

Making HAPPY

THE ART AND SCIENCE
OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE

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#1 New York Times Best-Selling Authors


WORTHY[®]
PUBLISHING

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Published by Worthy Publishing, a division of Worthy Media, Inc., 134 Franklin Road,
Suite 200, Brentwood, Tennessee 37027.

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Helping People Experience the Heart of God

eBook edition available wherever digital books are sold

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013954260

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Published in association with Yates & Yates, yates2.com

ISBN: 978-1-61795-120-6 (hardcover w/ jacket)

Cover Design: Brandon Hill Design

Interior Design and Typesetting: Hudson & Associates

Printed in the United States of America

13 14 15 16 17 LBM 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

1 Let the Happiness Begin

Happiness isn't a mood. It's a way of life.

Noel Smogard

THE LIST OF FAMOUS students from the hallowed halls of Harvard University is long, to be sure: John Hancock, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Helen Keller, Leonard Bernstein, John F. Kennedy, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Mark Zuckerberg, to name just a few. It makes sense. After all, the school has a long history. And as the oldest institution of higher education in the United States, founded in 1636, Harvard is pretty entrenched in convention and tradition. But not as much as you might guess.

Beginning in 2006, two professors, Tal Ben-Shahar and Shawn Achor, offered an unconventional course that remains the most popular class on campus, with an attendance of about fifteen hundred students per semester. No course has ever commanded such numbers at Harvard. Not before or since.

Professor Achor admits that he and Ben-Shahar have been shocked by its popularity. They never dreamed so many students

The greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances.

Martha Washington

would be interested in what they are teaching: *happiness*. But they are.

The Science of Happiness, the official course title, is often dubbed Happiness 101, and as the course syllabus says, it focuses

on “aspects of a fulfilling and flourishing life.” Remember, this is Harvard University—the school known for its high academic standards and rigorous requirements. How could such a course on such a squishy topic be taken seriously?

Getting Serious about Happiness

Hearing that Harvard was offering a course on happiness caused some scholars at other august institutions around the country to raise an eyebrow or two. Some skeptics believed it was a hoax. When Tal Ben-Shahar appeared as a guest on Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, Stewart asked how he could “get away” with a scholarly school having a course on such a soft and fuzzy subject. Ben-Shahar answered, “We now have a science of happiness.”¹

And we do. The word *science* is right there in the course title. But it’s more than semantics. The number of scholarly studies on happiness has exploded over the past two decades. Until recently, the countless studies produced by social scientists had been directed toward the other end of the human experience continuum—anxiety, depression, neurosis, obsessions, paranoia, delusions, and depression.

Why? It all started about one hundred years ago with a doctor in Vienna, Austria.

Paging Dr. Freud

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, wasn't a happy camper. He saw human beings as troubled creatures in need of repair. Freud himself was profoundly pessimistic about human nature, saying we are governed by deep, dark drives that we can barely control.

B. F. Skinner and the behaviorists who followed Freud weren't much happier, viewing human life as mechanistic if not robotic: humans were passive beings mercilessly shaped by stimuli and rewards or punishments.

In fact, some of psychology's most well-known experiments proved that normal people could become coldly insensitive to suffering and even cruelly sadistic. Research funders invested in subjects like *conformity*, *neurosis*, and *depression*.

The Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry, the expensive clinical bible of psychiatry, has five hundred thousand lines of text. There are thousands of lines on anxiety and depression and hundreds of lines on terror, shame, guilt, anger, and fear. But there are only five lines on hope, one line on joy, and not a single line on compassion, creativity, forgiveness, laughter, or

The great Western disease is, 'I'll be happy when . . . When I get the money. When I get a BMW. When I get this job.' Well, the reality is, you never get to when. The only way to find happiness is to understand that happiness is not out there. It's in here. And happiness is not next week. It's now.

Marshall Goldsmith



love. You get the idea. From the beginning and for nearly a century, social scientists have had little to say about positive virtues. But not anymore. Something happened in 1998 that changed everything.

O Happy Day!

When University of Pennsylvania psychologist Martin Seligman was elected president of the American Psychological Association by the largest vote in the organization's history, he gave a powerful keynote address to his fellow psychologists. On a balmy October night in North Carolina, his message was clear and blunt: he wanted psychologists to expand their myopic focus on treating mental illness and include promoting mental health. The same month, in the organization's newsletter, he wrote a piece titled "Building Human Strength: Psychology's Forgotten Mission," and said: "Psychology

My happiness grows in direct proportion to my acceptance, and in inverse proportion to my expectations.

Michael J. Fox

is not just the study of weakness and damage, it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken, it is nurturing what is best within ourselves."² No doubt about it,

Seligman wanted nothing short of a new day, a sea change, a transformation or even a revolution of his profession. And he got it.

Seligman's speech and the work that followed launched a new movement among social scientists that is now known as Positive Psychology.³ As evidence, you'll find scientific journals dedicated to it, massive funding, countless studies, and hundreds of courses like the one on happiness at Harvard. Pathology, of course, still garners

plenty of grant money and research, but a new wave of science has shed an amazing amount of light on the positive virtues and character qualities most humans aspire to.⁴

Before going too much further, however, let's make sure we know what we're talking about when we say *happiness*.

Happiness Defined

Serious exploration of happiness isn't new, of course. Classical thinkers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle gave plenty of attention to it. And every language, without exception, going back to

Success is getting what you want, happiness is wanting what you get.

W. P. Kinsella

ancient Greek, has a word for *happiness*. But while we use the same word, we often don't mean the same thing.

People prior to the late seventeenth century thought happiness was a matter of luck or divine favor. Even the root of *happiness*, *hap*, means "chance." Happiness was not something you could control. It was dictated by fate or fortune. Happiness literally happened to us and was out of our hands.

Today we think of happiness more as a skill that can be developed. The founding fathers of the United States, in fact, made clear that happiness was a right to be *pursued*. This new way of thinking engendered more noble humanitarian sentiments—the belief that suffering is inherently wrong and that all people, in all places, should have the opportunity to be happy.

But this new way of thinking about happiness also comes with a challenge. When happiness becomes a given *right*, it backs away

from being something won through moral cultivation, carried out over the course of a well-lived life. Instead, it runs the risk of becoming

Happiness is not in our circumstance but in ourselves. It is not something we see, like a rainbow, or feel, like the heat of a fire. Happiness is something we are.

John B. Sheerin

ing something “out there” that is not only pursued, but also caught and consumed. And that’s where the pursuit of happiness can cause problems.⁵

Before we delineate happiness further, let’s pause for a moment and ask: What is *your* definition of a happy life? Are you living

it? Think carefully about this because your definition of *happiness* will influence every other significant decision you make. That may sound like an overstatement, but your definition of *happiness* really does frame your approach to living. If you think happiness is outside you, for example, you will make happiness into a search or a reward to discover or earn. If, however, you know happiness is inside you, then happiness becomes more of a compass, enabling you to live a better life.

These two basic perspectives are not so much the definition of *happiness* as they are the means to finding it. So let’s make the definition easy. Ready?

Happiness is the emotional state of feeling satisfaction, playfulness, contentedness, amusement, cheeriness, serenity, gratification, elation, triumph, joy, and/or bliss.

It’s important to note that *happiness*, in this definition, is a state. That means it’s not static. In other words, even the happiest of people—the cheeriest 10 percent—feel blue at times. And even the bluest have their moments of joy. Like all feelings, happiness can ebb and flow.

There you have it: a straightforward, if not informal, definition of *happiness*. But let's dig deeper. Why? Because happiness—the kind that embodies deep joy—is more than a feeling. To really get to the underlying meaning of *happiness*, you've got to not only pinpoint the feeling but also where it comes from. Why? Because the source of your happiness can make or break your personal pursuit of it.

The Two Wells of Happiness

When someone asked Eleanor Roosevelt to define *happiness*, here's what she said: “A feeling that you have been honest with yourself and those around you; a feeling that you have done the best you could both in your personal life and in your work; and the ability to love others.” Mrs. Roosevelt obviously understood happiness to be an inside job.

Researchers call that *intrinsic* happiness because it's values-based. It's the result of personal growth, healthy relationships, contributing to the common good. *Extrinsic* happiness, on the other hand, is feelings based and comes about from obtaining rewards, praise, money, status, or popularity.

Harvard social psychologist William McDougall said people can be happy while in pain and unhappy while experienc-

The gap between our professed values and our practiced values is the gap between us and our happiness.

Marc Gafni

ing pleasure. Take a moment to let that sink in. You can only be happy in pain when it's values-based. And you can only be unhappy while experiencing pleasure when it's feelings-based. We're really talking about two kinds of happiness that both result in feelings of

satisfaction, gratification, and all the rest, but that have very different levels of shelf life.

Feel-good happiness is the momentary sensation of pleasure. When we joke around or have sex, we experience feel-good happiness. But here's the catch: we know from research that feel-good happiness is ruled by the law of diminishing returns. This type of happiness can lose its punch and it rarely lasts longer than a few hours at a time.

Value-based happiness is a deeper sense that our lives have meaning and fulfill a larger purpose than just pleasure. It represents a spiritual source of satisfaction. And here's some good news: it's not ruled by the law of diminishing returns. This means there's no limit to how meaningful and happy our lives can be. Some like to call values-based happiness *joy* because it's deep and more abiding. That's fine with us. Whatever you call it, it's found in our values.

Value-based happiness is the great equalizer in life. You can find value-based happiness if you are rich or poor, smart or mentally challenged, athletic or clumsy, popular or socially awkward. Wealthy people are not necessarily happy, and poor people are not necessarily unhappy. Values, more than pleasure, provide a deeper well for true happiness, and it's a well everyone can drink from. After all, everybody has the potential to live in accordance with his or her values.

How to Increase Your Odds of Disappointment

Happiness has increasingly been thought to be more about getting little infusions of pleasure, about feeling good rather than being good. For the uninformed, happiness becomes less about a well-lived

life and more about experiencing the well-felt moment. That's a dead end to true and solid happiness.

When feel-good happiness becomes more important than value-based happiness, hedonism rears its head. And narcissism isn't far behind. Feeling

good becomes the ultimate goal. Toughing it out and self-sacrifice are avoided at all costs. Self-seeking indulgence becomes the name of the game. Their orientation toward external sources of happiness means they're looking for things like admiration, acquiring stuff, and status. And we know from research that people who lean into this kind of happiness report less satisfaction and feel less energized.

It's known as the *hedonistic paradox*: when one aims solely towards pleasure itself, one's aim is continually frustrated. That's what novelist Edith Wharton was getting at when she said: "If we'd stop trying to be happy we could have a pretty good time." It's also what underlies what the great teacher Helen Keller said: "True happiness is not attained through gratification, but through a worthy purpose."

Of course, if you swing back the other direction too far and try to avoid feel-good happiness altogether, you risk becoming a stoic or puritan who relies on duty and represses pleasure to prove you can endure without having fun. And who wants that—especially in marriage? Either way, if you embrace one form of happiness exclusively, you instantly increase the odds for being disappointed.

Happiness doesn't depend on what we have, but it does depend on how we feel toward what we have. We can be happy with little and miserable with much.

William Dempster Hoard



Healthy happiness involves balance. That's why at the heart of this book you'll find a half dozen proven happiness boosters for couples that intermingle both feel-good and value-based happiness. They include things like counting your blessings, trying new things, attuning your spirits, and so on. While some may appear to be exclusive to one camp or the other, they're not. For married couples, these actions are not one-off tricks or techniques to conjure contentment. They are not mere mood managers. They are a way of life. Scratch that. They are a way of being happy in love together.

This Is Your Brain on Happiness

At the base of your brain is a bundle of nerves that wander throughout your body, linking your heart, lungs, and stomach as well as your facial and vocal muscles. The nerve bundle is known as the vagus nerve. It comes from a Latin word that literally means “wander-

It is pleasing to God
whenever thou rejoicest or
laughest from the bottom of
thy heart.

Martin Luther

ing” (think *vagabond*). Your vagus nerve reduces your heart rate and blood pressure while quietly communicating with the muscles that control respiration and digestion. It's a messenger to your brain saying everything is all

right.⁶ It's closely associated with oxytocin, the all-important hormone of human trust and devotion.

Oxytocin is essential to happiness, according to Jon Haidt, professor at the University of Virginia. In his view, human happiness

derives neither from external validation nor solely from within, but from *between*—through the relationships created by love and “something larger than yourself”—whether it’s a religious group, a volunteer organization, or a political campaign. “If happiness comes from between,” Haidt says, “then oxytocin is the hormone of between. It’s the catalyst that helps bond people together.”⁷

Oxytocin, often referred to as the love hormone, makes us more sympathetic, supportive, and open with our feelings—all necessary for couples to be happy in love. Studies at Claremont Graduate University have shown that high-oxytocin couples finish each other’s sentences, laugh together, and touch each other more often.⁸

Puritanism is the haunting
fear that someone,
somewhere, may be happy.

H. L. Mencken

The chemicals in our body make us easier to love and be loved. And they are inextricably linked with feeling happy.⁹ It’s no exaggeration to say we’re designed to be happy in love. Of course we don’t always hang our happiness on the right actions. That’s what this book is about. But make no mistake, you’re built to be happy and so is your marriage.

Easy to Live With

Some people are afraid to value happiness. It’s true. They think it’s selfish. Until the eighteenth century, Western standards encouraged, if anything, a slightly saddened approach to life, with facial expressions to match. Walk through any historical portrait gallery to see

what we mean—including the ambivalent smile of a Mona Lisa. Back in the day, good Protestants “allowed no joy or pleasure, but a kind of melancholic demeanor and austerity.”¹⁰ They felt it best for sinful humanity to display a somewhat sorrowful humility.

Do you think that’s what God wants? We agree with Catherine Marshall who asked: “Whence comes this idea that if what we are

No one can live without delight, and that is why a man deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures.

Thomas Aquinas

doing is fun, it can’t be God’s will?

The God who made giraffes, a baby’s fingernails, a puppy’s tail, a crooknecked squash, the bobwhite’s call, and a young girl’s giggle, has a sense of humor. Make no mistake about that.”¹¹

Even Jesus said, “I’ve told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature.”¹²

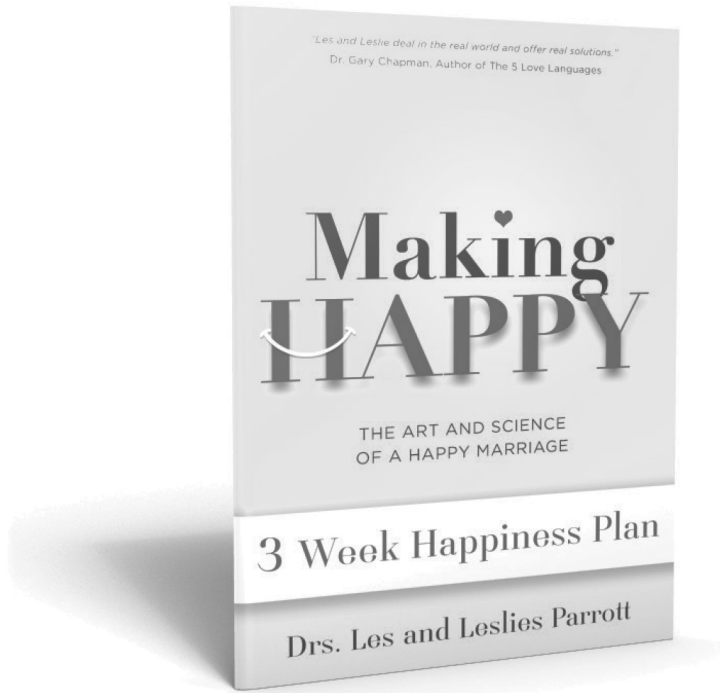
Still, some sincere people, even today, have a tough time valuing happiness because they think it’s selfish. But isn’t the opposite really true? Isn’t unhappiness the ultimate form of self-indulgence? When you’re unhappy, you tend to be self-consumed. You take yourself pretty seriously. Happy people, on the other hand are more selfless. When we choose to value happiness, gratitude, playfulness, and joy, we become easy to live with. If this sentiment doesn’t sit so well with you, if you’re holding onto the idea that happiness is selfish, hang in there with us. We’re going to shed more light on this in the next chapter when we expose the “hat trick of happiness.”

This book is dedicated to helping you be happy in love together. Does that mean the proverbial fairytale of living happily ever after? We’ll get to that. For now it means being easy to live with. And that makes every couple happy.

For Reflection

1. Why do you think it took social scientists so long to begin studying happiness and well-being?
2. What do you make of the two wells of happiness: feel-good happiness and value-based happiness? Do you agree that value-based happiness is the great equalizer in life? Why or why not?
3. Are you easy to live with? Why or why not? And if you increased your level of happiness, do you think it would make you easier to live with? How so?

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