

a unified theory *of*
happiness

AN EAST-MEETS-WEST APPROACH
to FULLY LOVING YOUR LIFE

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sounds true
BOULDER, COLORADO

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He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise.

WILLIAM BLAKE, "ETERNITY"

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Introduction

Only a deep attention to the whole of our life can bring us
the capacity to love well and live freely.

JACK KORNFELD

Life cannot be reduced to a single variable, and neither can happiness. Happiness is not a single type of positive human experience such as pleasure, control, surrender, compassion, or even love. Life is multifaceted, and so is happiness. If we wish our lives to be happy, we need to accept life's complexity and respond to it with our full human potential. We have to learn to relate to all facets of life.

Many popular psychology books center on only one or two aspects of happiness and are therefore destined to be ineffective. This book, written for seekers of true happiness, takes into consideration the whole of life and the necessity to reflect upon its dynamic complexity.

For nearly two decades I have explored happiness. I have found that once our primary needs are met, happiness depends entirely on the development of our consciousness. The development I refer to pertains to the ability of consciousness to change its focus and to skillfully relate to what it focuses upon. First, such a consciousness can narrow its attention and engage with other beings and external goals. Second, such a consciousness can broaden its engagement with life itself. It can thus slide in and out of two types of mental modes, namely the Basic Mode and the Supreme Mode. In the Basic Mode, we relate to “who” and “what” we perceive as distinct from ourselves. In the Supreme Mode, we relate to the plain Being that lies within us all. These two modes can

work as harmoniously as the wings of a bird. I refer to this union as the Two Wings of Happiness.¹

To obtain this harmony, we must examine both wings. Western thought is best suited to the Basic Mode. In the Basic Mode, we apply tools that help us function with deep satisfaction in various areas of life. I will elaborate on the Supreme Mode mostly from the Eastern perspective. The Supreme Mode stresses the realization of Being and the multitude of paths toward it. I integrate Eastern ideas into our Western way of thinking because focusing on Being gives us enormous peace and strength. This is deeply fulfilling, and it also makes us fit for action in the Basic Mode. Together the Basic Mode and the Supreme Mode make it possible to relate to all levels of life and achieve full life participation.

In order to develop our consciousness, we must find out how to access and utilize both modes. In part 1, I will begin by discussing both modes in depth, and follow up with the Two Wings of Happiness questionnaire for easy self-assessment. In parts 2 and 3, I will offer tools and paths to help you learn how to skillfully use and access both modes of consciousness. Each chapter ends with concrete suggestions and practical exercises. This book thus becomes a personalized guide for the transformation of consciousness that allows for your happiness to flourish.

You might be convinced that happiness is impossible for you, perhaps because pain and unhappiness currently dominate your life. I full-heartedly encourage you to treat your unhappiness. It is possible to get help, because there is much knowledge available about how to heal and manage yourself. However, do not expect that happiness will automatically follow from treating your unhappiness. It rarely does. Happiness needs special attention, because it relies on distinct knowledge and skills. No matter how long and well you treat your unhappiness, you need to focus on your happiness to make the quantum leap.²

As a psychologist and former victim of childhood abuse, I was tempted to focus only on unhappiness. Yet I was always looking for more—more than a mere “piece of sky.”³ My longing took me beyond psychotherapy and into meditation, comparative religion, philosophy, and the new science of happiness. Eventually, and

with the help of personal relationships, I learned to soar. I learned that we can all make happiness a high priority. Happiness is well within our reach, and in some ways, it is already within us.

I invite you to learn how to master your life in the Basic Mode as well as how to become still, deeply touched, and nurtured by the experience of life in the Supreme Mode. In my conclusion, I will introduce the Theory of Elastic Consciousness, which shows the link and potential harmony between the two modes.

Let us now turn to the Two Wings of Happiness. Let us make them work for us. Let our wings spread, and let us fly above and beyond that which keeps us struggling and pinned to the ground.

HAPPINESS REFERENCE CHART	
BASIC MODE	SUPREME MODE
<p>Confidence (chapter 7)</p> <p>Authenticity Self-Support Recognizing and Nurturing Existing Strengths Perseverance</p>	<p>Receptivity (chapter 9)</p> <p>Loosen Rigidities Skepticism Wonder versus Analysis Meditation Gratitude</p>
<p>Connection (chapter 6)</p> <p>The Importance of Connectedness Ten Building Blocks of Connections Connecting in Today's Society Feeling Disconnected</p>	<p>Tranquility (chapter 10)</p> <p>The Value of Tranquility Creating External Tranquility Understanding Our Buddha-Nature Trance and Tranquility The Practice of Humility</p>
<p>Competence (chapter 5)</p> <p>The Joy and Role of Competence Can We Afford to Develop Our Competence? Competence-Building Strategies</p>	<p>Reliance (chapter 11)</p> <p>Control versus Reliance What Not to Rely On Relying on Effort, Compassion, and Virtues Relying on Indefinable Being</p>
<p>Ambition (chapter 4)</p> <p>What Constitutes Good Goals? How Do I Discover Good Goals? Playing the Game Well</p>	<p>Lightheartedness (chapter 12)</p> <p>The Nature of Lightheartedness On Becoming an Adult Rediscovering the Nature of Lightheartedness via Eight Qualities</p>
Mind/Body Fitness	
Nutrition	Exercise
Commitment to Happiness	
Definition of Happiness	
Differentiation from Survival Feeling Fully Engaged: Happiness as Full-Life Participation	The Confluence of Western and Eastern Thought
Surviving Well	
Psychological Health (Treating Unhappiness) Pleasure	Opportunities Competitiveness in the Workplace
Surviving	
Fulfillment of Basic Needs Peace Global Nuclear Disarmament Green Energy (Reverse Global Warming)	Healthcare Law, Order, Regulations Protection of Ecosystems

Part I

Happiness and the Two Modes of Consciousness

There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give
our children. One of these is roots, the other, wings.

HODDING CARTER

The Two Wings of Happiness

By drawing on wisdom that is balanced—ancient and new,
Eastern and Western, even liberal and conservative—
we can choose directions in life that will lead to satisfaction,
happiness, and a sense of meaning.

JONATHAN HAIDT

As long as we do not chase happiness the way dogs chase their tails, happiness is a superior way of being, inviting creativity, increasing a sense of efficacy, and attracting and motivating others. As the ground-breaking research of Barbara Frederickson demonstrates, positive emotions broaden our resources, from the intellectual to the social.¹ Because of all these advantages, happiness may even help us live longer.² With happiness being such a good thing, Thomas Jefferson included it in the Declaration of Independence, making it a “self-evident objective” and an inalienable right to pursue.³

Happiness is good for us, but primarily, it just *feels* good. Some happy people attribute their happiness to luck, some others to the fact that they appear younger and more beautiful than their unhappy counterparts. The physical attractiveness of happy people has its origin in their smiles and laughter, expressions that put people’s best face forward.⁴ Most people want to be happy, appear happy, and share their happy experience with their peers.

There is no doubt: happiness is good, feels good, and does a lot of good. The desire for happiness is so strong that the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC) concluded that we are born to be happy, and everything we do is an attempt to achieve happiness.⁵

Based on these observations and highly regarded philosophical input, it only seems logical to assume that Mother Nature

would provide happiness-seekers with a little help, such as a genetic program that sets us on our way and protects us from major mistakes. After all, we have pretty good instincts about our survival; that is, the survival of our genes. Left alone, these instincts can guide us like an automatic pilot through the jungle of life. In other words, we have good reason to expect that happiness is easily accessible and easy to come by. It is understandable that we expect happiness to be easily accessible, especially because the flourishing “happiness industry” in the West reinforces this belief: we are bombarded with products and ideas that promise to work like jumper cables, turning something inside of us on, instantly, simply, and reliably.

Current Western thinking only encourages these expectations. Cognitive psychology, for example, seems to suggest that our entire well-being is the result of positive thinking, according to the mottos “Think happy and you are happy” or “Think positive, and everything will turn out positive.” Serious scientists in the field of Positive Psychology, such as trailblazers Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (who we will discuss in subsequent chapters),⁶ know that human behavior cannot be traced back to a single aspect or a single thought. This, unfortunately, does not stop popular writers from propagating “*the secret of happiness.*”

Eastern thinking—at least the way it is frequently packaged and sold—also encourages our expectations for quick fixes and easy happiness. We only have to be compassionate to be happy (Tibetan Buddhists), or to let go of preconceived notions to be happy (Zen Buddhists), or to feel “the energy” to be happy (Hindus). Although, once again, serious practitioners regret the trivialization of these deep wisdom traditions, plenty of enthusiastic well-wishers keep popularizing “the moment,” within which lies the power to become rich tomorrow and remain young forever.

We need to ask ourselves how reality fits into our expectations. Even though some slogans and products can be helpful, none ever work the way they promise. The truth is, happiness does not come easily. Despite society’s calls to happiness, most people feel left behind. Instead of being keyed to the goal of happiness, we seem keyed to the survival of our genes, seeking our advantage

even when we *clearly* impair our happiness. Against our better judgment, we stress ourselves and our children to assure the best possible spot in the hierarchy of our group. Not the positive, but the negative, more stressful, fear-driven strategies, such as fighting and fleeing, come easily to us, which is why they, and not the happy ones, are so ubiquitous.

There are no quick fixes for one reason: there is nothing much to fix. We have no biological program, no automatic pilot, and no strong instinct to guide us toward happiness. It is time and—as will soon become apparent—advantageous to confront Aristotle and his premise that our ultimate goal is happiness. Mother Nature, or the entirety of what we refer to as “biological nature,” wants nothing more than that her children’s genes live on. Aristotle neither had knowledge of the evolutionary process nor of our genes. Without this knowledge, even the best thinkers are bound to mistake *a* wish for happiness with *the* wish of all wishes: the automatic, ultimate goal for all human beings at all times and in all cultures.

The fact that there is little in our biological nature that compels us to aim for happiness might dampen our enthusiasm. Yet we can also make several good and encouraging claims about happiness. The first one is that happiness and survival must not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, they often overlap: that which is good for our happiness can be good for our survival. Because of this overlap, there is a slight pressure in our culture to improve the conditions in which happiness can thrive. It is very encouraging to see the resulting slow movement toward happiness, as people increasingly want more than just to “do well” or “do better.” Also, Mother Nature allows us to be aware of her and make conscious choices. This means we are free to guide her. After acknowledging that she is limited in what she can do for us in regard to happiness, we can begin to see the good in her. I find it wonderful that we are free to see Mother Nature for who she is, in relation and in contrast to ourselves. Mother Nature permits us to be conscious, permits us to see her in the midst of herself, and, ultimately, permits us be guided by something other than the goal to survive. These degrees of freedom are part of our human potential, and that’s good news.