

ZEN AND THE ART OF HAPPINESS BY CHRIS PRENTISS

This book abstract is intended to provide just a glimpse of this wonderful book with the hope that you may like to read the original book at leisure and enjoy its real beauty.

Chapter 1 : The Way

Perfection is everywhere if we only choose to recognize it. Okakura Kakuzo There is only one way to achieve lasting happiness. That way is simply: Be happy.

You may have lots of doubts about this philosophy. Yes, being happy much more of the time than you have ever been is an incredibly complex task-not in the doing of it once you know how but in coming to know how and then in keeping aware of what you have discovered.

Your life today is a result of a series of decisions you made that have caused you to arrive where you are.

If you are not satisfied with your life today, you have to make some basic changes, inner changes.

You may find the statements in this book to be impossible/foolish/ridiculous. But before rejecting them, ask yourself whether you want it to be true- and then give yourself the chance to see it as true.

Simple Questions

The truth is always near at hand, within your reach. D. T. Suzuki

First, answer truthfully the following question. Would I want this to be true: "Every event that befalls me is absolutely the best possible event that could occur."

The second, more difficult part, is to answer the following question: Will I give that a chance to be true?

I am not talking about "Try to make the best of it. The situation is bad do what you can to salvage some good out of it. Nor do I mean that within even the worst event possible, there can be a tiny bit of good.

I am thinking in unlimited terms, where every event that befalls you is absolutely the best possible event that could occur. Wouldn't that be the best possible news?

If you are willing to give this concept a chance and to actually believe and act accordingly, as a result of natural law, bring about that end. It takes some getting used to and it takes presence of mind, which is the more difficult part, but the price is small considering the reward: a lifetime spent in the sunshine of happiness.

Zen

Zen is simply--- that state of centeredness which is here and now. Alan Watts

Zen is a Japanese word derived from the Sanskrit word meaning "meditation" (dhyana). It is about experiencing life in the here and now and about removing the dualistic distinctions between "I" and "you", between "subject" and "object," between our spiritual and ordinary, everyday activities.

It merely enables us to wake up and become aware. It does not teach, it points. D. T. Suzuki

The Zen of doing anything is doing it with a particular concentration of mind, that brings the experience of enlightenment and, through that experience, happiness.

In their efforts to experience enlightenment, yogis spent decades in meditation. Through that they experienced their oneness with the universe.

Once that awareness is obtained, everything makes sense. Zen master Dogen taught, “To be enlightened is to be intimate with all the things.”

Happiness that is achieved through an essential understanding of Universal laws and our relationship to the Universe is true happiness.

Chapter 2 : We are the authors of every next moment.

All that we are is a result of what we have thought. It is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. The Dhammapada.

We are powerful beings, creating our futures with our thoughts and actions. We are the mechanism by which life is controlled, and we control the events in our life by our personal philosophy, which determines how we respond to those events.

Each of us has a personal philosophy, but few of us have defined it (aware of it). It deals with what you believe about the world/events/persons affecting us and vice versa.

Our actions are based on what we believe and as a result of natural law, results are also on expected lines.

Our reactions to the events cause continuation of the same. We are the ones who invest seemingly bad happenings with the power to seem bad at the time they occur and to continue to seem bad afterward. As William Shakespeare wisely observed, “There is nothing either good or bad, but our thinking makes it so.”

Our philosophy is completely responsible for your state of happiness and well being. It also determines what happens to you.

As you believe, so it is for you.

The true man sees what the eyes sees, and does not add to it something that is not there. He hears what the ears here, and does not detect imaginary undertones or overtones. He—is not busy with hidden meanings. Chuang Tzu

In a breakthrough 2004 film *What the Bleep Do We know!?*, physicist and author Fred Alan Wolf, Ph.D., observes :”There is no ‘Out There’ out there, independent of what goes on in our minds.”

The answers are never “out there.” All the answers are “in there,” inside you, waiting to be discovered.

Each time an event occurs, you channel the activity onto the positive or the negative track. Even though the event hurt you or took something away from you, you are still in charge of channelling it onto positive or negative track.

Have you ever had anything happen to you that seemed really bad at the time but later turned out to be beneficial-experiences where days, weeks, or even years later, you said, “That was the best thing that could have happened to me!”

It’s time to look at all events in the light of that information. Learn to see that perfect truth now, in every situation. Condition yourself to see it at the moment each event occurs, and happens will become your constant companion.

Chapter 3: The New Experience

Every day is a good day. Ummon

How do you change what you believe when your experience has convinced you otherwise?

By creating a new experience.

To reach a goal of happiness, act as though the following statement is true.: Everything that happens to me is the best possible thing that can happen to me.

This belief+ the new results=happiness

Happiness and unhappiness are there waiting for you. All that you need to do is follow the formula which creates it. Your response determines what you will experience.

Suppose you want to start a business with some budget. If you have the budget money you will start actions for the business on a positive note. If you didn’t, you may not take any action. However, even when you did not have money, you start actions for the business, in some way or other, the money will get attracted to you.

Wisdom of I Ching-6000 year old Chinese text: Everything comes at the appointed time.

Everything that you need for your venture is already there, waiting for you-you only have to draw in what is needed. It is the same with happiness.

The best possible thing

If you really know how to live, what better way to start a day than with a smile?..Smiling helps you to approach the day with gentleness and understanding..Smile with your whole being. Thich Nhat Hanh

The most difficult part in creating new results is maintaining awareness that whatever happens is for our greatest benefit. One of the best ways to remember is to write on many pieces of paper the magical sentence and place these pieces of paper where you spend your time and will see them often-bathroom mirror, car, where you work, on your wallet/purse, dresser, inside briefcase, in locker/closet, refrigerator door, bed ceiling, wall in front of desk.

When facing trying situation, remind yourself of this truth and act as though it is for your maximum benefit. Smile. Imagine situation turning out to be well for you.

The Universe doesn’t make mistakes. We are an integral part of the Universe that provides exactly what we need to achieve our true potential.

Chapter 4: The Inner Road

If you cannot find the truth right where you are, where else do you expect to find it? Dogen

Happiness comes from within. It is a state produced by our minds. Although there are external objects and circumstances that can cause us to feel happy, they are not the cause of our happiness. The way we feel about them is the cause of happiness.

The same sports event causes some people to be happy and others to be unhappy.

Neither happiness or unhappiness is contained in the event itself.

It is the way you look at things and the way you relate to them determines your state of happiness or unhappiness, not the things themselves.

Cause and effect

Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own thoughts, unguarded. But once mastered, no one can help you as much. The Dhammapada

Since happiness or unhappiness are states of mind based on your interpretation of events (what you choose to see), you can change your state of mind by supplying the mind with new information by choosing new ways of interpreting the events of your life. When you do this, you will not only be able to survive even the most difficult of times, but you will also come through them with a smile on your face.

Meta means “more than”, or “beyond” and physics deals with the physical world. Metaphysics is a part human effort to reach beyond sensory perception-to intuit what is beyond nature as we perceive it.

Metaphysical law of cause and effect: Every action produces a reaction, and that reaction is in exact accord with the action.

Every belief that you hold manifests itself in some manner by either causing you to take some form of action or by preventing you from taking action.

You can take charge of your own mind and impact how your life unfolds.

Chapter 5 : Mindful Happiness

My mind is a guiding-rein-The Buddha

Your state of mind is the most important factor in the outcome of your life.

You have inside you a “watcher” that looks on while you are engaged in your lives. It contains your beliefs which make your personal philosophy.

Hippocrates (father of medicine) observed 2400 years ago that negative emotions cause disease and that positive emotions are a crucial factor in recovery.

If you are happy, energetic, and excited about an upcoming event, or generally in a hopeful state of mind, your body’s immune system will keep you in optimum health. The converse is also true.

The body can get addicted to depression by demanding more of it. If, on the other hand, your personal belief system causes you to be happy, your receptors are creating a body that is more able to feel happiness.

The more you engage in any type of emotion or behaviour, the greater your desire for it will become.

That is true for anything, from depression and addictions of all kinds of emotions like anger and happiness. These produce powerful stimulants to which we get addicted

Being susceptible to happiness

The idea that you create yourself by what you think and feel is actually good news. Now that you know how your system functions, you can use your emotions and thoughts to create a body that's more receptive to feel-good states. There is only one way to do that-by feeling good.

The importance of holding the right belief is also based on the fact that a part of your body brain can't tell the difference between an imagined experience and an actual one. Thinking of the taste of lemon produces the same effect as eating a lemon. If you frightened in your dream the effect is similar to that in a waking state.

Your mind is powerful. "That which you can conceive, you can achieve." "Whether you believe you can or you can't, you're right. If you believe a goal is possible, you will set out to accomplish it. The converse is also true. You will accept or reject help according to your beliefs.

Worthy companions

Even if it is painful and lonely, associate with worthy companions. Dogen

Whatever you are trying to achieve in life, it is essential that you surround yourself with people who believe that what you seek and believe in are not only possible but also very probable.

The therapist who believes cure is possible will talk about cure, will look for cure, and more likely to bring about cure. They will instil belief in patients that cure is not only possible but probable

Who you allow into the circle of your life will make the difference in the quality of your life. As the Buddha taught, "He who walks in the company of fools suffers a long way. Company with fools..is always painful; company with the wise is a pleasure.

Chapter 6: What's is True in the Universe

Obey the nature of things, and you will walk freely and undisturbed. Seng-TS'AN

The ancient sages looked at nature to show them how to live a life of happiness. They taught the oneness with the nature and living in harmony with its ways are keys to inner peace.

In this chapter you will learn how to build a new personal philosophy for yourself based on what is true in the Universe. That's why it will work. It works every single time-no exceptions.

The future may seem unknowable, indeterminate, scary or hopeless. But once you know how to handle them, you will be relaxed and confident because you know you're in control of your

journey. You then know what actions to take to bring about the circumstances you desire, and you are not disappointed.

Don't be concerned about not knowing natural laws. You were driving a car in reverse gear, and have now realized that it has forward and faster gears as well.

We are an integral part of the Universe.

Separation is an illusion

Swami Vivekananda-Jnan Yoga: "There is but one life, one World, one Existence. Everything is that One... Who can find the difference between the wave and the sea?" He says that despite this, name and form have created all these differences.

Your personal philosophy

Universal laws, unlike man made laws, cannot be broken. One of these laws is the law of cause and effect.

If you are not happy most of the time, it's because you are relying on something that you learned should make you happy but isn't, or there is a condition in your life that is causing you to feel unhappy. This condition could simply be the habit of being unhappy. Some of us have been unhappy for so long, with rare moments of happiness, that unhappiness has become a habit, a natural condition. Based on the laws of cause and effect, if you can discover the true cause of happiness, you can put that cause to work and, with absolute certainty, be happy. Just as importantly, if you can discover the cause of your unhappiness, you can learn ways to avoid bringing about that condition.

A personal philosophy that's based on what's true in the universe will sustain you through every occurrence that life brings you.

It will save you from costly errors of judgement, countless hours of misery and needless suffering. It will help you see that events that you may have lamented for weeks, months, or even years are the best events that could have happened to you.

A curse or a blessing?

The sage blends everything into a harmonious whole. He is unmindful of the confusion and the gloom, and equalizes the humble and the honourable. Chuang Tzu

Each incident in life, even a painful experience, basically provides you with only two choices: you can either curse it and call it an "accident" or you can call it "good fortune." I have learned that there's only one of these choices that can bring us happiness-and help us bring happiness to others. I have learned that bad events simply do not happen.

From perfect to perfect

One in all, all in one-If only this is realized, No more worry about not being perfect! Seng TS'
AN

All laws of the universe are in favour of the continuation of the Universe. For that, it can only permit the best possible events, perfect events, to occur at any moment in time.

Universal law of conservation of energy: Nothing can be lost or destroyed, only changed. That includes us.

Everything that happens to us is for our complete benefit. That includes incidents that hurt us or took something from us.

The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge with it, move with it, and join the dance. Alan Watts

Chapter 7: Adapting to Change

Flow with whatever may happen and let the mind be free: Stay centred by accepting whatever you are doing. This is ultimate. Chuang Tzu

Change, explains the I Ching (literally “the book of changes”), is constant. Another piece of wisdom about happiness that comes from the tradition of I Ching is this: A situation only becomes favourable when one adapts to it.

All of life presents us with two basic ways to treat the events. We can either label them “good for us” or “bad for us.” The event is an event. It’s how we treat the event that determines what it becomes in our lives. The event does not make the determination-we do.

A change of outlook

He who has once known the contentment that comes simply through being content will never again be otherwise than contented. Tao Te Ching

Happiness is being happy with what you have. Far Eastern thought. The Tao Te Ching explains “Embrace simplicity...be content with what you have and are, and not one can despoil you.”

The true source of happiness is within each one of us.

Happiness comes from our response to the conditions of our lives. It is only the past conditioning that has taught us to be unhappy about the unfolding events. If you respond by being happy, you are happy.

How you conduct yourself along the path that is your life determines how your life unfolds-Basic law of Universe.

The angry man will defeat himself in battle as well as in life.” Samurai maxim

Freedom from the tyranny of events

To find composure in the midst of change is to find nirvana. Shunryu Suzuki

A strong personal philosophy does more than sustain us through the tragedies of life. It also sustains us daily in everything we think and do. It gives us optimism and hope. It frees us from the tyranny of events.

Dealing with trauma

When you can be calm in the midst of activity, this is the true state of nature...When you can be happy in the midst of hardship, then you see the true potential of mind. Huachu Daoren

Each one of us has suffered in our lifetime. We have been lied to, we have been betrayed and cheated, and we have been taken advantage of. Many of us, perhaps you, have been beaten, raped, mistreated, forced to do things against your will, or sexually molested by parents, siblings, or strangers. We have had our hearts broken and we have suffered great financial losses. We have grieved over the loss of loved ones and we have been born with physical and mental deformities. How we deal with those traumas and conditions will determine our state of happiness today or, for that matter, any day.

A person who was paralysed waist down, and confined for life to a wheel chair said “This is the best thing that could have happened to me.”

A strong philosophy based on universal laws will save you from playing the role of the victim. **The worst of times, the best of times**

Know all things to be like this: A mirage, a cloud castle....Nothing as it appears. The Buddha

I have learned first hand how good things can emerge from even the hardest of times if we maintain a strong personal philosophy.

To some, my son Pax’s years of addiction and trauma may seem like an irretrievable loss. Yet if you were to ask Pax how he sees the ten years of his addiction-the beatings, the degradation, the humiliation, the loss of friends, the loss of his college years, the loss of respect, the lost years-he would tell you that it was the most terrible experience of his life and the greatest. He would tell you that those ten years led him to his life’s work for a brilliant future where he could save lives of thousands. It was the worst of times; it led to the best of the times.

Chapter 8: Stress and Your Imagination

Those with limited views are fearful and irresolute: the faster they hurry, the slower they go.
Seng-TS’AN

One of the greatest obstacles between you and happiness is stress. By stress I mean a feeling in your mind of fear, anxiety, distress, worry, unease, or foreboding caused by your mind to imagine a bad outcome to a past, present, or future event or situation. The events or situations do not contain stress, although they seem to.

Stress comes from the way you relate to events and situations.

Sounds familiar? It should, because it’s the same formula as the one for happiness.

To prove to yourself that this can be the case, think of the many times you have felt stress over something that never materialized or, if it did materialize, ultimately turned out to be for your benefit. If you had known from the beginning that it would work out favourably, how much more pleasant your life would have been. That’s the way you can approach all situations.

Stress will never be completely gone from our lives because of all the negative programming we have taken on, but we can eliminate most of it. The tricky part in eliminating stress is controlling our imaginations to envision a happy outcome rather than a poor one.

How do you convince yourself about it? This is because the universe wants to benefit itself to the maximum amount possible at all times, the positive outcome is the only outcome it will permit.

After you have practiced for a while and have seen the results, you will come to know it's true. And that's when you will begin to wear that little smile-often.

Expectations

You should not be surprised at whatever you see or hear...If you are ready to accept things as they are, you will receive them as old friends. Shunryu Suzuki

You create your world by your expectations, and you can influence the future by how you respond to the present. If, as a part of your philosophy, you believe that every event will turn out for your benefit, stress will never enter the picture.

If you stay in control of your imagination, it's impossible to feel fear or stress. You should get deal of comfort from this information because your imagination is entirely under your control. You can just as easily imagine a good outcome as a bad one.

Obstacles

Chilling autumn rains curtain Mount Fuji, then make it more beautiful to see- Basho

Another part of a strong and healthy philosophy that allows us to create happiness in our lives has to do with how we look at obstacles. One of the reasons any obstacle is in your life is so that you can grow from it and become strong. You know the old saying that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Well, you are only as strong as your area of greatest weakness.

The Universe always strikes at your weakest point because that's what most needs strengthening.

Your challenges are, in effect, hand delivered by a loving Universe to make you stronger. In order to get the benefit from the obstacles, face and overcome them rather than turning away from them and giving up.

One of the common causes of anxiety is speaking in front of groups of people or meeting other people we don't know. This anxiety comes from using our imagination to foresee a bad result. For overcoming it, we need is to work on strengthening the inner weakness that is causing them to imagine a bad outcome. Perhaps they simply need to overcome their fear by practicing public speaking in order to become better at it and more confident.

How should you deal with the challenges in your life? First recognize that the situation or event has a purpose and that it is meant to benefit you. The circumstances may look like problems, feel like problems, and seem like problems, but that's just one possible point of view. Once you learn to look at your problems as "workout situations," they take on a whole new aspect. I call them "workout situations" because they are just that; situations you can "work out" with so that you can gain strength and understanding. After you have done that, the circumstance is of no use to you and it just passes out of your life.

Of course, the relief and answers won't be handed to you without effort on your part since it is by working your way through the problems that you will gain strength, wisdom, and knowledge.

Progress

The miracle is not to fly in the air or walk on water, but to walk on earth.-Chinese Proverb

Enlightenment is like an ocean and our paths to enlightenment are like rivers. Each river is different, but they all eventually lead to the ocean. No matter what we are doing or when, or whether it brings us happiness or remorse, gain or loss, we are all on our individual paths to enlightenment. Even when we have done something we consider wrong, we are still on our path to enlightenment.

The progress you make on your path will either be quick or slow, according to your awareness. If you are intentionally seeking enlightenment, which manifests as a desire to discover your relationship with the universe, you will use your so called problems as opportunities to learn and you will progress quickly. As a result, you will enjoy the rewards of peace, success, abundance, great good fortune, and well being.

Chapter 9: Healing Your Past

Do not pursue the past. Do not lose yourself in the future. The past no longer is. The future hasn't come. Looking deeply at life as it is in the very here and now, the practitioner dwells in the stability and freedom. Bhadderkaratta Sutta

We can't change the past events, but we can change how we feel about them.

We carry around a lot of hurtful baggage from the past: slights, intentional transgressions against us, broken hearts, hurt feelings, memories of people who cheated us or lied to us or betrayed us, events that brought us pain, missed opportunities, seemingly wrong choices we made, lost objects, things we did or didn't do, misunderstandings that caused us pain or the loss of friends, things that we did that brought hurt, pain or disappointment to others for which we feel regret-the list is nearly endless. Carrying that load of hurtful baggage from the past is a useless burden we would be much better off without.

Healing the past enables you to be happy in the present.

How can you heal the past? You can be open to the idea that whatever happened to you in the past eventually turned out or will turn out to be a benefit to you.

It is essential for your abundant happiness that you cause your memory to go back into your past from childhood, remember all those key experiences and relive them and conclude that it was good for you.

That means you forgive yourself for the things you regret having done to others, you forgive others for the things they did to you, you acknowledge the rightness of the events that you thought did not benefit you and acknowledge that each event was for your benefit.

Walk away from a mountain of problems that will never again bother you. When the weight of all that excess baggage has been thrown overboard, you can soar, happy in the eternal now.

The present moment

The present moment is a wonderful moment. Thich Nhat Hanh

The I Ching teaches: The superior person sees and understands the transitory in the light of eternity.

This moment we call now is all that exists.

When we live in the now, keeping our awareness and concentration on the present moment, we rein in our runaway imaginations-not dwelling on the past, not worrying about the future, not judging events as they come and go.

Meditation is a technique to keep us in our centre, concentrating on the present moment.

Meditation is not an escape from life..but preparation for really being in life. Thich That Hanh

Alan Watts likens this to a practice in martial arts of staying in the central position so that whichever way things happen, we can reposition quickly and easily. That way you stand a much better chance of being able to deal with the unforeseen than if you keep worrying about it.

Meditation need not be long and complicated. Just begin by meditating for 5 minutes a day. Morning time is best, but do it anytime. Just follow your breath for 5 minutes. Be relaxed, and have easy focus on your breath. If the mind is never aroused towards objects, then wherever you walk is the site of enlightenment.

Chapter 10: The Language of the Universe

To those who have conformed themselves to the Way, the Way readily lends it's power. Tao Te Ching

Learning to believe that the Universe is alive, conscious, and aware of each of us, can change your experience of life.

Not only is the Universe aware of us, but it also communicates with us. We, in turn are constantly in communication with the Universe through our words, thoughts, and actions. The Universe responds with events.

Events is the language of the universe.

Communication from the Universe is continuous, although some communications are more obvious than others. Most of the time, we are not aware of these communications, or we may just think of them as luck or a quirk of fate. In so doing, we miss what is truly the chance of a lifetime. Just by acknowledging the Universe when we become aware of such an incident, the Universe increases the obvious communications. What a treasure!

The importance of establishing that type of communication with the universe cannot be overstated. Once the Universe becomes aware that you are aware of it and of it's language (events), the communications increase both in quality and quantity. You receive enormous help and input, and even the smallest bit of assistance from the Universe is of great significance in your life.

How can you acknowledge these communications? Just a simple knowing smile is enough, a nod of head, an inward saying of “thanks.” Once you have put the acknowledgement into practice, the results are powerfully gratifying and you become increasingly aware of the intimate relationship you share with the universe. That’s a comfort, joy, and a great blessing.

The Secret and the smile

Never say, “I cannot”; for you are infinite. Even time and space are as nothing compared to your nature. You can do anything and everything. Swami Vivekananda

“Be happy”-means choosing to be happy whenever we have a choice. It is not a mindless happiness, but a mindful happiness based upon the knowledge that whatever happens to you will benefit you- and benefit you greatly.

Most of the time, we respond to life without taking a moment to choose the way we want to think and feel about a particular event or a situation. It takes work to make the choice. A deliberate mental effort is needed to pause, reflect on the situation, remember the goal to be happy, consider the other choices, then choose to feel happy about whatever the situation is, knowing it will ultimately be to our benefit.

The hardest work comes when the situation is hurtful or has taken something from us or there appears to be some impending mishap in store for us. At that moment, choosing to be happy may seem impossible, but many people have learned to do it and they will tell you that the result is worth any effort necessary.

Those who have chosen to be happy walk about wearing a tiny smile that seems to indicate that they have a secret, the contemplation of which is making them happy. The smile may be in mind only, but it is there. It is as though you lose 100 dollar bill, but know that you have a few million dollars in the bank. The realization that the loss hasn’t dimmed your happiness is by itself enough to make you happy.

Once that secret is in place, you will find yourself enjoying the little things of life: you’ll stop to admire a sparrow, a sunset and so on. You will enjoy a shower more than you did before, a walk, a conversation with a friend and so on. You will stop focussing on the negative things that may affect your happiness.

The nagging worries that all is not right, that something bad is going to happen, that you might fail, that you might not be good enough, strong enough, bright enough, or own enough will disappear. The doubts will be replaced with a confidence that You, as a part of the Universe, are as cared as if you were a precious jewel, which you are.

Of course, you are here to learn. Of course, there are hurts and heartaches. Of course, the inevitable mishaps will occur. But you will see them with new eyes. That stubbed toe or lost wallet or lost job will no longer be a cause of pain because you are being attended to by a benevolent Universe. That is when the real happiness comes which grows ever more satisfying.

The Great Promise of the Universe

The intellectual knowledge is of no use unless you put it to use.

Concentrate your mind, focus your attention on the great promise of the Universe, and say to yourself “This is for benefit.”

Allow yourself to wonder with expectancy and excitement, “What good will come from this?”

Don’t start with what’s most difficult—infant death, the tragic loss of a loved one. Start with something small. If you bump your head, say, “Ouch, I bumped my head! I must remember to pay attention and stay in the present moment. Thanks for the reminder.”