Why is Groundhog Day Still a Thing?

By Jamie Wells, M.D. — February 2, 2017

It’s official! Word just came in from Punxsutawney Phil as his 2017 prediction scroll [1]—translated from Groundhogese—proclaims:

At Gobbler’s Knob on Groundhog Day ~ We celebrate a world-wide Holiday ~ It’s mighty cold weather, you’ve been braving ~ Is it more winter or is it spring that you’re craving? ~ Since you’ve been up all night and starting to tottle ~ I, Punxsutawney Phil, shall not dawdle ~ My faithful followers, I could clearly see ~ A beautiful, perfect shadow of me ~ Six more Weeks of Winter, it shall be!

Accurate or not, the conclusion made by this tradition of weather forecasting often seems on par with the many other more conventional forms of prognosticating. Groundhog Day is a long standing ritual that is marked annually on official calendars. What’s behind continuing this holiday? Because, why not! Lighthearted customs—especially jovial ones—give us things to look forward to that distract us from the mundane or chaotic nature of the world. They inspire social connectedness and celebration which can positively contribute to well-being. After all, an optimistic approach can be the healthier one as pessimism has been linked to negative effects [2]. So, you go, Phil! See your shadow, don’t see your shadow and we will still gather every year to watch Bill Murray in the masterful movie tribute to your life’s work—where he has to live the same day over and over again until he learns an important lesson. Which we all have to do.

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