

Marriage and Family: Celebrate your Freedom

Mary McKinney | Posted: Tuesday, July 7, 2015 10:34 am

Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Each July 4, we celebrate our freedom and these rights, which were set forth by the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Our country is founded on this idea that these rights are self-evident for all humans.

As Benjamin Franklin pointed out, “The Constitution only guarantees you the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself.”

Our choices, actions and thoughts are guided by embracing this birthright for the pursuit of happiness, along with other birthrights that support that pursuit.

These actions and thoughts lead us to “catch” happiness, and the personal freedom that comes with it.

Embracing other birthrights, such as equality, dignity and inherent worth, supports the pursuit of happiness.

The actress, Kimberly Elise, named another one when she said: “It’s what I tell my daughters: Know that your birthright is to shine your light, and don’t let anybody deny you of that right. Take responsibility for your life.”

The responsibility to positively manifest birthrights is integral to the pursuit of happiness. It isn’t enough to know about these birthrights. They must be embraced in thought and in action.

Wrapping thoughts around these birthrights is a habit to practice in the pursuit of happiness. Making choices that are consistent with positive birthrights is integral to this pursuit, also.

Many religions agree that it is necessary to act according to what is known and is good, in order to be happy.

John 13:17 affirms that doing what is taught by Jesus will bring happiness and blessing.



Celebrate your freedom

The Buddha advised that “If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow.” This purity must include observance of these inherent rights.

Pursuit of this pureness of mind warrants examination of family legacies, which can be birthrights of blessing or curse.

In this examination, decisions must be made for embracing, adjusting or overcoming these legacies, according to how they are consistent or inconsistent with these universal birthrights.

For example, family legacies of hard work and unconditional love are likely to be consistent with these human birthrights.

On the other hand, legacies that involve fear and poor self-care are not consistent, and, therefore, should be adjusted or overcome in the interest of embracing moral and inherent birthrights.

In the mental health fields, there are two basic avenues to change: change thoughts or change actions.

Changing feelings is generally a result of changing thoughts, changing actions, or both.

I often discuss this principle of cognitive-behavioral therapy: “Feelings follow thoughts and actions.”

Embracing self-evident birthrights helps to direct change, when that is desired. For example, wrapping thoughts around the knowledge of inherent worth will direct respectful and responsible actions toward others and toward self.

Change of thought is insufficient.

As stated by William James: “Action may not bring happiness, but there is no happiness without action.”

In order to decide upon action, it is helpful to ask, “How do I want to feel?” — and then challenge the thoughts and actions that are inconsistent with that feeling.

In the process of choosing the thoughts and actions that demonstrate happiness, it will develop. This is the principle behind the AA motto of “Act as if.”

Other worthwhile questions also may help in choosing actions. “Am I happy?” “How might I be happier?” “Am I carrying and acting out negative family legacies?” “Am I living consistently with birthrights, as they are blessings?” “What do I believe about these birthrights, as they apply to me?” “What other birthrights impact my happiness?”

This exploration will provide direction. If you find that you are carrying negative family legacies, or not accepting positive birthrights, it may be wise to consider seeking support from a trusted friend, a therapist, a clergy member or other person who might help with insight, perspective, and planning change.

Mohandas Gandhi summarized, “Happiness is when what you think, what you say and what you do are in harmony.”

So, happiness is “caught” by consistency between thought and action, including what is said. It is also caught when this consistency is in line with important birthrights.

Personal freedom is promoted by the “truth” of happiness and is a grand reason for celebration.

Happy Independence Day!

For more information on available services or to discuss information in this column, contact:

MARY MCKINNEY, MA, LMFT

McKinney Marriage and Family Therapy 828.268.0155

For urgent matters and first-time callers: 828.773.5463

www.mckinneymft.com

mary@mckinneymft.com