

She was neither old nor young, but somewhere in the middle where she felt she was expected to be happily engaged in raising a family, taking care of her husband, and participating in all the school activities of her children. And she was doing all of it. She had scarcely a minute to spare on any day. She had worked hard to fill each day with productive and rewarding activities, she loved her family and husband. Then why did she feel she had not quite done everything ?

She did not feel like something was missing because that would mean that she knew there was something more. And she did not know if there was anything more. "Is this just the nature of life ?", she wondered. Her own mother had seemed so happy that she thought she could just do the same busy family activities her mother had done, and it would naturally make her just as happy. And at times she was fully satisfied with life, but she was slowly realizing that being satisfied with life was not being completely happy. Was there anything more to look forward to ?

One day she was stopped at a light while trying to get to the school to pick up her youngest and happened to glance to the side of the road. She saw a homeless man. Nothing was out of the ordinary, just a simple homeless man. His clothes were somewhat dirty and scraggly, his hair was unkempt. But then she noticed his face. It was fully lit up with a marvelous smile, from his chin to his cheeks to his eyes to his eyebrows. He just glowed. He looked completely happy. The car behind her honked, so she had to quickly glance away and continue driving, but the image of his smile went with her.

The rest of the day in between all her activities, she thought about him, and his smile would appear in her mind again. She discovered it made her happy just to think about that smile. What was it, she wondered, that made that smile so appealing ? He was dirty and unkept, just a normal homeless man, but somehow, a happy person. As she thought about him she realized that he couldn't be satisfied with his life because, well, he was homeless. So it seemed almost perverse for him to be happy. But she was convinced that she really saw genuine happiness. What could make someone so happy ?

In the morning, she realized she had to find out. She had to find him and ask. So she volunteered to take her child to school just as an excuse to go by that intersection again and see if he was there. So she herded the child into the car, and off they went. Soon she was at the intersection, and looking around, she saw she was in luck ! He was there, almost in the same place as before. And again, he had the wonderful smile that seemed to light up the air all around him. So when she stopped for the light, she rolled down the passenger window, and shouted out "Why are you so happy ?". He smiled all the brighter and shouted back to her over the din of the traffic "Gratitude !!". She was stunned. Simple gratitude made him happy ? How could that be ? But before she could ask, the light changed and she had to drive on to school.

All day long she pondered about his gratitude. What was he grateful for ? He was obviously poor. How could he be grateful ? What could he be grateful for ? The simplicity of poverty ? Not taking baths ? But then she realized it did not matter what the source of his gratitude was because her life was different, and she was a different person. However, she could see that somehow his gratitude was linked to his happiness. And since her goal was just to find happiness, she began to contemplate her own situation. What could she be grateful for ? She briefly reviewed her life, and fortunately, she saw that she had lots to be grateful for – a loving family, a loving husband, friends – she could see she had a lot. But even though she had it, she already knew it did not automatically lead to happiness. As she thought about it, it began to dawn on her that she had missed the step that the homeless person emphasized: Gratitude. She resolved to dive into it in the morning when she was fresh. So the next day

after the morning routine of getting husband off to work and kids off to school, she sat at her kitchen table, and began to consider.

First: What was she grateful for – she reviewed the list again. But this time she really thought about each. Starting with her husband, she thought about how he provided for the family. He worked each day. He did not complain. He just did it. She knew he sometimes was bothered, but she had not really paid much attention because there was not much she could do. But he just kept at it day after day.

She knew she already felt grateful for him. It was a warmth somewhere deep inside her. Although it was just a whisper of a feeling, it was there. So next she thought about her children. She loved them so much. But was she also grateful? Yes! From deep inside her she knew that despite all the issues that come with a family of different people trying to live together, she was grateful for sharing life with them, for being their mother, for having a chance to love them. Then she thought about her friends and wondered was she grateful for them? They were sometimes thoughtless and a pain, but yes, they helped her just by being around sometimes and kept her from being lonely. Yes, she was grateful for them too.

She began to think about all the other things she was grateful for, and now they came to her mind faster and faster. She was grateful for the house, for the way it kept them all safe, and she was grateful for the yard, with the small garden. Sometimes when she went out the back door to work in the garden, she could almost hear the flowers and grass sing out a greeting. She was especially grateful for the birds. Their bright and clear songs in the morning brought joy to her heart. She was even grateful for the sunshine, and how it shone through the windows and warmed the floor so she could enjoy walking on it with bare feet.

She almost thought she could feel gratitude everywhere. It surprised her. She began to feel grateful just for being alive and a part of the world. She was grateful just for being part of all creation and began to feel a kind of sharing, or a oneness with everything. Her feelings grew and soon she felt that she was feeling gratitude filling the air all around her. And as she was feeling the warmth of gratitude, her mind recalled that her goal was to find happiness. So in the midst of her overflowing gratitude, she looked to see if that was leading to happiness. She seemed happier, but something was not clear. From somewhere deep inside, she found she was warmed by feeling thankful for all that she was: for life, family, and companions. But was this the happiness she was looking for?

She kept thinking about this sharing or oneness. She loved the oneness with her family and her husband. Then as she thought about her friends and her home and her neighbors, and remembered all the times they had shared, she loved the feeling of oneness with them too. She was realizing how grateful she was for everything around her. Gratitude had helped her start to see just how much everything had been a part of her and how she loved sharing a oneness with it.

She thought about how she loved this oneness. This oneness was kind of like a new kind of love. Not the natural love that she felt for her children and her husband and her friends, but something more akin to a universal love of oneness, a sharing of selves, a love of being together, of being part of all creation with them.

She thought about this new love, and she reached out in her mind to express gratitude just for being. She felt like she was talking to the Creator and simply thanking Him for the good feelings and the oneness. This new love, this oneness, seemed to make her happy. But more than that, this new love

seemed to come from Him. As she thanked the Creator, even though she did not know Him, she felt she was feeling that love being returned, and in a way, making her new love feel all the more warmer and deeper than before. Yes, she thought, it was this new love that made her happy.

Perhaps the homeless man was right, and gratitude somehow was the beginning of true happiness. As she was sitting at the kitchen table, she felt she was starting to see things differently. Her gratitude had let her see how much her family, friends and even her home and yard were a part of her, and how much she loved this oneness. Somehow she now felt this new love was connected to all creation, and it seemed brighter when she thanked the Creator. She began to feel that if she asked God from deep inside her, maybe he would gift her with more of this wonderful love. A love that made her feel like she shared herself with divinity – almost like a oneness. This wonderful oneness seemed to connect her with earth, her family, the sunshine, the trees, and the birds, and it filled her with happiness. To her surprise, she almost felt that with more work, perhaps this gift, this divine love, could make her completely happy.

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