life," to borrow a phrase from the dust jacket of Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) popular book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.*

## Six Factors That Enhance Both Coping and Savoring

Although coping and savoring involve separate sets of concerns that are only modestly correlated (Bryant, 1989, 2003; Meehan et al., 1993), some variables serve to facilitate both types of processes. Before highlighting guiding principles specifically aimed at enhancing savoring, we first briefly note six cognitive-behavioral constructs that serve to enhance both coping with negative experience, as well as savoring of positive experience: (a) social support; (b) writing about life experiences; (c) downward hedonic contrast; (d) humor; (e) spirituality and religion; and (f) awareness of the fleetingness of experience. These factors are particularly valuable tools for managing affect because of their widely applicable versatility in helping people not only handle bad things, but also savor good things.

*Social Support.* Across most forms of adversity, one of the most adaptive forms of coping with stress and misfortune is social support, in which one shares one's feelings with significant others in one's social network (Bloom, 1990; House, 1981; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A great deal of research has demonstrated that social support buffers the negative effects of stress on individuals, thereby ameliorating distress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Vaux, 1988). And as we have noted repeatedly throughout this book, sharing one's positive feelings with other people also enhances savoring. Sharing feelings with others can boost the emotional impact of positive outcomes (Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 1994), and our own data show strong and consistent relationships between expressing positive feelings to others and greater enjoyment of positive events (see chapter 4). Thus,

people with larger and more accessible social networks may not only cope better, but may also savor more fully.

*Writing About Life Experiences.* A great deal of research supports the notion that writing about negative life experiences has beneficial effects on physical health. For example, writing about traumatic life events enhances immune functioning (Esterling, Antoni, Fletcher, & Margulies, 1994; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988) and decreases symptoms of asthma and rheumatoid arthritis (Smyth, Stone, Hurewitz, & Kaell, 1999). To explain these effects, Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) suggested that writing about trauma helps people make sense of negative life experiences. In other words, the health benefits of writing about trauma seem to stem from the creation of a logical narrative that helps people gain insights into the meaning of their personal suffering (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002).

This type of narrative construction can also be useful in boosting the benefits of positive experiences. For example, compared to students randomly assigned to write about a neutral topic, students assigned to write about their best possible "future selves" showed greater physical health benefits and psychological well-being after writing (King, 2001); and students assigned to write about intensely positive peak experiences showed greater positive mood at the posttest and fewer health center visits for illness 3 months later (Burton & King, 2004). Other data suggest that simply talking about positive experiences with others, explaining the details and meaning of one's joys, can provide the same benefits as writing about these experiences (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002). Thus, people who tell stories or write diary entries, letters, poetry, or songs describing and interpreting their life experiences may not only work through negative experiences more effectively, but may also enhance savoring and gain greater physical and psychological benefits from positive experiences.

*Downward Hedonic Contrast.* Another strategy that enhances both coping and savoring is the creation of downward hedonic contrast, through cognitive evaluations that make one's current state seem better in relation to relevant comparative standards. One way to create downward contrast is through counterfactual thinking (Markman, Gavanski, Sherman, & McMullen, 1993; Roese, 1994, 1997), or thoughts about the way things might have been. For example, imagining how a negative outcome could have been worse dampens its emotional impact (Roese, 1994; White & Lehman, 2005), whereas imagining how a positive outcome might not have happened boosts its emotional impact (Roese, 1994). With respect to downward counterfactuals in savoring, Frijda (1988) proposed:

> Adaptation to satisfaction can be counteracted by constantly being aware of how fortunate one's condition is and of how it could have been otherwise, or actually was otherwise before—by rekindling impact through recollection and imagination. Enduring happiness seems possible, and it can be understood theoretically. However, note that it does not come naturally, by itself. It takes effort. (p. 354)



Along these same lines, the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 B.C.) offered the following advice: "Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; but remember that what you now have was once among the things only hoped for." Note that Item 3 of the Ways of Savoring Checklist (WOSC) captures precisely this sentiment: "I reminded myself how long I had waited for this to happen."

Downward *social* comparison, on the other hand, may not always boost enjoyment of positive events (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYperen, & Dakof, 1990). Sometimes one may feel guilty when comparing oneself to others who are worse off. In the fall of 2005, for instance, some people found it hard to celebrate the Labor Day weekend because of guilt, when so many others were suffering in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Associated Press, September 3, 2005). Thus, it may be a more effective savoring strategy to compare one's current state to worse possible outcomes than to others who are worse off.

*Humor.* Another response that enhances both coping and savoring is the use of humor. With respect to *coping*, humor not only relieves tension and anxiety (Kuiper & Martin, 1993; Moran & Massam, 1999; Yovetich, Dale, & Hudak, 1990), but also buffers people from the affective and physical consequences of stress (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986; Martin & Dobbin, 1988; Martin & Lefcourt, 1983). With respect to *savoring*, injecting humor into: (a) the classroom makes learning more enjoyable (Bryant & Zillmann, 1988; LoShiavo & Shatz, 2005); (b) television commercials enhances enjoyment of the programs containing these ads (Cantor, Bryant, & Zillmann, 1974; Perry, 2001); and (c) video material increases levels of hopefulness toward the future (Vilaythong, Arnau, Rosen, & Mascaro, 2003). Furthermore, laughter not only helps maintain perspective in the midst of adversity, but also increases the outward expression of joy, which can enhance savoring. Thus, humor enhances the capacity to cope with negative experience and derive benefits from positive experience.

*Spirituality and Religion.* Spirituality and religion not only provide a source of strength, comfort, hope, and meaning in facing and overcoming adversity (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003; Pargament, 1997), but also are linked to higher levels of happiness (Myers, 1992; Myers & Diener, 1995). With respect to coping, mothers with a disabled child are less likely to be depressed if they have a strong religious faith as opposed to little or no religious faith (Friedrich, Cohen, & Wilturner, 1988). Moreover, a meta-analysis of 29 research studies found that religious involvement is associated with lower mortality—specifically, odds of survival are 29% higher among highly religious

individuals, compared to their less religious counterparts (McCullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig, & Thoresen, 2000). And with respect to savoring, people who say their religious faith is the most important influence in their life are twice as likely as people low in spiritual commitment to report being "very happy" (Gallup, 1984). Thus, spirituality and religious involvement not only serve as a coping resource, but may also help people savor positive experiences and find joy in life.

*Awareness of the Fleetingness of Experience.* Realizing that one's current experience will not last forever can both reduce stress and heighten enjoyment. During stressful periods, imagining a future time when one's troubles will be over can help put problems in perspective, thus engendering hope and boosting morale (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). And as we noted in chapter 4, an awareness of the fleetingness of one's current joy can enhance the bittersweetness of the moment and motivate people to enjoy themselves while they can. For example, parents of 2-year-olds often remind themselves that their child will be grown up before they know it—a thought that not only increases their ability to cope with the stresses of childrearing, but also helps them savor time spent with their child. Along these lines, Jewish legend has it that King Solomon, renowned for his exceptional wisdom, had an inscription engraved on his ring, at which he would glance whenever he experienced something positive or negative. The Hebrew inscription supposedly read, "Gam zeh ya'avor"—"This too shall pass." The saying reminds one that misfortune will fade with time, thereby helping one endure hardship. But it also adds bittersweetness to positive experiences and reminds us to capture the joy now while it is still present.

Clearly, these six affect management strategies—sharing feelings with others, finding meaning in life events, creating downward hedonic contrast, being humorous, being spiritual or religious, and being aware of the fleetingness of experience—are uniquely versatile tools for both adapting to hardship and enjoying life. And they are skills well worth cultivating.

## ESTABLISHING THE THREE ESSENTIAL PRECONDITIONS FOR SAVORING

In our general definition of savoring, we contend that three critical preconditions must exist in order for savoring to occur. First, people must be relatively free of pressing social and esteem needs. Second, people must be focused on attending to their present experience. And third, people must have some degree of awareness of the positive feelings they are experiencing.

For people who savor their lives easily, these preconditions arise quite automatically. But what about people who find it hard to savor, who have trouble breaking free of distracting thoughts, staying present-focused, or being mindfully aware of positive feelings? What can these individuals do to foster these three preconditions for savoring?



### Becoming Relatively Free of Social and Esteem Concerns

We first suggest some basic aids to set the stage for savoring. With the demands and rewards of most people's everyday life, it may be a tall order to forego thinking about the responsibilities and social incentives that compose the world we inhabit. It is not as if people have internal switches that allow them to turn off their ordinary pursuits. Nor is it necessarily easy to stop oneself from worrying about problems and concerns in one's life. But if people have a finite amount of attentional resources they can use to optimize their emotional experience (Linville & Fischer, 1991), then worrying and thinking about pressing problems deplete these attentional resources and reduce people's ability to savor.

One strategy to short-circuit worrying is literally to pull the plug on it. Here we take a tip from concentrative meditation training, in which a person is asked to focus on a single stimulus (e.g., a repeated word or one's own breathing) and thereby blot out other stimuli from attentional focus. This strategy is a form of sensory-perceptual sharpening, a savoring response we discussed in chapter 4. Needless to say, this approach might not work if a person were in the grips of severe pain, thirst, or other extreme discomforts. Nevertheless, some pain therapists teach chronic pain patients ways to relax that resemble what we advocate. For example, although the data are not entirely consistent (Seers & Carroll, 1998), relaxation training has been found to decrease pain, improve functioning, and reduce anxiety, compared to receiving standard pain medication (Good, 1996; Kessler, Patterson, & Dane, 2003; Mandle, Jacobs, Arcari, & Domar, 1996; Syrjala, Donaldson, Davis, Kippes, & Carr, 1995).

Assuming people are not overwhelmed by any physical discomforts, how then might they ignore social and esteem needs simply by using concentrative meditation methods? First, one should have a willful intention to relax and divert attention from ongoing esteem or social concerns. Given this requirement, one should focus attention as narrowly as possible on the repeated word or mantra without stopping to consider any competing thoughts that might arise. For example, Benson (1975) advocated that people repeat in their mind the word "one" or "relax" as a mantra, in order to evoke what he termed the "relaxation response." Evidence indicates that this form of meditation reduces metabolic rate, decreases heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and decelerates breathing (Benson, 1975, 1984).

When people meditate in this way, at first they often find it difficult to block out thoughts about present concerns, worries, and ways to solve their problems. The mind tends to wander quickly from focusing on the meditative mantra toward these other interfering thoughts. According to Benson (1975), however,

when these distracting thoughts occur, one should simply try to disregard them and redirect attention toward repeating the mantra. Nor should one worry about how well one is performing the meditative technique, as this too inhibits the relaxation response. Instead, one should adopt a passive, receptive attitude and "just let it happen." This orientation is a form of experiential absorption that we distinguished from cognitive reflection in chapter 5.

This meditative process resembles the mind-set one must take in falling asleep. Many people, when getting into bed and watching television to relax, experience the unintended phenomenon of falling asleep when repetitive advertising or highly irrelevant material is discussed or presented. At least for a moment, a person could adopt this same kind of relaxed mind-set in connection with any stimulus field, and attempt to make the flow of stimuli irrelevant to one's interests or goals and devoid of any practical meaning. We contend that, besides promoting sleep, this technique could also provide a ripe context for the development of savoring by helping one ignore competing stimuli.

We are not simply suggesting that people who wish to savor try not to worry. Rather, we are instead advocating that people actively discount any thoughts or external stimuli that might interfere with savoring by reinterpreting these distractions as being temporarily irrelevant. Along these lines, research suggests that the particular set of "stopping rules" people adopt when worrying can determine how long they persist in ruminating. Individuals who worry until they no longer feel like continuing stop worrying sooner than those who worry until they feel they have generated as many potential solutions as possible (Davey, Startup, MacDonald, Jenkins, & Patterson, 2005; Martin et al., 1993). One implication of this finding is that the more strongly one believes worrying can help solve problems, the harder it may be to savor. This reasoning suggests that rather than trying to generate as many potential solutions to their problems as possible, when people worry they should set aside a fixed amount of time in which to do so constructively, and then stop worrying afterwards (cf. Borkovec, 1985). Adopting this time-limited approach to worrying would help free up attentional resources to use for savoring, if people so choose.

Other theorists have recommended rational, cognitive-behavioral strategies to reduce worrying. For example, Fordyce (1983) suggested that people keep a daily record of worries, analyze the amount of time spent worrying, determine how many worries actually come true, and use thought-substitution techniques to change their worried thoughts. Adopting a rational-emotive approach, Ellis (1999) encouraged people to make a rational choice: If one wants to experience happiness, then one should devote one's attention to pursuing it, and not to fruitless worrying about possible catastrophes that worrying cannot prevent. Again, the long-range goal of all of these self-change interventions is to take one's attention away from negative thoughts and feelings associated with ruminative worrying, thereby providing more attentional resources for use in savoring positive experience. Returning to the notion of opponent processes that we proposed



in chapter 7, guilt and worrying (or kill-joy thinking) may well be the primary negative counterpart process to savoring—worrying makes it hard to find the attentional resources required to savor. If you want to savor, then you need to check your worries at the door.

### Focusing on the Present

What interventions can we suggest to help people attend to their present flow of experience in the moment, and not dwell on the past or future? People can also use the meditative strategy we advocated for silencing worries to cease focusing on the future or the past. But we extend this meditative technique a step further. To help one attend more fully to what is happening in the present, we use ideas derived from intentional mindfulness techniques of meditation, in which all internal and external stimuli become possible targets of attention during a state of relaxed openness to experience.

At first blush, mindfulness meditation may seem at odds with the concentrative techniques we have just described for shutting out pressing needs. However, mindfulness meditation is not contradictory when it occurs *after* a concentrative meditative technique has already been implemented. Once a person is ready to adopt a savoring orientation, intentional mindfulness techniques can enable the person to let consciousness flow more easily (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Having relinquished distracting thoughts or blocked out irrelevant stimuli, people are then free to focus their attention mindfully on their present experience as it is unfolding.

What we suggest here about ways of getting into a mindful savoring orientation is much like some of the "intentional mindfulness qualities" that Kabat-Zinn (1990) and Shapiro et al. (2002) list as being conducive to meditation. We particularly highlight the qualities of: (a) nonjudgmental orientation (i.e., "impartial witnessing" or not concerning oneself with evaluation); (b) openness (i.e., seeing things as if for the first time; Shapiro et al., 2002, p. 640); and (c) acceptance (i.e., being focused on things as they are in the present).

How people become nonjudgmental, open to novelty, and present-focused must be cast in idiosyncratic terms. For example, becoming nonjudgmental might require consciously reminding oneself not to evaluate one's ongoing experience. Becoming open to novelty might require purposefully doing or trying something different for a change. Becoming more present-focused might require putting away one's appointment book and removing one's wristwatch. Shortly, we will present a few exercises aimed at helping people foster these critical qualities during positive experiences.

### Enhancing Attentional Focus on Positive Experience

We have suggested that the third condition necessary to establish a savoring context is the capacity to enhance attentional focus on pleasurable aspects of

one's ongoing experience. How do we suggest that people learn to enhance their attentional focus on the positive stimuli and feelings they experience, as one does when savoring? Generally speaking, people can use the same meditative process we suggested for focusing on the present to focus more mindfully on ongoing positive experiences. We have suggested from the very beginning that savoring is not simply experiencing pleasure or enjoyment. On the contrary, savoring involves taking the perspective of an inquiring journalist toward one's own pleasurable experiences and then reporting these inquiries to oneself.

One suggestion that can help people focus more intensely on the present is to avoid multitasking, or what has been termed *polyphasic activity* (Friedman & Ulmer, 1985). Polyphasic activities involve "trying to think about or to do two or more things simultaneously" (Friedman & Ulmer, 1985, p. 40). A hallmark of Type A behavior, these frenetic, time-urgent pursuits divide one's attention among multiple targets, thereby making it harder to attend to the joy of a happy moment as it is unfolding (Friedman & Ulmer, 1985). It is hard for people to focus closely on the joy they feel if they are also thinking about or trying to do other things at the same time. Thus, people can enhance savoring by devoting their attentional resources more exclusively to those aspects of ongoing positive experience that they find enjoyable.

Being meta-aware of one's ongoing positive experience often dovetails with the elimination of social and esteem needs and a focus on the present. Therefore, strategies for enhancing savoring are often relevant to two or more of these contextual preconditions. For example, we can suggest a "trick" to enhance the poignancy and power of the moment that increases attentional focus on both the present and its pleasurable aspects. Specifically, we recommend an extension of one of Lakein's (1974) "lifetime goals questions" to intensify savoring. In particular, Lakein (1974) suggested that people ask themselves, "If I knew I would be struck dead by lightning six months from today, how would I live until then? (This means you would have only six months to live and would have to squeeze whatever you consider important into your dramatically reduced time on earth . . .)" (p. 33).

Slightly modifying this perspective, we suggest that when people encounter a positive experience, they imagine that this is the last time they will ever go through the particular experience, be it a beautiful sunset, a conversation with a friend, sipping a warm cup of tea, or a stroll on the beach. Imagining the positive moment to be a last-of-a-lifetime experience produces an extremely intense bittersweetness, making the present much more vivid and salient; and imagining one will never again experience the particular moment (i.e., downward counterfactual thinking) dramatically accentuates the positive features and feelings involved through hedonic contrast, making it easier to notice and appreciate those aspects of the moment that are most readily savored.

Another strategy to enhance savoring is to become more aware of one's positive feelings. Just as people vary in their baseline levels or ranges of positive affect, people also vary in the degree to which they are consciously aware of their own feelings. In particular, there are individual differences in the personality trait of mood attention (Salovey et al., 1995) or mood awareness (Swinkels & Giuliano, 1995), which includes both mood monitoring and mood labeling. These personality differences may well predispose some people to be more capable than others of recognizing and interpreting their positive feelings while they are experiencing them and of telling themselves how they feel. As noted in chapter 1, we expect higher levels of both mood monitoring and mood labeling to facilitate savoring. Along these lines, we suggest that people practice noticing and explicitly labeling their positive moods, so as to enhance their ability to savor. Indeed, one reason why women are typically more adept at savoring than men is that they tend to be more consciously aware of their feelings (cf. Gohm, 2003).



For example, the next time you find yourself going through a positive experience, take a moment to try to identify the specific positive feelings you are experiencing. First, find words to describe your pleasant feelings. Are they affectionate, mellow, awesome, energizing, uplifting, exciting, or empowering? Are they fun, fulfilling, comforting, inspiring, heartwarming, prideful, or grateful? Are they happy, pleased, satisfied, content, glad, relieved, or elated? Try first to put your finger on exactly what it is you are feeling. You may well be experiencing more than one positive feeling. Once you have put your positive feelings in words, tell yourself explicitly at that moment that you are feeling this way right now. Then return your attentional focus to the stimuli or event from which you are deriving these feelings in the first place. Practicing this process of attending mindfully to positive feelings, and explicitly labeling them, can help one become more aware of positive feelings and thereby enhance one's ability to savor.

## Strategies for Enhancing Contexts for Savoring

Throughout this book, we have highlighted various ways in which people can generate, intensify, or prolong savoring experiences. These savoring strategies include: sharing with others; active memory building; self-congratulation; sensory-perceptual sharpening; downward social, temporal, and counterfactual contrast; experiential absorption; behavioral expression; heightened temporal awareness; counting blessings; and avoiding kill-joy thinking. Next we offer three general suggestions that people often find helpful to enhance the situational conditions that are ripe for savoring experiences, and for each of these suggestions, we provide specific exercises designed to induce savoring.

*Taking Time Out From Everyday Activity.* A basic strategy that enhances opportunities to savor is to purposely take "time outs" from ordinary ongoing life. The momentum American men and women establish for accomplishing what needs to be done for their lives often requires a 48-hour day. By and large, Americans are earnest workers, trying hard to earn enough for a

comfortable standard of living. And the time they spend doing nonwork tasks such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, and fulfilling required social functions is endless. There are no siestas for most Americans. Indeed, they often indulge in recreation with the same earnestness. They get tired, and sometimes find that collapsing in front of the TV set is the most satisfying respite from the pace. Mindless TV viewing—what's to savor, if people work, play, and carry out their routines so earnestly and so breathlessly that time does not stop long enough for them to appreciate the good things around them?

A remedy for this pace of existence clearly is to take some time off to let life pass more slowly. Anything that makes people step off life's daily treadmill without discomfiting them or arousing their guilt or concern about falling behind in their work could be part of such a remedy. Vacations sometimes are meant to do just that. And yet there are people who pursue vacations in the same pell-mell pace that characterizes their daily schedules. For these people, the pursuit of leisure becomes a job rather than a joy. However, if vacations really bring a shift in the pace of life, then vacation time might be an ideal time for savoring, or a time to try out some of the other exercises we propose to invigorate savoring. In fact, the word "vacation" comes from the Latin word *vacare*, which means to be free or exempt, as from stress, burdens, or obligations. For most people, however, vacations come but once or twice a year. A remedy for these people is to build daily or weekly "minivacations" into their lives or regular routines.

Indeed, minivacations are sometimes easier to arrange than longer holidays. A weekend getaway, a day off from work, time away from having to cook, or freedom from other types of everyday responsibilities in one way or another—at these moments of escape from the daily grind, deliberate strategies for savoring can be applied, if savoring processes are not automatically activated.

One tip for enhancing savoring is to become more *proactive* rather than purely *reactive* in finding enjoyment. Note that there is a natural asymmetry between coping and savoring. On one hand, the sorrows in life inevitably find us and force us to feel them despite our best efforts to avoid them, and they require us to actively cope to reduce their negative emotional impact. On the other hand, the pleasures in life more often require us to hunt for them or else they will not happen despite our best hopes, and they require us to actively savor to enhance their positive emotional impact. These facts suggest that people should make savoring a priority if they wish to enjoy themselves (cf. Fordyce, 1977, 1983). Along these lines, it is important to recognize that the frequency and intensity of positive affect are largely independent (Diener, Larsen, Levine, & Emmons, 1985), and the frequency of one's positive affect is a stronger predictor of overall level of happiness than is the intensity of one's positive affect (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991). These findings suggest that increasing the total number of savoring episodes one has will boost overall happiness more than simply intensifying enjoyment while one is in a savoring episode. Indeed, increasing the number of pleasurable activities in which people engage has been shown to increase subjective well-being and decrease subjective distress (Reich & Zautra, 1981). Here we present a semistructured activity, *The Daily Vacation Exercise*, that helps people practice savoring proactively in the context of everyday life.



**The Daily Vacation Exercise**

1. Each day for one week, plan and participate in a formal "daily vacation" during which you spend time doing something you find enjoyable for at least 20 minutes. This activity might be going for a walk, sitting quietly in a garden, reading a book, treating yourself to a cup of coffee, going out to eat, visiting a museum or art gallery, taking a shower or soaking in a bathtub, spending time with a friend, or watching a sunset. Be creative in finding sources of enjoyment that you can look forward to and savor. This exercise works best if you do not use the same activity every day, but instead seek a variety of experiences in your daily vacations.
2. Before starting each daily vacation, make sure to set aside worries and concerns, pressing responsibilities, and sources of stress for at least 20 minutes, and do your best to structure the situation so as to prevent distractions while you are savoring. Remind yourself not to be judgmental, but rather to see things as if for the first or last time, and to focus on what is happening and what you are feeling as it unfolds in the present.
3. While you are on your daily vacation, try to notice and explicitly acknowledge to yourself each stimulus or sensation that you find pleasurable. Identify your positive feelings and explicitly label them in your mind. Actively build a memory of the feeling and the stimuli associated with it, close your eyes, swish the feeling around in your mind, and outwardly express the positive feeling in some way.
4. At the end of your daily vacation, plan your daily vacation for tomorrow and begin to look forward to it. At the end of the day, look back on your daily vacation, and recall and rekindle the positive feelings you savored.
5. At the end of the week, take a few minutes to recall all seven of your daily vacations. Look back on the activities you enjoyed doing and try to reexperience the positive feelings you felt during each daily vacation. Compare the way you have felt over the past week and the way you feel right now to the way you usually feel during a typical week. People typically report having felt happier a greater percentage of the time during their week of daily vacations and report feeling happier at the end of the week, compared to the way they usually feel.

The purpose of The Daily Vacation Exercise is to give people direct experience with proactive savoring, to give them the opportunity to bring savoring into their lives on a regular basis, and to help them practice the art of savoring daily life. After engaging in this exercise, some people may want to make daily vacations part of their everyday routine.

*Becoming More Open to Experience.* Once there is time to experience life in a savoring mode, a person has to be open to and aware of the varieties of experience that are there to be savored. People have to relax sufficiently to undo the restraints on their views of the world and themselves if they are to let savorable stimulation enter. In chapter 4, we spoke of a general way of extending

the duration of savoring as chaining together one's positive experiences. One kind of chaining is a set of free-associative linkages that one creates, sometimes haphazardly, other times intentionally. Next is an exercise, *The Life Review Exercise,* that can facilitate this kind of associative chaining in contemplating one's life.

**The Life Review Exercise**

1. Identify an activity or experience that you currently savor in the way we have defined savoring in this book.
2. Think of the last time you had such a savoring experience, and write down in as much detail as you can the situation you were in, the people who were there, the place you were, the time of day, the time of year, and so on.
3. Do the same for one other time that is similar to what you report in Step 2, including all the accompanying data.
4. Do the same as in Step 3 for the very first time you remember savoring something in the way we have defined savoring in this book.

The purpose of The Life Review Exercise is to give people direct experience with the cognitive savoring process of chaining, in which one links positive associations together in one's mind, thereby broadening and prolonging an ongoing savoring experience. In this way, people may eventually make what at first requires deliberate effort into a habitual pattern of thinking.

*Narrowing One's Focus.* In the next exercise, *The Camera Exercise,* we recommend what appear to be two paradoxical processes that always seem to be involved in savoring. The exercise requires people to narrow their focus of attention on a small, given target, and yet be wide open to any stimuli that may come their way when attending to the target with this narrow focus. We know of no better way to practice this orientation than to take photographs without an explicit goal concerning the subject or target.

**The Camera Exercise**

1. Get access to a camera, your own or one you can borrow for a day. The simpler the camera, the better. This exercise works best if you do not have to think too much about the functions and settings on the camera. If you are unfamiliar with the camera, spend some time first getting acquainted with the simplest settings. Get a roll of color film for prints, not slides; or better yet, use a digital camera.
2. Select a sunny day, if you can. Having an active play of light on your visual field enhances this exercise. Go to a relatively quiet location near where you live. It could be nearby, if you live in the country or on a quiet street in a town or city. It could be in a park, if you live in a noisy town or city. Find a comfortable place to sit or stand for a period of time, and simply wait there while you scan what is in your immediate field of vision.
3. Find an object close by. It could be a building or part of a building. It could be a tree, or other vegetation. It could be a machine or parked vehicle. It could be anything that will remain relatively still while you gaze at it. Now take the mind-set of seeing the abstract patterns in the object that you have selected. These could be contrasts in color, light, or shading. Or these could be variations in texture.
4. Start taking pictures from different angles that represent alternative perspectives you can take in relationship to the object. Move a bit in one direction, then in another; hold the camera higher, then lower; tilt the camera to one side, then the other. Vary your stance and the angle with which you hold the camera in relation to the object. Snap any shot that appeals to you. Don't worry about a shot being totally balanced and symmetrical. Just shoot those images you find interesting or pleasing. Remember, this exercise is not a photo contest. Rather, it is designed to help you develop your savoring skills.
5. Find another object, and repeat the procedures in Steps 3 and 4 until all of the film has been exposed, or until you have taken 30 to 40 digital shots.
6. Develop the film (the quicker, the better—perhaps in a 1-hour photo shop) or download the digital photos, and carefully study the pictures for patterns that please you.
7. Repeat Steps 2 through 6 another day as soon as you can, photographing the same or similar objects.



The Camera Exercise forces one to attend closely and mindfully to ways in which an ordinary object can have pleasant visual effects. The photographer scrutinizes the object in the field of vision and takes time to compose an image. Often the photographic results are illuminating and reinforce the experience of enjoyment in examining objects and taking pictures. Reviewing the photos returns one's eyes to images that hold memory traces of what had previously been felt in the initial visual scanning.

## Savoring, Wisdom, and the Good Life

In his classic treatise on ethics, Aristotle (350 B.C./1925) argued that there are two distinct forms of happiness: *hedonia,* or the pleasures inherent in life, as when one fully savors a positive experience; and *eudaimonia,* or the life well-lived, as when one lives a virtuous, meaningful, or purpose-driven life. Aristotle considered this latter form of happiness to be "the highest of all goods achievable by human action" (Ryff, 1989, p. 1070). Others have suggested eudaimonia is more accurately defined as "the feelings accompanying behavior in the direction of, and consistent with, one's true potential" (Waterman, 1984, p. 16). In any event, it is important not to confuse these two different positive subjective states.

Whereas hedonia is the "life of pleasure," eudaimonia is the "life of purpose." Explicating the latter term, Seligman (2002a) cogently argued:

> The good life consists in deriving happiness by using your signature strengths every day in the main realms of living. The meaningful life adds one more component: using these same strengths to forward knowledge, power, or goodness. A

> life that does this is pregnant with meaning, and if God comes at the end, such a life is sacred. (p. 260)

In encouraging people to find ways to enhance savoring in their lives, it is not our intention to promote selfish hedonism or to suggest that pursuing the joy of the moment should be one's primary goal in life. On the contrary, the single-minded pursuit of hedonia and nothing else would be a vacuous existence aimed solely at maximizing personal hedonic gain with no higher purpose. The life of pleasure devoid of eudaimonia would be empty and meaningless indeed. Yet, the "good life" filled with virtue and meaning would be stolid and sterile, if it achieved eudaimonia at the price of never being able to savor one's life. The Greek philosopher Epicurus (300 B.C./1993) made precisely this point in arguing, "It is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, well, and justly, nor is it possible to live prudently, well, and justly, without living pleasantly" (p. 70).

We suggest that true wisdom lies in learning to savor in ways that achieve both hedonia and eudaimonia, without trading one form of happiness for the other. Indiscriminate savoring pursues the empty pleasures to be gained in satisfying "wrong desires" (Adler, 1991). Along these lines, Adler (1991) argued that there are three basic types of wrong desires:

> . . . either (a) the wrong desire is for something that, while really good and needed, is only a partial good . . . yet is desired inordinately as if it were the only good, the whole good; or (b) something that, while good as a means, is a limitless good for those who desire it as an ultimate end; or (c) something that, though it may appear to be good when actually desired, is an apparent good that is noxious rather than innocuous. The prime examples of this threefold classification of the objects of wrong desire are (a) pleasure, (b) money, and (c) fame and power . . . pleasure, much more frequently than these other partial goods, is the object of wrong desire when it is desired as the only good, and as the ultimate goal of one's striving. (pp. 37–38)

As Adler (1991) noted, "In sharp contrast, persons motivated by right desire, while differing in minor traits, are all of the same moral character. Moral virtue is the same in all of them" (p. 55). Thus, wisdom and virtue go hand in hand to guide one toward pursuing those things that provide meaning and fulfill purpose in life, which include those positive experiences that are truly worth savoring for the right reasons. And these moral traits help insure that people savor their lives in ways that bring joy, awe, gratitude, pride, and pleasure, without harming oneself or others and without sacrificing eudaimonia in the process.

### Conclusion

Although we have argued that savoring is a crucial process in the regulation of positive emotion and is vital to a wide variety of human concerns, we hasten to add that savoring is certainly not the only important process in positive psychology. On the contrary, there are many other constructs and processes that play a role in this growing field. These concepts include flourishing, thriving, transcendence, elevation, inspiration, hope, optimism, virtue, wisdom, forgiveness, compassion, altruism, self-actualization, spirituality, and love, to name just a few. Savoring processes are, in turn, related to each of these other constructs of positive experience. Savoring may be a missing link in understanding how people transform many of these positive experiences into emotions. It is our fondest hope that this book will encourage others to pursue savoring as a topic worthy of further scientific study.



## SUMMARY

In this final chapter, we noted that although people may have a genetically determined range within which they experience positive affect, they can learn to regulate positive emotions in ways that keep them in the upper level of this hedonic range. After reviewing prior research on boosting happiness, we considered six factors that enhance both coping and savoring: social support, writing about life experiences, downward hedonic contrast, humor, spirituality and religion, and awareness of the fleetingness of experience. We then offered specific strategies that people can use to establish the preconditions necessary for savoring. To set the stage for savoring, we suggested that people free themselves from social and esteem concerns through concentrative meditation, cognitive reinterpretation, adopting a rational-emotive perspective, or using cognitive-behavioral techniques to extinguish worrying. To focus more exclusively on the present, we suggested that people use mindfulness meditation to foster a nonjudgmental orientation, openness to ongoing experience, and acceptance of the present. To increase attentional focus on positive feelings, we suggested that people avoid multitasking and polyphasic activity, imagine their savoring opportunities to be last-of-a-lifetime positive experiences, and practice noticing and explicitly labeling their positive moods. To enhance contexts for savoring, we suggested that people intentionally take time out from everyday activities to savor, and we provided three hands-on exercises designed to help people practice (a) savoring their daily lives (The Daily Vacation Exercise), (b) chaining together positive thoughts associated with ongoing positive events (The Life Review Exercise); and (c) narrowing their attentional focus in savoring (The Camera Exercise). Finally, we considered the vital role of virtue and wisdom in guiding people's choices in savoring so as to avoid narcissistic hedonism and facilitate growth toward eudaimonia, or the "life of purpose."