

## "Suck Out All the Marrow of Life"

*"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately...to discover that I had not live...I wanted to...suck out all the marrow of life..." Henry David Thoreau.*

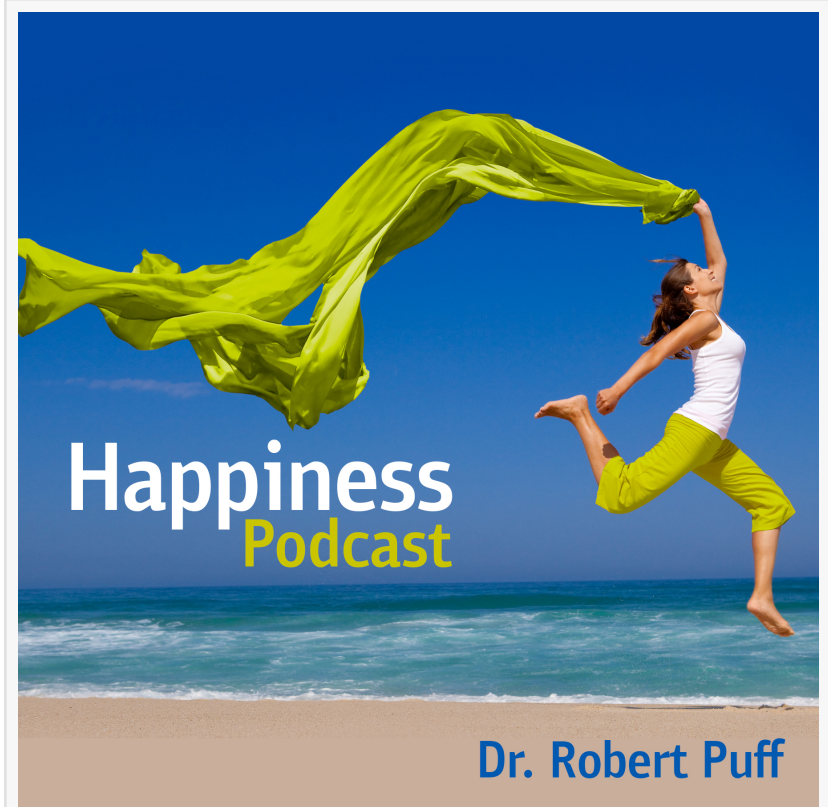
NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA, USA, November 9, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Let's take a moment to consider the words of one of America's most prominent and esoteric philosophers, Henry David Thoreau.

Thoreau is best known as a New England Transcendentalist when spent the years 1845-47 living on the outskirts of society in a small cabin in the woods by the side of Waldon Pond. He called this period of his life an experiment of intentional living.

In a chapter of the resulting work, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, titled "Where I Lived, And What I Lived For," Thoreau writes this famous paragraph:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life ....

There is great wisdom in Thoreau's purpose here, and I think it's very useful to ask ourselves a key question that drove him to take up residence by a secluded lake: What would our lives be like if we sucked all the marrow out of life? In other words, what would it mean for us to live life to fullest capacity that we are able — to embrace life more richly — so that when we take our last breath, we say, "That was a good life."



Happiness Podcast

We don't have to be adherents of 19th century philosophy to have heard this famous quote of Thoreau's. If it sounds familiar, it may be from watching the film *Dead Poets Society*, a movie with a lot of deep wisdom in it. The film is about young men at a boarding school as they prepare to do good in the world because they have the privilege to bring about change. Their English teacher, played by Robin Williams, tries to convince them that they should live life well now instead of believing that they will find [happiness](#) after they reach certain goals.

Williams quotes Thoreau's wish to "suck all the marrow out of life" as he tries to convince his students of the importance of grabbing life by the horns. And it sounds like good advice

— but how do we do this? We must attempt to live our lives in such a way that we can suck the marrow out of life, so that when it's our time to die, we can say, "I lived well"?

Sucking the marrow out of life sounds simple enough, but as a matter of fact, it may be the most difficult thing that we can ever do. But it actually is as simple as it sounds — though "simple" is not quite the same thing as "easy."

Living life well means living every moment like Thoreau did at Walden: deliberately. Why is it such a struggle to live each moment well? It's because life presents us with so many distractions from that target.

I can think of three barriers that often keep us from living our best lives.

- Desire for things. We are constantly brainwashed that things will make us [happy](#), and so we become willing to sacrifice so much to attain the physical objects of our desire.

Maybe we want a beautiful new house, or a fancy car, or expensive jewelry — fill in the blank. But we forget the specter of hedonic adaptation, a concept I've introduced here before. When we get the things we wanted so badly, we find that we get used to them very quickly, and then the thrill they brought to us fades away. We still have the objects, which didn't have the lasting power to provide us with the joy we anticipated, but we also have the bills from their acquisition, and we have to work hard to pay the back, often at a job we hate. The truth is that objects very



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seldom bring lasting joy.

- Addictions. Another factor that can stand in the way of our happiness is the shadow of addiction in our lives. This addiction may be to drugs — the first thought that comes to mind when we speak of addiction — but there are so many things we can become addicted to, like food, or sex, or substances, or relationships.

With addictions, we begin to feel that we need these things to just to live, but ironically, we can stop living in our desire for the next hit. What happens is that we numb ourselves to ourselves. When we are no longer in touch with who we really are, we're definitely not living — and we're definitely not sucking all of the marrow out of life.

- Another factor that keeps us from getting the most out of life is our desire for approval and fame. This is one of the main messages in *Dead Poets Society*. The young men in the private school where Robin Williams' character teaches have the potential to accomplish so much in life, but in the process of always looking for fame and glory, there is the danger that we will stop living. In order to seek approval from others, we fail to find a sense of approval within our own spirit.

There are many other barriers to sucking out all the marrow of life, and most of them, like the three I mention, are barriers that we erect in our own life path. But if we are wise, we realize that these barriers lead to pain and suffering. We can buy the thing that entices us, but it won't matter in the long run, because we will grow less infatuated with it once it's in our possession and we're left to pay for it. And we can come home every day to smoke a joint or have a drink or three, but soon we'll realize that giving our bodies a constant stream of substances is the path to suffering. And if we seek glory, don't we sometimes find that we're giving away our lives to others instead of living well now?

If today we do decide that it is our sincere desire to suck the marrow out of life, what should our first step be? I think it lies in realizing that we have undergone many, many years of condition ourselves not to put our life's happiness first. But when we become aware that we are missing so much out of life, we can decide that we want to make changes.

When our intention is to change the focus of our lives and start living for the joy of it, our best move is to start small. When we get home from work at the end of the day, for instance, we can bypass the television or our handheld devices and head outdoors, where we can just sit and listen to the sounds of nature. Or we can head to a local park, where we can go for a walk to see the beautiful things that lie in our path. If we are having a meal, whether a sumptuous spread or a modest supper, it is always within our power to take it slowly and really feel, taste, and savor the food before us.

Sucking all of the marrow out of life is all about living in the present moment. Instead of comparing now to the future or the past, we can command ourselves to stop giving our lives

away.

We all have a lot of habits in place, and becoming savorers of life is not something that will happen for us overnight. Few of us can easily do like Henry David Thoreau and get away from it all in the wilderness. But let's remember, this wasn't easy for Thoreau, either. He had to make preparations and rearrange his life to meet his intentional goal, and then he met it so beautifully, and he told us about it so generously. His example would be a wonderful one to emulate.

Even so, you don't need a cabin in the woods to live an intentional life that brings you pleasure and teaches you about the world. I know that when I was in college, I had a drive that was similar to those of the students in Dead Poets Society. I wanted to make a difference, to, and to pursue fame and glory.

One summer, I worked hard every day to save up enough money for my goal, which was to spend the following summer in Europe. I managed to meet my goal, and for three months I traveled all around Europe, both by bike and by rail, and I learned so much about the world. One thing I learned was that most people in Europe don't work 40-hour weeks, and almost all of them got six weeks of paid vacation at their jobs. Here in the U.S., most of the people I knew worked 40, 50, or even 60 hours in a week, often sacrificing weekends, and if they were lucky they got two weeks off after a year of employment. It's hard to suck all of the marrow out of life when your nose is so firmly attached to the grindstone!

Spending time in other cultures helps us to take an assessment of our own influences, and upon returning from Europe, I was able to observe people I felt were living well. What I noticed was that they weren't attracted to fame, wealth, or addictions; instead, they were attracted to life — to living well — and they didn't care what others thought of the because they were focusing on the present moment.

We can live well, and we can do it in our actual houses — no Walden Pond required. The thing to keep in mind, though, is that it takes commitment and effort to do so. We're not going to get praise for watching the sunset; no one is watching, and chances are no one would care. If we win a major award or buy a beautiful home or car, someone might notice or care. Even so, we must stay focused on the realization that the experiences of life can be so beautiful when we pursue them instead of chasing external prizes.

When we live in the present moment, we realize that we can suck all of the marrow out of life by living well now. This takes effort, and we need to be kind to ourselves as we begin to change our focus. We may be in a job we hate; we may be addicted to food or substances; we may be working hard for glory. Whatever our condition, when we realize it's time for change, we can make that commitment and start working toward it. The results will be beautiful if we can allow ourselves to achieve them.

To suck all of the marrow out of life, we can make small changes, every single day. We can leave

our office to go outside and enjoy our lunch in the sun. We can take a longer vacation without pay, just to being to enjoy our lives. We can even change our life circumstances, trading in a showplace of a home for a more modest, affordable one, for instance, to reduce some of the financial stress in our lives and spend less of our time working ourselves to death.

With time, we can create the environment that best allows us to suck all of the marrow out of life. This is possible for any of us, if only we commit to it, work toward it, and really make it our goal.

When living our best life is our goal, we will find little steps along the way that will truly be exquisite, and we'll keep having more and more of them. Ultimately, with enough of these beautiful moments, we'll have to admit, when we reach the end of our time in this body, that we have lived a beautiful life.

If today were the day you took your last breath, would you be able to say that you sucked all of the marrow out of your life? If so, congratulations on a life well lived. If not, at least metaphorically, isn't it time to go to the woods and live deliberately?

If today is my last breath, I sucked all the marrow out of life.

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If you would like to learn more, the latest episode of the [Happiness Podcast](#), hosted and created by Dr. Robert Puff, is now available. It is titled, "#298 Happiness - "Suck Out All the Marrow of Life"" and can be listened to at:

<https://www.happinesspodcast.org/298-happiness-suck-out-all-the-marrow-of-life/>

Links to listen to the Happiness Podcast:

<http://smarturl.it/HappinessPodcast>

About the Happiness Podcast hosted by Dr. Robert Puff:

Do you ever wonder what it takes to lead a peaceful, happy life? Are you curious about the specific steps involved in a self-actualized, limitless life? Are you struggling with anxiety or depression? Or are you just plain tired and want some help? We explore all these concerns and more every week on the Happiness Podcast, which has been downloaded over 9 Million times since its inception. Happiness does not happen by chance, but because we take specific actions in our lives to create it.

Dr. Robert Puff, Ph.D., author of 13 books, TV show host, Psychology Today blogger, and corporate trainer, has been studying the actions it takes to reach the highest levels of human

achievement for decades, and he wants to share what he knows with you. Come and explore, along with millions of others from the Happiness Podcast, Dr. Puff books and Psychology Today blog, private clients and corporate workshop attendees, the specific steps to take so that you can soar in your life.

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