

Choose The Life You Want: The Mindful Way to Happiness: Tal Ben-Shahar

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.

Introduction

One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process near ends until we die. And, the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility. Eleanor Roosevelt

Goal: Translate rigorous research from the social sciences into accessible and actionable ideas that can help individuals flourish.

My initial interest in positive psychology came from my own desire to lead a happier, more fulfilling life. For me, key component of well-being—reasonable level of work/life balance.

Once I felt exhausted before 3-day intensive program. I was fearing suffering. But I realized that I have a choice. I would draw energy from enthusiastic participants and share my passion.

...choice was made possible-and obvious-only as soon as I became mindful of the fact that I actually had a choice. We feel thinking and making decisions is hard part, but the difficult thing is realizing that there is a decision to be made, that we have a choice.

Psychology research —40 % of our happiness is determined by the choices that we make-what we chose to do and how we choose to think directly impact the way we feel.

Whether you think you have a choice or not-you are right.

Book comprises of 3 types of choices: first, the choices we have at almost every moment, such as whether we smile or whether we take in a deep breath; second, choices that we have following a specific event, such as how we react to failure or whether we choose to compliment a colleague for the job well done; third, choices that relate to the big decisions in life. The book focuses on the first two types of choices.

Very often we do not practice what we know is good for us.

This book is not about knowing what is right, but doing what is right.

Choice is a creation.

To choose is to create.

Through my choices I create my reality.

What kind of life do I want for myself?

What choices will create this kind of life?

1

Choose to Choose

Understand that the right to choose your own path is a sacred privilege. Use it. Dwell on the possibilities. Oprah Winfrey

When we feel trapped-that we must choose to choose, that we must commit ourselves to looking for new ways to change our life. ---paths are almost always open to us, small or large changes we can

introduce to improve our situation. Choosing to choose means searching for the paths that lead to change.

Recognize the power of choosing to choose. Sit down to reflect, analyze, to think about the possibilities open to you. Ask yourself difficult questions: what do I have to do for my life to be the way I want it to be? Where do I want to go? How do I intend to get there? Write down your options, discuss your situation with those you trust. Refuse to accept “I have no choice” as an answer.

It requires effort as well as courage... does not guarantee a solution.—increases the likelihood of finding a solution.

2

Be Mindful of the Wonder

Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of earth are never alone or weary of life. Rachel Carson

Hellen Keller’s essay “three days to see”

3

Take a Step Back

At every given moment we have a choice—to be a slave to our emotions and react, or to take a step back and exercise restraint.

Daniel Gilbert: shopping on an empty stomach we buy more.

Merely labeling a situation can help a great deal in coping with it in a more rational way. —we observe. Awareness of the state makes us more likely to take the necessary precautions.

4

Think and act purposefully

Rumination inevitably backfires. It merely compounds misery. It’s a heroic attempt at solving a problem that is just not capable of solving. Mark Williams

Replaying scenarios in mind again and again makes things worse. Purposeful thinking and purposeful action make us feel better

5

Carry yourself with confidence and pride

A good stance and posture reflect a proper state of mind. Morihei Ueshiba

--slumped shoulders, dragging feet, head down, we communicate lack of confidence and energy.

Strong stride, shoulders open and relaxed, we send a positive message to others and to ourselves. When we walk like someone who is confident, we actually become confident; the physical act of sitting up straight actually boosts our motivation and increases our energy; when we shake hands firmly, we become assertive.

Our behavior changes our attitude.

Marva Collins provided her students with the gift they needed most—the belief in themselves., the confidence that they could succeed.

Sit up straight. Express pride through your stride.

6

Make a difference

Movie Pay It Forward: A schoolteacher assigns his class the task of finding to bring about positive change in the world. Trevor, one of the students decides to do three good deeds to others-three acts of random kindness-and in return ask them to do three good deeds to three other people, who in turn will do the same.

Galvanize just a few people-we can make a significant difference.

7

Just do it!

A thousand-mile journey begins with a first step. Lao-Tzu

Procrastination-putting things off is a pervasive phenomenon. Over 70 % of college students are in this category. Price is high-higher level of stress, a weaker immune system, poorer sleep, lower levels of happiness.

Fortunately, research has also identified practical ways to overcome that. The single most important technique is called "the five-minute takeoff." It consists, simply, of starting to do the thing you have been putting off, no matter how little you feel like doing it. You don't need to be in the right mood, or be inspired. Enough to merely begin doing it-the initial action kick-starts the process and often brings about more action.

I sometimes need to repeat the five-minute takeoff two or three times.

Want to exercise-just put on your running shoes and start running.

8

Forgive

True forgiveness is not an action after the fact, it is an attitude with which you enter each moment.
David Ridge

No one is perfect. Stop punishing yourself and others for that. Through it we release the flow of emotions. Holding grudge ties knot tighter.

9

Experience your work as a calling

If we do not experience a sense of purpose in our work, we can do one of the things: find work that is meaningful, or find something meaningful in our work.

We don't have the luxury of having a perfect job. But we have a great deal of choice as to how we experience our daily work. It can make difference in other person's lives; can find elements exciting and interesting, opportunity to develop our skills, it can provide for the family.

Even in the most restricted and routine jobs, employees can exert some influence on what is the essence of the work.

Builder and hospital cleaning staff example.

Many organizations ask employees to write job description highlighting technical aspects of their work. Why not write a calling description of your work (meaning, significance)?

10

Actively learn the lessons of hardship

Never let a good crisis go waste. Anne Harbison

You have a choice with a hardship. Negative or learning experience. You can learn humbleness, empathy, patience, and resilience.

Things do not necessarily happen for the best, but I can choose to make the best of things that happen.

11

Appreciate and learn from those around you.

Loving kindness meditations have been practiced for thousands of years in the east. More recently, western scientists have demonstrated the remarkable benefits of this practice. The basic idea behind this is simple- directing kindness, generosity, benevolence, or positive emotions in general toward ourselves and others.

12

Express and reveal

Putting on a façade is often an indicator of low self-esteem

Professor Brene Brown studied people with high self-esteem. They all had courage as the distinguishing characteristic.

13

See the win-win

There's plenty out there and enough to spare for everybody. An Abundance Mentality involves sharing prestige, recognition, profits, and decision making. It opens possibilities, options, alternatives, and creativity.

14

Savor life

15

Treat your body with respect

Eat until you are 80 % full.

16

Create your own luck

Richard Wiseman of the university of Hertfordshire studied lucky people. They all had behavioral and thought patterns that distinguish them.

They notice and capitalize on chance encounters. They create luck by changing their routines: newspapers they read, the route they take to work, the activities they attend, the people they choose to approach. They also focus on full part of the glass.

17

Remind yourself of your true self

Habits of thinking need not be forever. One of the most significant findings in psychology in the last 20 years is that individuals can choose the way they think. Martin Seligman

Some people believe they cannot learn math or master certain skills these messages are baseless and irrational.

Professor Jeffrey Schwartz UCLA created intervention program that can help people banish negative messages from their mind.

18

Commend and compliment

If we fail to appreciate the positive in other people, the positive will depreciate and we will have less of it. It strengthens them and relationship with them. This is like bank deposits. Helps in difficult times. Happiness is priceless.

19

Be benefit-finder

Make a game of finding something positive in every situation. Ninety-five percent of your emotions are determined by how you interpret events to yourself. Brian Tracy

Personal stories: I have ADD. Was kicked out of PhD program at Cambridge University. Humbled me. Spent some of the best years in Asia.

20

Listen with empathy and openness

The key to providing emotional and moral support to people in need, is the ability to listen to what they are saying.

21

Invest in experiences

It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness. Charles Spurgeon

Lasting happiness comes not from possessing material things, but pursuing positive experiences.

Although the experience may be short lived and material good remains with us for much longer, we continue to enjoy the experience through memories.

22

Be open to suggestions

Make point of soliciting feedback, of asking others where you can improve.

23

Say yes only when your vision is served

Sometimes, saying yes to others is saying no to ourselves.

24

Accept reality and act on it.

25

Bring humor and lightness

Norman Cousins was in late 40s and diagnosed with severe arthritis. Needed painkillers and sleeping pills. Doctors told his days were numbered. He left hospital and started laughter therapy. Watched movies and listened to funny stories. He healed completely.

26

Focus on what truly matters

27

Move on

Stanford psychiatrist Irvin Yalom studied terminally ill patients. When patients were told they had no hope, led a radical shift in perspective. They started ceasing focus on small problems and petty worries and started to live fully.

28

Be hopeful and optimistic

29

Make others feel good

I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. Maya Angelou

Jeff Bezos in 2010 addressed graduating class at Princeton University: "What I want to talk about today is the difference between gifts and choices. Cleverness is a gift; kindness is a choice. Gifts are easy; they are given, after all. Choices are hard."

30

Focus on strengths and abilities

These people are happier and more successful. Peter Drucker, "Only when you operate from strengths, can you achieve true excellence.

We need to invest in our weaknesses so that we can survive in the world; we need to invest in our strengths so that we can thrive.

32

Let go

My body and mind constitute a single, unified system. Every emotional or psychological state has an impact on our physical well-being.

To let go of the physical tension-be it in my forehead, jaw, throat, shoulders, belly, or back-I can shift my focus to that part of the body, breathe into it, and release it. I can even utter to myself in silence to let go as I relieve myself of the tension and strain, and gently sink into calmness and tranquility.

33

Focus on process

We have control over the goals we set and over the effort that we invest in them, but the success is largely beyond our control. Therefore, it is important to stop trying to control the outcome, and instead focus as much as possible on the process of arriving at that outcome.

34

Perceive hardship as temporary

When we choose to perceive painful experiences as temporary and fleeting-then we allow them to take their natural course. Arrived naturally, depart naturally.

35

Move

Having a bout of exercise is like taking a little bit of Prozac and a little bit of Ritalin, right where it is supposed to go. John Ratey

36

Open your mind and heart to learning

37

Connect to your values

The most precious things in life are not those you get for money.

38

Choose deliberately

39

Smile

Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy. Thich Nhat Hanh

Research into what psychologists call the “facial feedback hypothesis” shows that we can affect our own mood through our facial expressions-a smile will bring about a more positive feeling. In fact, we can improve our mood at almost any point by simply smiling, or better, laughing. To jump-start the process, we may think of something that makes us smile-someone we love, a funny story or situation-or just mechanically fake the smile until we make the emotion real.

To overcome stage fright, I choose to genuinely smile before I go to onstage. My body fills up with those naturally created feel-good love chemicals (oxytocin and others), and I actually feel happier and more upbeat.

If I become nervous in the middle of a presentation, I again generate a genuine smile. My smile also helps audience to relax and relate positively to me and my subject.

40

See the glass as half full

Classic movie “It’s a wonderful Life” remind yourself of good deeds you committed.

41

Be present

Forever is composed of the nows. Emily Dickinson

We spend so much of our short lives haunted by the what if, rather than luxuriating in what is.

Remind yourself to focus on the here and now-start wearing a wrist band, paint the word now on your wrist watch, or have a screensaver on your computer or phone that you associate with being in the present. Even a minute of centering every few hours, by focusing on your breathing, or even your physical surrounding, can go a long way toward improving the quality of your entire day.

42

Seize the moment

The most significant increase that I experienced in my level of well-being was not a result of a large-scale transformational change in my life; rather, it was due to introducing what I've come to call happiness boosters-bite-size activities that elevate my mood. These mini-breaks provide me with the fuel that I need to continue to function with energy and zest.

Today, I often close my eyes for a minute and imagine a person I love, or if I have more time, I sit down and go through 20 minute LKM. I will take a few minutes out of my schedule to listen to some song or music. I may take few deep breaths or decide to take a short nap. I may read something I like.

In the past, I often reached a point where I feel depleted, when I had little enthusiasm for work (and sometimes life in general). The best cure, I found, was to inject a few happiness boosters into my daily routine. Today, rather than waiting for my energy levels to drop dangerously low before I take a break, I incorporate instant gratification into my life on a regular basis. These infusions of moments of joy do not merely make me feel better in the moment, they often create a current of enthusiasm and energy that helps me become more productive, more creative, happier.

43

Do what you want to do

Goals that are aligned with my ideals and interests-the ones I choose freely-lead to greater success and well-being. To the extent possible-taking into consideration all the limitations and constraints that we all face in life -I pursue my passions and I am true to my values and desires.

Psychologists Ellen Langer and Judith Rodin conducted research to prove that instead of giving all the support, if choice and responsibility are given, people become healthier, more active, less depressed, and more confident, alert and cheerful. More striking was that the survival rate was double in this group. Small decision like choosing what you like to do, makes a big difference.

44

Learn from failure

If you want to increase your success rate, double your failure rate. Thomas Watson

Learn to fail, or fail to learn.

Edison: I just found 10k ways that won't work. I failed my way to success.

Abraham Lincoln: failed in business several times, had nervous breakdown at the age of 27, lost 8 elections for political office.

45

Help and contribute

You can always, always give something, even if it is only kindness. Anne Frank

Psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky conducted an experiment in which he asked people to carry out, in the course of one day, five kind acts that they would normally not do. These do not have to be grand or dramatic. An act of kindness could be donating money or time to a cause you believe in, helping a friend think through a dilemma, giving blood, or simply opening a door for a stranger. The finding was that these acts contributed significantly to the well-being of those who gave not just while they were performing the acts, not just for that one day, but for the entire week.

An experiment was conducted on a group of mentally challenged people. They generally receive help from many quarters. In this experiment, ways were found for them to give back something to the society. The impact was remarkable. Their sense of self-worth, well-being, and their ability to help themselves improved.

46

Breathe deeply and slowly

If I had to limit my advice on healthier living to just one tip, it would be simply to learn how to breathe correctly. Andrew Weil

Shallow breathing is a reaction to stress, and it itself is a cause of further stress, which leads to more shallow breathing. To stop this downward spiral-even in the midst of the daily mayhem-I can take three or four deep breaths and enter an upward spiral of deep breathing and calm. I can switch on the healing power of deep breathing right now and at any time throughout my day-as I wake up, while on the train, in the middle of a meeting, before going to sleep, while waiting for red light to turn green, or while reading a book. All I need to do is gently, without strain, fill up the space of my belly, and then slowly and tenderly breathe out.

T. Crum book: Three deep breaths: Finding power and purpose in a stressed out world.

Three deep breath technique is a scientifically based technique is quite simple, and it can help us shift from the flight-or fight response to Herbert Benson calls the “relaxation response.”

I use a variation of this technique and has done wonders for me. I take the first breath mindfully. I take the second breath focusing on my purpose for the day or life as a whole. The third is a gratitude one.

The physiological impact of deep breathing, coupled with the cognitive component of focusing on something positive, provides a powerful technique that can change the way you feel. The technique is particularly effective in bringing about calm and joy if you do it a few times a day.

47

Respect those close to you.

Respect is love in plain clothes. Frankie Byrne

48

Maintain the strength of independence.

The reward of conformity that everyone likes you but yourself. Rita Mae Brown

49

Pursue your passion

Pursuing your passions may or may not lead to material or public success; however, regardless of external success, life is short, and finding small ways to express your inner, authentic voice at work, at home, or with your friends is perhaps the most important thing you can do for yourself and the world.

50

Appreciate the good.

Gratefulness is the measure of our aliveness. Are we not dead to whatever we take for granted? Surely to be numb is to be dead. David Steindel-Rast

Psychological research has repeatedly shown that when we are thankful for the good in our life, the good grows and we have more of it.

You might want to keep a gratitude journal, writing down five things for which you are grateful before you go to bed each night. Or you might simply make an effort to notice three good things as you go about your daily routine. The items need to be important and profound. Trivial pleasures and fleeting experiences could also do. Subjects could also be anything from parent, God, or anything.

Taking a minute out each day to express gratitude turns out to have far reaching consequences. They became more appreciative and enjoyed higher levels of well-being and positive emotions. They feel happier and more determined, more energetic, and more optimistic. They were more generous. They slept better, exercised more, and experienced fewer symptoms of physical illness.

Psychologists Emmons and McCullough suggest that being grateful triggers a positive spiral of growth and well-being. When you think all that you are grateful for, when you take stock, you feel better. When you feel better, you become more open to- and more likely to notice and pursue – positive experiences.

When you appreciate the good, the good appreciates.

51

Embrace silence

I have discovered that all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own room. Blaise Pascal

To learn, to grow-to flourish-we need space which we get through silence. A moment of silent meditation, of solitude, of being alone without the distraction of outside stimulus, can help us see clearly and understand deeply.

A growing body of research points out to the high price we pay for this constant aural stimulation. Silence is necessary to increase creativity, deeper connection to our environment and ourselves, healthier physical and mental development, and higher levels of happiness.

52

Be true to your self

To be true to myself requires knowing myself and being myself-knowing what is important to me, knowing my values, and then living in accordance this knowing. According to Warren Bennis, “Until you truly know yourself, strengths and weaknesses, know what you want to do and why you want to do it, you cannot succeed in any but the most superficial sense of the word.”

53

See the other

We need to notice the beauty within others, appreciate them.

54

Don't insist on perfection

55

Actively accept your emotion

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change. Carl Rogers

Accepting our emotion is not necessarily about liking everything we feel; rather, it is about allowing ourselves to fully experience it. Our second choice is whether to automatically react to the emotion or take time to think about the most appropriate way to act in the given situation.

Active acceptance is about putting these two choices together.

56

Experience the excitement

57

Observe the storm

Watch the passionate storm raging within with compassion and curiosity through meditation.

Jeffrey Schwartz: in each moment of your life you are choosing whether to be mindful or not.

58

Treat yourself with kindness and generosity

Love for self and love for others are inseparable.

59

Fill up

The real enemy of high performance is not stress...the problem is the absence of disciplined, intermittent recovery. Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz

We go through life constantly shifting between emptying and replenishing our energy stores. We experience this empty-full cycle also in our emotional and spiritual lives. There are activities that help us recharge our emotional and spiritual batteries (such as listening to the music we like, spending time with loved ones, or taking a vacation).

60

Think global, act local

61

Bring positive energy wherever you go

We create a day as per our expectation-self-fulfilling prophecy. We can make most days and encounters cheerful, lively, positive, and pleasant-if we choose to bring these kind of emotions to the situation. Emotions are contagious. We can affect each other's moods.

62

Express

Holding back our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can place people at risk for minor and major diseases. James Pennbaker

If the risk of opening up is daunting, we can start taking small steps. We can begin, for example, by opening up to ourselves in a journal, and then gradually, to those we are close to.

Because, physical pain carries less stigma in our culture than does emotional disease, our subconscious mind diverts attention from the emotional to the physical.

63

Create your future

64

Be open and sincere

65

Slow down

66

Stretch yourself

67

Become who you want to be

Self-concept is destiny.

We need to combine thinking and doing.

One of the most useful self-help exercises that I carry out involves reading a list of characteristics that, for me, capture the way I want to think about myself and the way I want to be.

Affirming messages: "I give myself permission to be human" "I play and I am playful."

I put together a list of eight affirming messages that I want as my guide to a better life. Each morning I go over my list, spending half a minute on each message, thinking about what the message means to me, imagining and feeling what it is like to be the way that I want to be.

Negative messages do not necessarily go away, but over time, as we persist with the alternative messages, they lose their centrality and the overwhelming power and have less influence on us.

68

Commit to overcoming hurdles

Commitment unlocks the doors of imagination, allows vision, and gives us the right stuff to turn our dream into reality. James Womack

Declaring that I will reach a certain destination, making a pledge, is throwing my knapsack over the wall.

I create my future by expressing, in words and deeds, my commitments to it. Although making a verbal commitment, no matter how bold and inspiring, does not ensure that I reach my destination, it does enhance the likelihood of success. Words create worlds; acts of courage break barriers.

69

Sing, dance, listen

Abraham Maslow: dance, rhythm, and music are “excellent ways of moving toward the discovering of identity.”

70

Perceive difficulty as a challenge

A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty. Winston Churchill

The same external even can be seen very differently.

Research by Joe Tomaka and others illustrates how we can affect our psychological and physiological reaction to a situation by the way we evaluate it. In one study, two groups of students were given the same math test. The first group was told that the task was “difficult mental arithmetic” and were instructed to complete it efficiently and quickly. They found the test threatening. The second group was told that the test was challenging, and that they should try hard to do their best. This group was calmer, more creative, and actually performed better than those in the first group.

A single word can make a dramatic difference-in terms of our heart rate, our blood pressure, and other stress markers. Whether we choose to view the situation as a challenge or threat, an opportunity or a danger, a privilege or a menace can radically influence our overall experience of that situation.

71

Be a beautiful enemy

He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves, and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper. Edmund Burke

72

Be afraid and go ahead anyway

73

Be nice

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.

74

Be playful and light

75

Take the larger context into consideration

76

Be the scribe of your own journey

77

Focus on the positive

78

Lead with the deeds

Be the change you want to see in the world. Mahatma Gandhi

79

Seek to be known

80

Find the new in the familiar

81

Experience heartfelt positivity

We think too much and feel too little. Charlie Chaplin

Prof Barbara Fredrickson conducted a study in an organization about effects of LKM at work for 20 minutes each day. They could feel love for anyone including themselves. The effect was astounding, going far beyond the immediate positive feeling in the participants. During the 7 weeks of study, they experienced a decrease in the levels of anxiety and depression, an increase in the general feeling of joy and happiness, improved physical health, better relationships, and a higher sense of purpose.

82

Work toward your dreams

83

Act from the best within

84

See the seeds of greatness in each person.

Great leaders (teachers, managers) are able to see the seed of greatness in themselves and others.

Ask simple questions, "What is most impressive and remarkable about him?"

In a school study, after an IQ test, the results were reported to the teachers. The students and teachers were told that it identified students with highest academic potential. It was actually a random list of students. After one year, the identified students actually became better students. Their IQ also improved.

85

Live with integrity

86

Be humble

87

Simplify your life

88

Treat your mistakes as valuable feedback

89

Focus outward

Our obsession with happiness contributes to our unhappiness.

90

Appreciate your family and friends

91

Lead a spiritual existence

What are your core values? What matters most to you in the work that you do, beyond the material reward it offers? Is it integrity? Giving? Excellence? Is it being kind? Keep the identified list with you all the times and use it as a reminder of what matters most to you. And then do your best in accordance with your values.

92

Lead!

93

Be hard on the problem

Separate the person from his behavior. Be as harsh you need to be when dealing with the problem, but as soft as you can with the person.

94

Be an active agent

Taking responsibility is one of the pillars of healthy self-esteem. Making positive difference in my life is up to me, and me alone.

95

Change your perspective

Maybe the art of life is to convert tough times to great experiences. We can choose to hate the rain or dance in it. Joan Marques

96

Focus on successes

97

Give yourself permission to be human

98

Act generously

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared. Gautam Buddha

No more selfish act than a generous act.

While the rewards of generosity do often come in the form of material success, they always pay dividends in the currency of happiness. Happiness is an unlimited resource. Through our generosity we can tap the infinite reserve of spiritual and emotional wealth.

99

Have patience

100

Find the extraordinary in the ordinary

The invaluable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common. Ralph Waldo Emerson

The seemingly ordinary fact that I am conscious and aware right now is in fact extraordinary, a miracle that science cannot explain. There is nothing ordinary about being alive.

101

Take dreams seriously

I have a choice. And I choose to choose