

A Way to Happiness

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Introduction:

I include in the text wisdom of the ancients, more recent discoveries by academics and tools made by the author and others for application to the present society. Becoming happier is a difficult task. We shall explore studies that demonstrate how difficult it is both to increase happiness and to decrease happiness. Happiness is sticky. I will use personal examples from my life, look at the lives of others that have had struggles becoming happy and those that have done well at being happy. I owe a great deal to Eric Barker who has a blog on interesting subjects. Many of the ideas have come from him. It is helpful to take either the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire: <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/03/take-the-oxford-happiness-questionnaire> or the Subjective Happiness Scale at the end of the book. The link to the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire is available at life401.com or I find it easier to Google Oxford happiness and let the link come up. Do this before reading the book and check back to observe progress.

Chapter 1 What doesn't work.

In what is called by Christians as the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon son of David and Bathsheba. In it Solomon expresses his unhappiness. He sees the evil in man. That makes him unhappy and using poetic license I have put together a composite sentence where he says that he has gold, silver, palaces, gardens, singers, musicians, dancers, slaves male and female, wives and concubines man's delight and finds no pleasure in them. He took the job of king away from his older brother and his parents are dead. In that age relatives of a king were a danger to a king. They may take his job. Throughout this course we will look at what he has that are making him unhappy and what he needs to make him happy.

There are what people think will make them happier, but will not.

Things
Money
Cosmetic surgery
Better job
More loving parents
Children
Cure from illness
Loosing weight

Chasing pleasure doesn't work. The momentary pleasure numbs us from future pleasure. The pleasure of seeing a fireworks show makes the next less pleasurable. Finally fireworks shows become annoying. Going to Disney Land is fun the first time. It gets old quickly. This adaption is why the winners of lotteries quickly return to their former level of happiness. They usually chase pleasure only to find it does not lead to Happiness.

Chapter 2. Difficulty in increasing happiness

People often say they would be happier if they only had a better place to live, a bigger TV, a better car, etc. There is no end to the list of the things that people say would make them happier. The 1978 study by Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulman on lottery winners and paraplegics shows the fallacy of things making us happy. The abstract of their paper said:

Adaptation level theory suggests that both contrast and habituation will operate to prevent the winning of a fortune from elevating happiness as much as might be expected. Contrast with the peak experience of winning should lessen the impact of ordinary pleasures, while habituation should eventually reduce the value of new pleasures made possible by winning. Study 1 compared a sample of 22 major lottery winners with 22 controls and also with a group of 29 paralyzed accident victims who had been interviewed previously. As predicted, lottery winners were not happier than controls and took significantly less pleasure from a series of mundane events. Study 2 indicated that these effects were not due to preexisting differences between people who buy or do not buy lottery tickets or between interviews that made or did not make the lottery salient. Paraplegics also demonstrated a contrast effect, not by enhancing minor pleasures but by idealizing their past, which did not help their present happiness.

We only need to think of Solomon to see the effect of possessions.

Lykken, D. and Tellegan did a study of identical twins raised apart. It showed that despite differences of circumstances (sometimes large differences) their happiness was nearly identical. The conclusion is that you are programmed to be at a certain level. Sonja Lyubomirsky has done a literature study and she comes to the conclusion that about 50% of your happiness is genetic, 10% is circumstances and 40% is what you do about it. This work would be pointless if it did not provide techniques to improve happiness. Much of what has been proven by researchers has been in ancient literature. We will review what the ancients found and how it has become part of what has been called Positive Psychology. This field deals with healthy psychology rather than mental illness. It is better to make someone happy than to give them drugs later for depression.

Chapter 3 What can Epicurus from 300 BC teach us?

Epicurus believed that friends are key to a happy life. He said that we do not so much need the help of our friends as the confidence of their help if need. He formed what would now be called a commune where he could spend time with friends and eat meals with them. He also said of all things which wisdom provides to make us entirely happy, much the greatest is the possession of friendship. Looking back at Solomon it doesn't seem to be good to be the king with absolute power. How could you have friends who would not be subservient?

Online friends do not help. In a study of the effect of Internet use on social relationships in adults aged eighteen to sixty-three, Dutch psychologist Thomas

Pollet found that time spent using online social networks resulted in more online contacts but didn't translate into genuine offline connections or a feeling of closeness. Indeed, not only is online contact experienced as less fun, but without face-to-face contact, social relationships decay and are soon replaced by others... "Emotional closeness declines by around 15 percent a year in the absence of face-to-face contact, so that in five years someone can go from being an intimate acquaintance to the most distant outer layer of your 150 friends," says Dunbar.

Material possessions were something that Epicurus thought were not necessary for happiness. He said do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for. He believed that to make a man happy, do not add to his riches but take away from his desires. The problem is desires for as he said nothing is enough for the man to whom enough is too little. This was pointed out by Lao Tsu 200 years earlier when he said a man is wealthy when he knows he has enough. Diogenes of Oenoanda the ruler of a local territory liked Epicurus philosophy about material possessions so he built wall at a market to say: Things do not make you happier. Epicurus would approve such a wall in our shopping centers. It was not only about possessions not helping but about the concern for them. He said free life cannot acquire many possessions, because this is not easy to do without servility to mobs or monarchs. This matches Buddha who said possessions are a burden. Buddha described a man that went on a journey down a river. Thinking it would be better to walk on the other side he made a reed boat to cross. For the rest of the journey he carried the boat. Jesus was also not in favor of possessions. He described the difficulty of a rich man getting into heaven as a camel going through the eye of a needle. The needle was the name of a narrow gate that would only let one man pass at a time.

Marie Kondo (Japanese) teaches neatness and helps people organize their homes. Her clients usually throw away 2/3 of what they have in their houses. Her first rule is to sort by category, not by location. Too many people try to tackle one closet or room at a time. Instead, she says take one item, such as every book in your house, and put it on the floor so you can truly see what you have. Step number two is to pick each item up and ask yourself "does it spark joy?" "It's important to touch every item and hold it with your hands," Kondo explains. Your body actually has a physical reaction. You either feel uplifted or you sink down.

Our example Solomon had lots of possessions and that did not lead to his happiness but were a burden.

Living in the present is also advised by Epicurus. He said the future has not yet come, or that it is past and gone, is like saying that the season for happiness is not yet or that it is now no more. This also comes to concerns for life when he said death does not concern us, because as long as we exist, death is not here. And when it does come, we no longer exist. Could Solomon have relaxed in one of his gardens and enjoyed the present?

Honesty and justice was important to Epicurus. He said it is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and well and justly. And it is impossible to live wisely and well

and justly without living a pleasant life. The evil in man was summarized when he said if God listened to the prayers of men, all men would quickly have perished: for they are forever praying for evil against one another. Solomon would have agreed about the evil in man but was unable to let go of the unhappiness it caused him.

As a last thought of Epicurus he said the fool's life is empty of gratitude and full of fears; its course lies wholly toward the future. This is certainly true of Solomon who did not seem to express gratitude to his people or God and he was certainly focused on fear of the future.

From Epicurus we have some rules for now and an exercise.

Rules for conversations with friends:

1. No emotional discussion unless the emotion is laughter
 2. No discussion of medical conditions of yourself unless it is to ask for specific advice
 3. No discussions about others unless it is to find a way to help them, No gossip
 4. No discussion of politics unless it is specific advice about how to vote
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1. Discuss food and drink: restaurants, Farmers markets,
 2. Discuss fashion
 3. Logically discuss religion if you can
 4. Discuss local news focused on what you can do to help
 5. Discuss future events that will be enjoyable.
 6. Discuss sports
 7. Discuss mindfulness
 8. Reminisce about happy events
 9. Laugh about unhappy experiences

At home exercise:

- 1 Give 10 things to the Salvation Army
- 2 Do not buy anything but food and drink necessary for immediate use for one week

Chapter 3 What can Lucius Annaeus Seneca (Seneca the Younger) 4 BC teach us?

Seneca was the tutor to Nero. Nero was evil and worse than he is portrayed. He is the 666 of Revelations. He had part of Rome burned down to make way for his design and blamed it on the Christians. Seneca did not want to be Nero's tutor but Nero would not let him go. Seneca's brother was Gallio who would not let Paul be killed by the Jews. Seneca was a careful observer of the Roman court and the life of the slaves and nobility.

Seneca's overall rules are: Obey God, Do not seek pleasure, Accept the world as it is, Have Gratitude. Seneca says A man's as miserable as he thinks he is. This matches Lincoln who said a man is as happy as he makes up his mind to be. Seneca advised

against quarrelling his advice was: "A quarrel is quickly settled when deserted by one party; there is no battle unless there be two." My sister is a converted Socialist. Logical discussions with Socialists are like trying to teach a pig to sing. It wastes your time and it annoys the pig. I like my sister, she is a good person, but I stay away. Avoid taking such bait by others or giving in to temporary negativity in yourself. Just let it go. Seneca said that he that does good to another does good for himself. It is another's fault if he is not grateful but it is mine if I do not give. Shared joy is increased joy. And one of the best ways to become happier is simply to make others happier. When you do that, positive feelings seem to be generated from within.

Seneca observed that the nobility were always angry. They expected perfection and perfection was never obtained. It was a case of unrealistic expectations. The angry customer at the airline ticket counter is likely the wealthiest in the room. His anger is hurting his body, his brain and the chance that he will get help from the clerk he is berating. I once was on a business trip and I found that my schedule was a problem. The clerk behind the counter had a name tag that read Jefferson. I said please Mr. Jefferson could you do anything to fix my problem. He worked his computer and solved the problem. I imagine if I had been angry and berated him I would not have had my problem resolved. Thanking him profusely when he finished made us both happier.

The domestic help in Hong Kong come from the Philippines. They live in with their employers. They must do what ever they are asked. Their employer can send them back at any time. They have a six day week. On Sunday they will leave their employer early in the morning. They do not have any place to go. On Sunday they are found in the open area of the bus terminal, in the walk over bridges downtown, at the beach or in covered areas at public parks. They do not have any money as they send all of their money back home to support their family. They talk, play cards and visit with their friends. Studies have found that they are happier than any other section of Hong Kong society. Having no more freedom then a slave of ancient Rome and no possessions. They are happier than their employers. It is a mirror of ancient Rome.

My wife and I had sailed our boat to the Exumas in the Bahamas the weather turned and we went into Nassau to wait out the weather. I was sitting on the deck in the shade having a drink and bantering with the natives who were serving drinks. I was enjoying myself and enjoying the local young men discussing life. I overheard two couples at the next table. They owned one of the large yachts and were weathered in like us. They were unhappy and angry. Their captain was not living up to their standards, They had a list of grievances about him, crew members, the weather, the harbor facilities etc. It was exactly as Seneca had observed. The rich people were angry and unhappy while the young men employed at the facility were having a good time.

In Thailand anger is treated like a contagious disease. If someone is angry the locals stay away. The Thais are correct, anger is contagious. The Thais use a smile to stop anger. They have found that you can't be angry and smile at the same time. Trying to preserve anger and smile will only cause laughter. Thailand is sometimes called the land of smiles. When a group is complaining about the mayor, the governor, the president the

anger of one person soon becomes the anger of the group. Change the topic or join a different group. Smiling is not only an antidote for anger it is always helpful. If you smile you will be happier and it will make others happier. I always say smile, it will make others wonder what you are up to.

Dr. Don Colbert, M.D., author of *Deadly Emotions* says anger can damage your health. Anger triggers a biologically embedded “fight-or-flight” response. In ancient times, when human beings faced physical threats like animal predators, the fight-or-flight response saved our lives by pumping our bodies with hormones and chemicals necessary to fuel intense physical action. When anger kicks in, your body readies itself to respond to a perceived threat your muscles tense...your digestive processes stop...and certain brain centers start firing in ways that alter brain chemistry. When angry any bodily function not directly related to fighting or fleeing is put on hold, including: Digestion, Assimilation, Cell production, Body maintenance, Circulation to internal organs, Healing and Immunological defenses. These processes damage internal organs and lead to heart attack, stroke and other diseases. Your heart is especially vulnerable to the deadly effects of anger and its consequences. Researchers at Washington State University conducted a study with participants 50 and older. Those with explosive tempers were significantly more likely to have arterial calcium deposits—a primary indicator of heart attack risk—than those who didn’t. The effects of anger and stress on the brain has been studied by Hotchkiss Brain Institute in Calgary. They have discovered that one of the effects of anger on the brain is that neurons in the hypothalamus, the brain's command center for stress responses, can be compromised. Normally these neurons receive different chemical signals that prompt them to switch on or off. Stress and anger compromise these functions and jeopardize the brain's ability to slow down. All of the damage done by anger is also done by fear by activating the flight or fight response. Laughter may not be the best medicine but it is a good one. According to Dr. Lee Berk researchers investigating the interaction between the brain, behavior, and the immune system found that simply anticipating a mirthful laughter experience boosted health-protecting hormones.

Activity: Think of stories about the people who cut us off in traffic. Is his wife in labor in the back seat? Does he have an overactive bladder? Is she rushing to school because her child has had an accident? Think about how lucky we are not to have those problems. It becomes a fun game and when you think up an outrageous story you may find that it brings a smile.

At an intersection with a traffic signal where there are turn lanes the North / South turn lanes go; then the North / South traffic lanes go; after that the East / West turn lanes go and finally the East / West lanes go. No matter which way you want to go only one of the four possibilities will be green. We should expect 25% of traffic lights to be green when we get there. Count those on the way to the store or the office or the Church. Celebrate when there are less than 75% red. When there are more than 75% red then set this as the new expectation and celebrate when there are less than that. Expect to miss even some of the green lights because of the number of cars in line. Getting upset

because a light turns red is not logical. Seneca would say it is an example of unrealistic expectations.

Solomon doesn't say he is angry except he is unhappy with life. As the richest of the rich he is likely to have the same unrealistic expectations.

We are to live in the present

Live in the present. Seneca said there is no person so severely punished, as those who subject themselves to the whip of their own remorse. True happiness is to enjoy the present, without anxious dependence upon the future. Seneca notes there are more things to alarm us than to harm us, and we suffer more often in apprehension than reality. To be happy we need to remember tomorrow isn't here yet. Yesterday has passed. Now is the present moment. And all three of them are always the present moment when we are living in them. So there is no real space where you and I can change or live in except the one you and me are in right now. But still we insist to spend much time regretting yesterday. Or fearing tomorrow. That's normal. But it's isn't so useful. One of the characteristics of Christianity is the belief by the followers that if they confess their sins and do what they can to sincerely attempt to refrain from further sin God forgives them and they no longer need to worry about their past. This belief is liberating. We can't really do anything about the past. We can learn valuable lessons from it but after that it's not so important. Most of the things we fear will happen in the future rarely show up. A negative attitude can do wonders to create monsters within the mind to occupy much of your time. So, planning your future is very useful but over thinking it is seldom helpful. So much time is lost thinking compulsively, over and over again, about things we have little control over. And it can create a huge amount of suffering inside that is projected and acted out into the world.

Solomon wasn't living in the present.

Chapter 4 What can we learn from Marcus Aurelius 121AD:

Marcus was emperor of Rome from AD 161 till 180. He was also a philosopher and wrote Meditations. During his reign persecution of Christians was severe. He talked a good game but he did nothing to prevent these persecutions.

Marcus repeated much of what was said by those before him We should accept the things to which fate binds you, and love the people with whom fate brings you together, but do so with all your heart. When you arise in the morning think of what a privilege it is to be alive, to think, to enjoy, to love ... Our life is what our thoughts make it. If someone is able to show me that what I think or do is not right, I will happily change, for I seek the truth, by which no one was ever truly harmed. It is the person who continues in his self-deception and ignorance who is harmed. Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present.

Marcus echoed Epicurus when he said: “No one can lose either the past or the future - how could anyone be deprived of what he does not possess? ... It is only the present moment of which either stands to be deprived: and if this is all he has, he cannot lose what he does not have.”

What he added were thoughts about Status anxiety where he said: Or is it your reputation that's bothering you? But look at how soon we're all forgotten. The abyss of endless time that swallows it all. The emptiness of those applauding hands. The people who praise us; how capricious they are, how arbitrary. And the tiny region it takes place. The whole earth a point in space - and most of it uninhabited. The happiness of those who want to be popular depends on others; the happiness of those who seek pleasure fluctuates with moods outside their control; but the happiness of the wise grows out of their own free acts.”

This is what Lao Tsu said 750 years earlier:

Lao Tsu 600 BC

From 13: Favor and disgrace make one fearful
The greatest misfortune is the self
What does "favor and disgrace make one fearful" mean?
Favor is high; disgrace is low
Having it makes one fearful
Losing it makes one fearful
This is "favor and disgrace make one fearful"

From 24: Those who are on tiptoes cannot stand
Those who straddle cannot walk
Those who flaunt themselves are not clear
Those who presume themselves are not distinguished
Those who praise themselves have no merit
Those who boast about themselves do not last

Marcus recommended action where he said: “Do not act as if you had ten thousand years to throw away. Death stands at your elbow. Be good for something while you live and it is in your power.”

We see some of Albert Ellis in Marcus quote: “you are pained by external things, it is not they that disturb you, but your own judgment of them. And it is in your power to wipe out that judgment now.” We will study Albert Ellis later.

Chapter 5 What can we learn from Martin Seligman from the University of Pennsylvania borne 1942:

Martin E. P. "Marty" Seligman is an American psychologist, educator, and author of self-help books. Seligman has been an avid promoter within the scientific community for the field of positive psychology.

He recommends an activity to improve your happiness. Make a list things you are grateful for.

Every night for the next week, set aside ten minutes before you go to sleep. Write down three things that went well today and why they went well... Writing about why the positive events in your life happened may seem awkward at first, but please stick with it for one week. It will get easier. The odds are that you will be less depressed, happier, and addicted to this exercise six months from now.

Thinking about the absence of something positive in your life produces more gratitude and happiness than imagining its presence. What would your life be like if you had not met your spouse? If you did not live in your current neighborhood? If you had not had that chance encounter with the stranger on the plane who later became a business associate?... By taking something away in our minds, we become more aware of benefits that we still have but previously took for granted. Mentally subtracting something good from your life can make you more grateful for it. Think of an aspect of your life for which you feel grateful and then write about the ways in which this might never have happened (e.g., "what would have happened if I had never met my wife?" as opposed to "I am so grateful to have met my wife").

Express gratitude to people in your life. Thank your partner, your neighbor, your clerk, your cleaning person, your relatives, your clergy etc.

Chapter 6 Flow and what can Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi borne 1934 teach us?

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times... The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. He describes the state of composers, Ice skaters and artists that report being in the flow.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi discovered that people find genuine satisfaction during a state of consciousness called Flow. In this state they are completely absorbed in an activity, especially an activity which involves their creative abilities. During this "optimal experience" they feel "strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious, and at the peak of their abilities." In the footsteps of Maslow, Csikszentmihalyi insists that happiness

does not simply happen. It must be prepared for and cultivated by each person, by setting challenges that are neither too demanding nor too simple for one's abilities.

From Eric Barker: The experience of “flow” is strikingly reminiscent of Zhuangzi’s description of “great skill” achieved by Daoist sages such as carpenter P’ien and butcher Ting, the latter finding bliss in the art of chopping up ox carcasses by “going along with the Dao” of the ox. It is no coincidence that these blue-collar sages are situated on the bottom rungs of the social hierarchy. They discover the Dao much more readily than Confucian scholars, who, according to Zhuangzi, are studying the “dregs of wisdom” in lifeless books and have lost touch with the world of concrete affairs.

Mihaly believes it takes 10 years to develop the skills to be able to get in the flow at the highest level. His flow is where high skill matches high challenge. He says our brain only has a limited ability to process thoughts in our conscious. When operating at the high skill / high challenge mode all of our mental processing is in the task and we are not aware of other stimulus or time.

Being in a job or doing tasks that allow our skills to grow where we can handle the high challenge tasks is a formula for high happiness.

Mihaly does say: Take Recess, break at least every 90 minutes. He did a study where he found working without a break for an extended time causes clinical anxiety.

Chapter 7 What can Albert Ellis teach us?

Albert Ellis was an American psychologist who in 1955 developed Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). He wrote the book *The Secret To Never Being Frustrated Again*. Central to REBT teachings is the ancient psychological insight of Epictetus, who said, “What disturbs men's minds is not events but their judgments on events.”

Albert describes how our beliefs interact with circumstances that in turn cause emotions. It works like this:

- A. Something happens.
- B. You have a belief about the situation.
- C. You have an emotional reaction to the belief.

For example:

- A You are cut off in traffic.
- B. You believe, The person was a jerk and unnecessary endangering you
- C. You feel angry.

If you had held a different belief, your emotional response would have been different:

- A. You are cut off in traffic
- B. You believe, He may have an emergency
- C. You feel good about not having a accident

The problem is the three basic musts:

1. I must do well and win the approval of others for my performances or else I am no good.
2. Other people must treat me considerately, fairly and kindly, and in exactly the way I want them to treat me. If they don't, they are no good and they deserve to be condemned and punished.
3. I must get what I want, when I want it; and I must not get what I don't want. It's terrible if I don't get what I want, and I can't stand it.

We can reduce the frequency, the duration, and the intensity of our irrational beliefs by developing three insights:

1. We don't merely get upset but mainly upset ourselves by holding inflexible beliefs.
2. No matter when and how we start upsetting ourselves, we continue to feel upset because we *cling* to our irrational beliefs.
3. The only way to get better is to *work hard* at changing our beliefs. It takes practice, practice, practice.

Accept reality:

Emotionally healthy human beings develop an acceptance of reality, even when reality is highly unfortunate and unpleasant. REBT therapists strive to help their clients develop three types of acceptance: (1) unconditional self-acceptance; (2) unconditional other-acceptance; and (3) unconditional life-acceptance. Each of these types of acceptance is based on three core beliefs:

Unconditional self-acceptance:

1. I am a fallible human being; I have my good points and my bad points.
2. There is no reason why I must not have flaws.
3. Despite my good points and my bad points, I am no more worthy and no less worthy than any other human being.

Unconditional other-acceptance:

1. Other people will treat me unfairly from time to time.
2. There is no reason why they must treat me fairly.
3. The people who treat me unfairly are no more worthy and no less worthy than any other human being.

Unconditional life-acceptance:

1. Life doesn't always work out the way that I'd like it to.
2. There is no reason why life must go the way I want it to.
3. Life is not necessarily pleasant but it is seldom awful and it is nearly always bearable

Activity: Start by listing all of your limitations and shortcomings including moral and ethical failures. For myself: I can't sing, dance, play an instrument, I am incompetent at any sport with a ball, I never could run fast and age hasn't helped. I could go on and did go on but I am not going to put all of my limitations in print. If we are brutally honest we all will come to the conclusion that despite what our mother said we are not special. We are all unique and special to ourselves. We are to love ourselves in spite of any flaws. This also makes it easier to follow Jesus directive to love others as ourselves.

The above exercise will make it easier to accept others even if we are not treated well by them. Just like in the traffic example stories about them will make it easier.

Life is a succession of now. We can look at our now and see if we are in pain; if we are hot or cold; are we hungry or thirsty? Life will give pain, hunger, thirst, heat and cold. In our advanced civilization we are seldom experiencing any of the unpleasant states for very long.

REBT is very effective at increasing happiness. It does require repetition of the steps until we can go through life without upsetting ourselves with a unfounded belief in our superiority and worth, unreasonable and unnecessary beliefs about others motives and how they should treat me and unrealistic expectations of how life will proceed.

Chapter 8 Religion and Happiness

A study in the American Journal of Epidemiology by researchers at the London School of Economics and Erasmus University Medical Center in the Netherlands found that the secret to sustained happiness lies in participation in religion. A study suggests that joining a religious group could do more for someone's "sustained happiness" than other forms of social participation, such as volunteering, playing sports or taking a class. This study was done by people who were atheists or agnostics do not understand Christianity.

Mauricio Avendano, an epidemiologist at LSE and an author of the study, said "The church appears to play a very important social role in keeping depression at bay and also

as a coping mechanism during periods of illness in later life, It is not clear to us how much this is about religion per se, or whether it may be about the sense of belonging and not being socially isolated.”

Researchers looked at four areas: 1) volunteering or working with a charity; 2) taking educational courses; 3) participating in religious organizations; 4) participating in a political or community organization. Of the four, participating in a religious organization was the only social activity associated with sustained happiness, researchers found.

The study analyzed 9,000 Europeans who were older than 50. The report that studied older Europeans also found that joining political or community organizations lost their benefits over time. In fact, the short-term benefits from those social connections often lead to depressive symptoms later on, researchers say.

Although healthier people are more likely to volunteer, the researchers found no evidence that volunteering actually leads to better mental health. Benefits could be outweighed by other negative impacts of volunteering, such as stress, Avendano said.

The researchers noted that it is unclear whether the benefits of participating in a religious organization are connected to being in the religious community, or to the faith itself.

I note, in the Christian religion we are to confess our sins and thereby be forgiven. We are to not worry about the future. We are to love others as we love ourselves. We are to be grateful. This is Seneca and Albert Ellis combined. A typical church service has group singing, meditating and expressing gratitude. There is a group cohesion that provides a sense of belonging and friendship. It is no wonder that Christianity has survived.

In Paul’s letter to the Galatians he said: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Joining a Christian Church and attending a small group in the church will improve happiness. Volunteering to help on specific projects with others is also good. Be careful not to be in a position of responsibility if it is stressful. Stress can undo any of the benefits.

Chapter 9 Tools

Have friends and introduce friends to friends. These need to be people that make you laugh and not those that make you angry. Do things that make your friends happy. It is the little things like: Congratulations on something that they did, Thanking them for what they did for you or others, Complementing them on their looks or dress, Saying their name as a greeting. Giving gifts can be counterproductive as it may lead to their stress in concerns about reciprocation.

We can savour things in life. I describe it as focusing senses one at a time on an enjoyable experience. Relax and close your eyes when listening music you like. Close your eyes and breath in the fragrance of a special food or drink. Look at a beautiful scene as if you are a camera while letting other senses and not let thoughts linger in your conscious. Feel the warmth of another when giving and getting a hug. Look to expand experiences to savour.

Researchers Fred B. Bryant and Joseph Veroff came up with suggestions: Tell friends about an experience that was pleasurable. Good food at a restaurant, a journey that you enjoyed, a game you played etc. Be careful to not repeat and not be bragging. If someone is with you tell them how you are enjoying what you are doing. If someone is not with you rehearse what you are going to say about the experience. If you are enjoying something remember it so that you can relive the experience.

Express happiness openly particularly if it is in conjunction with expression of gratitude. If you hit a home run jump for joy. Again be careful not to brag.

Live in the moment. When I have been sailing and getting the best out of the boat it is a joyful feeling. I can allow the feeling to be intense. Playing a game, fixing a leaking faucet, sewing a pillow or building a model if it is at the top of your game just be in the flow.

Say I am so pleased to have this in my life. Saying it out loud with or without others present will add to the happiness of the event.

Meditation can help in reducing stress and lead to happiness. Meditation can also cause depression. I discuss it in a later chapter.

Chapter 10 Health

We can be happy even with health problems. It is the downward trajectory that will lead to less happiness. If we have bad knees (One of my many limitations) that limit some activities we can be happy. It doesn't limit our choice of friends or our thankfulness. The downward trajectory of our health can make us unhappy. Just like any self help advice document, good diet and regular exercise need to be part of our life. Proper rest is also important depression breeds on insomnia. Embrace where you are now.

Chapter 12 Empathy

Happiness of our species requires a social life. In order to have that life we need to be able to understand others as they understand the world. Having empathy is common to all but the few psychopaths. Three year old children have it and even my dog had it. If I stopped moving and was quiet the dog understood that I was listening and she would stand still and cock her head to listen.

Empathy is the ability to step into some one else's shoes and understanding why they do what they do and think how they think. Empathy guides action when dealing with another. Empathy is not pity it is understanding. I have spent time with the vagrants at the beach to try to understand their motivation. Just listening to them without being judgemental and asking relevant follow up questions seems to brighten their day. I do not feel sorry for the ones I have spoken with. I found that it was their life style choice.

A study at the University of Michigan showed that our empathy is declining. There are theories that this may be caused by less and less real face to face conversations. They have been replaced by texting, addiction to computers and TV. A team from Northwestern University found that the average daily usage of a smart phone for depressed individuals was about 68 minutes. For non-depressed individuals, it was about 17 minutes. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statics we spend 24 hours 54 minutes per week watching TV. This is a ½ time job. If your friends are the TV show Friends you will live an unhappy life. With respect to cause and effect we can't entirely sort it out but if not a direct cause, electronic interaction is certainly reinforcing the loss of empathy.

We have a part of our brain that give us empathy. This is missing in psychopaths. Scientists are able to see it on a brain scan. Some people have more than others and some of this is called social IQ. Just like exercising our muscles can make them stronger, exercising empathy can make it stronger. Most of us are a mix of selfishness and wishing to help others.

Empathy is the basis of good relationships and good relationships are the basis of happiness. Most relationships fall apart fall apart not because there is disagreement about some subject but because each does not see what the other person sees. Empathy would fix many broken marriages. It can't be fixed if one of the partners is a psychopath. If we have empathy we will not follow the golden rule of doing for others what you would have them do for you. It is harder than that: We should do for others as they would have us do for them.

To exercise our empathy power listen. I heard of a company that had all of their sales people provide to the management a list of details about their customer: marital status, the spouses name, children, pets, hobbies, etc. They found that it made their salesmen seem more empathetic and more likely to make a sale. By working to seem empathetic we can become more empathetic. When meeting someone new we can learn about them by asking questions about their life and goals. If we are non judgmental and simply let the persons lead we can learn a great deal. We can also supply supportive comments where we agree. Since even their dog doesn't listen to them they will feel better. It will make them want to be a friend and that in turn makes us happier.

Solomon doesn't show empathy for his people.

Chapter 12 Experience

Having new experiences gives interest to life. It can make us more interesting to our friends. Seeing all ten of the great wonders of the world is not as good as meeting 10 new

people in a new place. Reminisce about new experiences either by thinking about them to ourselves or sharing them with others.

When we are on a cruise rather than take a tour to see some ancient ruin, cathedral or natural formation I prefer to find a local hang out and visit with the natives. There are usually some retired people in a park, locals in a coffee house or workers on a break. The conversations are fascinating. They ask me about the US, where I live and what I do. They tell me about their life. They often have pictures of their wife and children. In Asia it allows them to practice their English. It is certainly more enjoyable than the droning of a tour guide and being with a group of ungrateful people taking worse pictures than are available on postcards. It is a helpful way to increase empathy. (I just noticed how unempathetic I am to fellow tourists. I didn't say I was perfect.)

My wife Harriet and I try many things, many of which do not turn out well. We often say: "Well, we don't have to do that again." Our friends find it more interesting when we share bad new experiences. They can be a warning or they can just be an interesting story. We can laugh about them later in any event. Laughter takes all of the pain out an unpleasant experience.

Chapter 13 Mindfulness / Meditation

Eric Barker: "Mindfulness practice brings all sorts of insights into the workings of the mind. Perhaps the hardest to grasp is the idea that thoughts are not reality. We're so accustomed to providing a narrative track to our lives and believing in our story that to see things otherwise is a real challenge. Remember, this practice is not about emptying the mind, getting rid of difficult emotions, escaping life's problems, being free of pain, or experiencing never-ending bliss. Mindfulness practice is about embracing our experience as it is—and sometimes what is can be unpleasant at the moment... We usually try to feel better by decreasing the intensity of painful experiences; in mindfulness practice, we work instead to increase our capacity to bear them. Ronald Siegel, Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychology at Harvard said: "The working definition of mindfulness that my colleagues and I find most helpful is awareness of present experience with acceptance."

Watching our minds work is a revelation. We will see that we jump from thought to thought and nearly every one causes some emotion.

As Nobel Prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman noted

"Nothing in life is as important as you think it is while you are thinking about it."

And research by Harvard happiness expert Daniel Gilbert shows that a wandering mind is not a happy mind:

”People spend 46.9 percent of their waking hours thinking about something other than what they’re doing, and this mind-wandering typically makes them unhappy... ”Mind-wandering is an excellent predictor of people’s happiness,” Killingsworth says. “In fact, how often our minds leave the present and where they tend to go is a better predictor of our happiness than the activities in which we are engaged.”... Time-lag analyses conducted by the researchers suggested that their subjects’ mind-wandering was generally the cause, not the consequence, of their unhappiness.”

Joseph Goldstein notes:

“Anybody who's paid any attention to their minds will know throughout the day there's a run of thoughts going through our heads. Usually, we're quite caught up in them and identified with them. We take them to be who we are. Without mindfulness, we're lost in the dream of our thoughts in these mind created worlds and we're not even aware that that's what's happening, we're so enmeshed in them.”

You need to do this more often, rather than assuming just because it's in your head, it's you and it's to be taken seriously. Here's Sharon Salzberg:

“I think one of the issues that we have is that we don't necessarily recognize that a thought is just a thought. We have a certain thought, we take it to heart, we build a future on it, we think, "This is the only thing I'll ever feel", "I'm an angry person and I always will be", "I'm going to be alone for the rest of my life", and that process happens pretty quickly.”

From Joseph Goldstein’s book, Mindfulness:

“...contrary to some popular beliefs, our aim should be not to follow the heart but to train the heart. All of us have a mix of motivations; not everything in our hearts is wise or wholesome. The great power of mindful discernment allows us to abandon what is unwholesome and to cultivate the good. This discernment is of inestimable value for our happiness and wellbeing.”

“Where is this action leading? Do I want to go there? ...This thought which has arisen, is it helpful? Is it serving me or others in some way or is it not? Is it just playing out perhaps old conditions of fear or judgment or things that are not very helpful for ourselves or others? Mindfulness really helps us both see and discern the difference and then it becomes the foundation then for making wiser choices and why the choices lead to more happiness. It's really simple. It's not easy to do, but it's very simple.”

From Sharon Salzbers:

“What we're talking about with mindfulness is not in any way eradicating thoughts or annihilating them, but being able to have a little bit of space so we can make a clear decision: Do I want to nurture this or do I want to let it go?”

ou need to not be overwhelmed by the feeling in order to remedy it and mindfulness helps you keep that distance so you can be of help. From Joseph Goldstein:

“Mindfulness has a key role in the development of compassion. In the face of suffering, compassion is that desire of, "How can I help in this situation?" What's necessary for compassion to arise is a willingness to come close to the suffering and this is not always easy to do. Very often in the face of suffering you don't want to see it because it's unpleasant. Mindfulness allows us to let it in and when we let it in and come close to it, that's precisely the condition for compassion to arise.”

Meditation:

When people think of Meditation a picture of Buddhists in saffron robes come to mind. Meditation is not about Buddhism or about any religion. A meditative state is a state of mind that can reduce stress and help us put our life in perspective. As mentioned before it can also trigger depression. There are four states of the brain each with characteristic brain wave patterns: Deep Sleep, REM Sleep, Awake and Meditative. As mentioned before mediation can also trigger depression. If it is not helpful, stop.

There many ways to meditate, none of them wrong. It is only a question of finding what works for you. I find the following works for me: I sit upright in a chair with my hands in my lap. I close my eyes and think of relaxing my feet, then my legs, then my hands then my arms, then my back and then my face. I allow the background sounds of air conditioning system, traffic, distant conversations to move through my conscious but not dwell on them. I pay attention to my breathing and then allow it to be in the background. When thoughts of things like schedules and tasks come to mind I refocus on breathing or use the mantra aba to replace them. For me it is refreshing, unlike a nap. Rather than feeling groggy or weak afterwards I feel invigorated and my senses are more aware.

I also find that I can do a meditative experience with my eyes open. I let the vision pass like letting sounds pass. It can be done at a red light. Focus on the light. When it changes I come out of the meditative state.

This is how Dan Harris describes his technique:

It really involves three extremely simple steps. One: Sit with your eyes closed and your back straight. Two: Notice what it feels like when your breath comes in and when your breath goes out, try to bring your full attention to the feeling of your

breath coming in and going out. The Third step is the biggie. Every time you try to do this, your mind is going to go crazy. You are going to start thinking about all sorts of stupid things like if you need a haircut, why you said that dumb thing to your boss, what's for lunch, etc. Every time you notice that your mind is wandering, bring your attention back to your breath and begin again. This is going to happen over and over and over again and that is meditation.

Eric Barker provided the basis for the following:

The Buddhists have Meditation called Loving Kindness Meditation. It consists of thinking about someone and thinking: May you be happy, May you be healthy, May you be safe and May you live with ease. It is to be done slowly thinking about each part and really wishing these good things on someone. Start with loved ones and then friends, then acquaintances, then to those you do not know and to people who are difficult. Finally wish these things on all beings. It is easier to do than most meditation because you are using your mind in an active way. It is not a substitute for the more passive meditation but it can be used in addition to passive meditation.

It will do two good things. It will make you more empathetic you will also really wish these things on everyone. This in turn will make you more likable. It will also make you less envious. Remember reducing wants is better than increasing things.

Chapter 14 Why be happy

Happier people have more friends and happier friends. This is a good circle to be in. Happier people have better careers. They find it easier to get hired, to keep a job and be promoted. Happier people are better salesmen. It is easier for them to get help from their peers. Grumps elicit negative reactions and this is a bad cycle. The biggest reason to be happy: Why not have a better life?

Chapter 15 What Solomon Discovered.

In the end Solomon discovered that we could and should enjoy the present, enjoy youth, enjoy each day but remember you will be judged by God. His findings are the same as Seneca, Epicurus, Lao Tsu, Buddha and others. It is interesting how all of the ancient religions and ancient philosophers converge on the same things.

Chapter 16 Review list in random order

It is not practical to try everything a once. Try some of the tools to happiness. Focus on the ones that suit you best. Go back and look at the list from time to time and try to add others. Check on progress with the Oxford Happiness questioner.

Have friends that make you happier

Be thankful and express it to others

Help others

Have empathy

Have integrity

Look for new social experiences

Live in the present

Have less stuff

Follow the commandment to not covet

Have a belief system that eliminates being upset

Do not worry about status

Do not chase pleasure

Smile

Practice mindfulness

Meditate

Forgive

Look for flow experiences

Take care of your body

Practice religion

Additional thoughts

This is not about happiness directly but it is about living a happier lower stress and more fulfilling life. A parishioner of Assumption in downtown St. Paul, Thalhuber, 77, spent 40 years practicing hospice care. serving as its medical director, St. Paul hospice home now known as Our Lady of Peac, a position he held until 2009, eight years after retiring from his private practice. “It was there that I learned about the dying patient,” he told The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. “What they taught me about my own mortality is to trust and be grateful. And trust trumps all. When patients trusted, and were grateful for what they had accomplished and who they were, and knew who they were, it was a very powerful experience.”

When confronting a possible fatal event these same thoughts are what come to mind. Marcus Aurelius is right, death is always at our elbow. Fear like anger drives the fight or flight response. In the modern world extra adrenalin is seldom helpful in a dangerous situation. Clear thinking is the best response. Without the fear of dying we can be more rational in a dangerous situation.

A few years ago there was a flight from Australia to the United States. While over the Pacific, a long way from any possible landing, one of the engines caught fire. The passengers all knew that death was a significant possibility. Their were two distinct different possible reactions.

Reaction A: Blind fear with high levels of adrenalin. Muscles clenched, stomach tight, mind racing, logic gone.

Reaction B: Thinking about possible escape with a water landing. Mapping out the path to the exit, checking for the life vest and once there was no longer additional planning possible sitting back, forgiving anyone that had done harm in the past, reminiscing happy times and thanking people that had been helpful. It was a good time to meditate. Reaction two is only possible if life is lived as if death is at our elbow.

If the plane did crash, reaction B people would have been more likely to survive. When the plane did land safely reaction B people would be motivated to be more thankful to others and in some cases express forgiveness. The experience would have been positive and something to share with friends. Churchill said that in war hearing a bullet go by and not being hit was exhilarating experience.

Reaction A people would be less likely to survive if the plane did crash. When the plane did not crash they would have damaged internal organs including a damaged heart. They would also have real brain damage.

Diet and depression

The usual American diet has a high content of high glycemic carbohydrates. These carbohydrate are quickly broken down to simple sugars and enter the blood. High levels of sugars are toxic to tissue. The pancreas produces insulin to prevent the sugars from running free. The insulin carries the sugar to where it can be used to produce energy, to produce glycogen a animal starch for temporary storage or make fat. After the sugar rush is past the insulin continues to transport sugar out of the blood. The result is low sugar. Continued cycles of high sugar, high insulin, low sugar will cause insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes.

Long before the actual diabetes the low sugar periods produce depression. The temporary low sugar will turn down metabolism which also turns down the brain. Limiting high glycemic foods like potatoes, rice, bread and cereals and replacing them with low glycemic foods like beans, nuts, seeds, most vegetables and most fruits will reduce the sugar spike and resultant insulin spike.

This reduction of high glycemic foods is also good for health in general.

Subjective Happiness Scale

- Permission is granted for all non-commercial use.
- A PDF of the scale can be downloaded [here](#).
- To score the scale, reverse code the 4th item (i.e., turn a 7 into a 1, a 6 into a 2, a 5 into a 3, a 3 into a 5, a 2 into a 6, and a 1 into a 7), and compute the mean of the 4 items. Norms are available in the reference below, as well as in many other publications that have used the scale (see PsycInfo).
- Please cite the following scale validation paper in all work mentioning the scale.
 - Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. (1999). [A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation](#). *Social Indicators Research*, 46, 137-155. The original publication is available at www.springerlink.com.

SCALE IS SHOWN BELOW:

For each of the following statements and/or questions, please circle the point on the scale that you feel is most appropriate in describing you.

1. In general, I consider myself:

not a very happy person 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 a very happy person

2. Compared with most of my peers, I consider myself:

less happy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 more happy

3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 a great deal

4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 a great deal