

Have you for once really thought about what makes us happy? In the whole of human history, individuals have usually been pursuing happiness – it could be the olden Greeks, Buddha, or nowadays happiness researchers.

But, in spite of the huge human attempt to find the secret to happiness, the basic questions persist: What is happiness? Also, how can it be accomplished?

In the whole of human history, there have been a lot of various common concepts about what makes up happiness. Due to that, individuals looked for happiness in places as diverse as exercise, riches, religion, also food.

But, nowadays, there looks to be an agreement: happiness implies having the appropriate relationship between one's personality as well as the environment.

Jonathan Haidt observes how the working of the human mind can affect our happiness In The Happiness Hypothesis. Particularly, he claims that we usually think that our rational self – what he refers to as our “rational rider” – guides our day-day decision making, when as a matter of it's controlled by our intuitive, emotional self (our “inner elephant”).

In this book chapter, you'll discover the reason why learning how the mind functions are the first step to take in order to achieve being a happier individual and the reason why passion is particularly vital to romantic relationships at the start.

Lastly, you'll find out the reason why healthy social relationships are vital to our health, and the reason why giving is more helpful to our health than getting.

Chapter 1 - Our mind is separated: or the mind of a human that works as a rational rider on a wild elephant.

Have you ever observed how it is so easy to have New Year's resolutions than it is to abide by them?

What is the reason for that?

The reason is that the mind isn't a unit; however, it is really separated into two different parts. One comparison for this divided mind is a wild elephant that is ridden by a human being who is attempting his possible best to being in charge of it. This division can be seen working in various means:

First of all, we cannot completely control the body with conscious thought. For instance, the human heart behaves separately from the mind, because our heart rate cannot be controlled consciously. The reason is that we have a second brain, known as the "gut-brain," whose deeds are autonomous and can't be guided by rational choices.

Therefore, in terms of the above-stated metaphor, our heart rate is influenced by how fast our inner elephant is racing, and it is not influenced by the rider's rational conscious decision making.

Secondly, and furthermore, this division is shown in our brain structure.

Although older structures such as the limbic system are in control of simple instincts, like hunger and sex, the newer neocortex is in charge of inhibition as well as reasoning, which makes us keep the drives, as well as desires that arise from the older regions of the brain in control. The purpose of the neocortex can be noticed most evidently in how individuals whose neocortex is impaired behave: when they get hungry, they can't put off eating; and when they get aroused, they can't prevent themselves from harassing others sexually.

In order to control our simple drives, the rider makes use of language to plan before time and guide the elephant, who is in charge of feelings as well as instincts. But, in real life, rather than making use of reason in our decision making, we normally let our emotions guide us – which implies that the elephant of our metaphor, who works more or less involuntary, has a tendency to be stronger than the rider.

**Chapter 2 - Even though genes affect our happiness,
transforming the way we think can make us happier.**

Anybody who has ever read one of the numerous self-help books available will be conversant with this term: “Nothing is inherently good or bad; just our thinking makes it seem like that.”

However, is it really possible to change the manner we think? Also, if it is possible, what precisely can we do to alter it?

The actual hindrance is that our inner elephant has a tendency to assess all the things we see – and normally in a really negative manner. Because our forefathers’ survival rested on their ability to identify risk, we’ve grown to react more powerfully to things that are worse than to things that are good.

For instance, if we came directly with a wild animal, we’d feel anxiety and dread that would cause us to run away. However, in order to feel joy over a thing we’d already gotten was redundant, as it didn’t offer us the motivation to acquire more of it.

Similar to how a real elephant gets shocked when it spots a mouse, our inner elephant reacts excessively with fear and concern of things that are not likely to harm or kill us –such as getting scared over the presentation we need to deliver at our work.

However, our genetics as well is partially in charge of our disposition to have either an optimistic or a pessimistic view.

For example, a study discovered that babies who showed mainly right-brain activity were less happy than the babies who were essentially left-brain active, even extending into adulthood. Also, other studies reveal that about 50-80% of someone’s average level of happiness is influenced by their genetic material.

Therefore, it seems that our elephant cannot be regulated at any time by our rational rider. But, the rider can use specific skills to teach the elephant to be happier.

For instance, meditating regularly can extremely decrease pessimistic, negative thinking; hence, changing our view of the world into a more optimistic view. Cognitive therapy is another technique, which was established during the 1960s and has been confirmed to effectively heal depression. Cognitive therapy entails the effort to substitute negative, self-blaming thought patterns with more positive thoughts.

Chapter 3 - Reciprocity is the simple basis we form our social lives on.

Assuming you got a Christmas card from a person you barely know, what would be your action? You'd probably send back a card to the person in return.

The reason is that human beings have an extremely in-built instinct to reciprocate.

We've grown into reciprocal beings since reciprocity extremely improved the chances of survival for the whole group.

Consider, for instance, groups whose survival relies on hunting. If one of the members of the group kills more prey than he needs for himself, he can share his prey with a less privileged group member.

Deciding not to share provides no benefit to him because the surplus food will become wasted. Also, if in the future, the other member reciprocates the act, he can anticipate getting the exact quantity back in return.

However, reciprocity does not usually serve us well: it's really a simple instinct to us that we'll at times reciprocate when it even goes against our own interest.

Think about the following experiment: two participants are offered \$25 among them. The first participant has the chance to choose how the money will be allocated, and the second participant can only accept or reject the deal. But, if the second decides to refuse the offer, both participants get nothing. Logically, the first participant should give the second only a dollar.

But, the majority of the people who take part in this experiment essentially gave half of the total amount. However, if the first participant gives below \$7, the majority of the second people would reject, choosing to get no money. This is interesting because logically the receiver should choose to make \$1 compared to nothing at all.

The principle of reciprocity is really powerful that individuals will respond with retaliation if it is defiled –usually by gossiping about the person. If a person doesn't fulfill our desire for a reciprocal relationship, we'll tell the other members of our group about him in an attempt to destroy his status as a member.

Chapter 4 - A big obstacle in a lot of relationships is our failure to notice our own mistakes.

Have you ever been in a fight with a person and thought about how it is possible for the other person not to notice their own mistakes as well as flaws? This feeling was most likely mutual.

We have a tendency not to see our own mistakes since understanding that we're imperfect is totally unpleasant to us. Certainly, due to that, both our elephant as well as rider neglect to notice them.

Our resistance to the unpleasantness of seeing our own errors is really powerful that, for instance, if we're accused of doing a wrong thing, our instant response (meaning, our elephant's response) is inner denial.

Also, in reaction to this spontaneous, instant response of the elephant, the conscious rider hurries to justify it. Instead of calmly thinking about the accusation, the rider searches for just those elements which support the elephant's initial response.

Although this process is somewhat normal, the rider's bias towards the elephant usually leads to conflict among people.

The reason is that we usually see the world based on good vs. evil and we like to think that we're on the good part. The outcome is that we usually don't notice our errors.

Consider, for instance, the normal dynamic among individuals sharing a living space. Fights among flatmates usually happen over who does more house chore. Maybe one thinks that he does the majority of the cooking, whereas the other flatmates argue that she does most of the cleaning. During that process, every flatmate ignores the other's work and backs it up with explanations such as, "But you like to cook; therefore, it does not actually work for you."

Although that kind of conflict can look like a continuous cycle of mutual blame, the cycle can be stopped. For example, if we put a conscious attempt into looking for errors that we ourselves made, we can minimize our cognitive biases to at least a little extent.

Also, based on the principle of reciprocity, the other party will most likely then acknowledge their own errors or flaws, and on this basis, we're able to honestly apologize and fix the conflict.

Chapter 5 - In order to be a person that is happy, you require the right people in your life and to do the things you're good at.

If we believe that the way we think influences our opinion of things as being either good or bad, it results that the external world would not have any impact on our happiness.

But, this is just partly true.

Due to the fact that individuals have a powerful tendency to acclimatize to new situations, external circumstances have a really small lasting impact on our happiness. The reason is that, from an evolutionary view, concentrating and acclimatizing to new situations in our lives has usually been more significant than being happy about former ones.

This can be noticed in the results of one research that studied the happiness levels of lottery winners and individuals who were paralyzed from the neck downward. The research discovered that the lottery winners were actually much happier –however, just for a short period. Certainly, after a lot of months had gone, the majority of the subjects of both groups had gone back to their previous level of happiness.

But, specific external circumstances are really vital to our happiness that we basically cannot acclimatize to them.

For example, since humans are social animals, healthy social relationships are very vital to our health. Certainly, if we don't have social relationships, we can get extremely unhappy.

The number as well as the depth of our relationships is the most significant external factor to our happiness. As a matter of fact, individuals who have a bigger number of friends or who have happily married report higher levels of happiness averagely.

However, it's not just our social connectedness that influences happiness. Also, it is vital to do the things we're good at since we feel extremely happier when our activities fit our strengths.

We all have our own strengths or things we're both good at and like doing. For instance, if a person has really good interpersonal abilities and if the person is a good communicator, a job in PR will offer her good pleasure. Also, she will never acclimatize to this pleasure; the job won't "get old" for her; however, it will keep on making her happy every day.

Chapter 6 - In human lives, love is a really basic and important feeling.

Whether or not you like The Beatles, it's difficult to dispute that they were correct about at least one thing: "The only thing you need is love." Love is one of the fundamentals of our lives, and due to that, it's totally essential and irreplaceable.

Certainly, just like how a mother's milk is important to babies, a powerful bond to the mother is a biological need for a child's healthy growth.

This bond offers children with a sense of security as well as belonging that they take with them all through their whole adult lives. As a matter of fact, in a study that was conducted where monkeys were fed by a number of various human strangers rather than their mothers, the monkeys didn't form basic socializing as well as problem-solving abilities.

Also, the love we feel towards our parents in our childhood is really similar to the romantic love we feel later on in our lives. The similarities are noticeable: for instance, the mutual hugging, the long staring into one another eyes, and the separation anxiety that's experienced when the other person isn't around.

Because of the requirement of love in our lives, we ought to not attempt to please our need for romantic love with passionate love. Rather, we must attempt to form companionate love.

Passionate love is the feeling of being “in love,” which is felt at the start of a romantic relationship – nearly usually disappears, generally after around six months. At that moment, passionate love can be substituted by companionate love, which looks like that of our feelings towards our parents in a lot of ways and, significantly, develops over time.

Proof of the short-lived nature of passionate love can be seen in the brain, which displays a response to the passion that is really similar to the activity of the brain when we’re high on a drug.

Definitely, that kind of high is for a short time. Likewise, the concept that passionate love will remain forever is an illusion.

In a relationship, when passionate love is gone, a lot of individuals think of the relationship to have failed. This is an error. Rather, individuals ought to take the time to allow companionate love to grow.

Chapter 7 - What doesn't make you die can make you get stronger – and hence happier.

We usually hear that personal development appears just as a result of handling adverse circumstances or traumatic events. Still, this can't be true every time because a lot of people suffer from deep depression after going through traumatic situations.

Therefore, how, and in which situations, does adversity bring about benefits?

Research shows that the majority of the people who go through hardships are most likely to benefit from suffering.

For example, individuals usually feel an improvement in confidence after losing a job or someone they love since their experience of having survived a difficulty that was formerly unimaginable changes their self-image for good.

Likewise, experiencing a distressing occurrence usually deepens current relationships as well as friendships since we need to ask for and offer help during those times, which has a tendency to make people get closer to one another.

One other benefit of going through traumatic events is that they can offer the chance to transform our self-concept and get more realistic about ourselves.

Our rider believes that our self-concept is what characterizes us – such as, for instance, considering oneself as an ambitious career woman. But, our real personality, is what our elephant instinctively desires –such as, to spend more time with individuals outside the world of one’s career. The greater the difference between the two, the less happy we get.

During the time of adversity, we get the opportunity to show on our self-concept. For instance, a traumatic occurrence like losing a family member can make us reconsider our self-concept to make it coherent with our personality.

But, in terms of adverse events bringing about personal development, specific times of our lives are more productive than the other ones.

Although kids are likely to be extremely affected by trauma and adults more than thirty are not really resilient to it, people in their teens and twenties are able to benefit significantly. The reason is that young adults are usually looking for meaning; therefore, emotionally difficult experiences –such as a break-up – can offer them the perfect chance to discover coherence between their personality as well as their self-concept, their elephant, and their rider.

Chapter 8 - Altruism as well as a virtue has to be practiced and not taught.

All through history, the notion of virtue usually referred to specific respected character features, such as nobleness, altruism, or morality. These features were usually thought to be vital for living a happy life in historical periods like the Middle Ages and in ancient Rome.

But, nowadays, the Western idea of morality is usually incorrect and ineffective. For example, in opposition to a lot of other cultures, Western kids are now taught to think about morality, instead of practicing moral behavior, by, for instance, via obligatory social service.

The issue with this method is that only thinking about morality will not affect our elephant. In order to become a very moral and virtuous individual, we need to train our elephant.

Practicing altruism is one means to do this. We usually consider altruism as serving the whole society. But, being altruistic is as well good for the person.

The reason is that altruistic behavior offers to mean to our lives and it connects us to others—both of which are useful to our happiness. For example, one study discovered that old people who gave their assistance to other people lived a happier and longer life than old people who just got such help.

One other means to train our elephant to practice morality is to form a fixed set of values in a society, i.e., a surrounding where everybody is taught to abide by the same set of rules. That kind of a rule-governed surrounding helps to offer the person with greater coherence between rider and elephant.

Also, as a study revealed, one of the best predictors of health in U.S. neighborhoods is the degree to which society values are maintained.

Hence, because practicing morality as well as being surrounded by moral neighbors improves our happiness, it may be a good thing for you, and the growth of your kids, to live in a society that represents a system of common beliefs as well as rules.

Chapter 9 - We possess a basic human necessity for the divine.

Likened to other communities or olden times, religion plays a quite small part in the contemporary Western world. However, even though you're not a person that is religious, religions might still offer something that is vital: awe-inspiring experiences.

Regardless of whether we're religious or not, our minds possess a divinity scale based on what we see things to be more or less holy.

All human culture all through history has had some kind of religion, usually, one which characterized humans, deeds, or objects based on their holiness. Normally, actions that look like those of animals were regarded as impure, while more spiritual actions – for instance, ritual bathings or prayer – were regarded as divine.

As a matter of fact, even the minds of atheists work based on a really similar scale – for instance, atheists usually remember where they had their first kiss as being special.

Those kinds of awe-inspiring experiences – may be religious or not – can assist us to become happier, better, individuals

We usually experience awe when we see a thing our present mental structures cannot hold – such as the immeasurable stars in the sky or seeing a person do a great moral action.

This feeling of awe makes us happier individuals since we're linked to a thing much greater than ourselves. Certainly, it can as well connect us to other people, particularly when we experience awe in group activities, such as chanting or prayer.

This would clarify the reason why individuals in the largely secular West usually feel as though their lives are missing something vital: the Western world doesn't actually create space for divine experiences.

The Western community has grown to become completely practical, a place where all things are assessed as well as rated based on its functional value and where religions are not approved. As a result, really few individuals experience the awe and the majority of us feel an absence of something vital in our lives.

Chapter 10 - Happiness, as well as purpose, emanate from the appropriate relationship between you and your environments.

Human beings have for ages attempted to establish the vital elements of a meaningful life. Lately, contemporary psychology has found various principles for discovering meaning in our lives.

First of all, we can become happier by forming the appropriate type of relationship between ourselves as well as other people.

Since we're partially social beings and partially individuals, our desires are usually in conflict with one another: "Should I assist other people, or should I assist myself?"

Because this is a default state of human beings, it follows that we have to surround ourselves with individuals we care about sincerely, because assisting them will be the same as assisting ourselves.

Secondly, to be satisfied with your work, that work has to fit with your beliefs concerning what's good and worth doing. Everybody possesses his own personal beliefs as well as values; therefore, finding your work meaningful needs that these values cohere with the values of your job.

A study showed that hospital janitors who thought they were a vital part of a team that assisted patients since they set and maintained the doctors' working areas were happier than the janitors who regarded their work as just tiresome and tedious.

Lastly, forming a relationship between you as well as something that is greater than yourself is important for a meaningful life. Certainly, religion in some way or the other has constantly been part of all societies because it allows us to connect the person to god, or to every group member. These days this appears in the form of meditation, which offers a means for us to connect to a thing bigger and mystical, like nature or the entire humankind.

The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom by Jonathan Haidt Book Review

In order to enhance our happiness, we have to understand humans generally and our own personality particularly. Later on, we can make use of that understanding to enhance our lives.

Do something you love.

Never pick a job only for the income; however, because it's a thing you really enjoy doing: you'll eventually become happier. In order to determine the type of work you really enjoy, examine your own personal beliefs as well as values, and look for a job that fits with these. We have a tendency to enjoy work we consider meaningful.

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