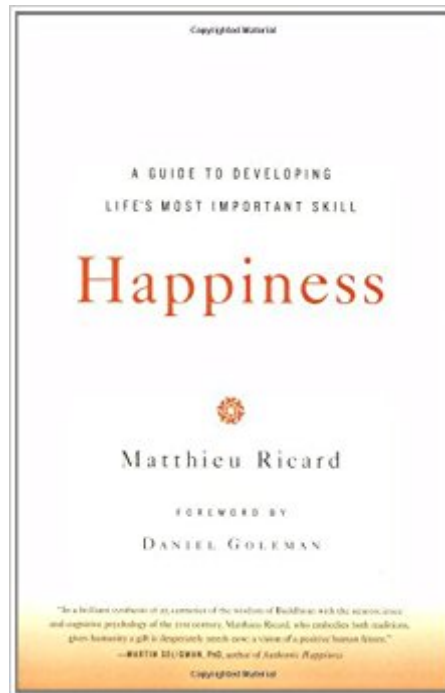


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Happiness: A Guide To Developing Life's Most Important Skill



Synopsis

A molecular biologist turned Buddhist monk, described by scientists as "the happiest man alive," demonstrates how to develop the inner conditions for true happiness.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I think a lot of the other reviews clearly explain why this is a wonderful book. It definitely has added a lot of perspective to my outlook on things. I believe as Ricard explains, that tweaks to the way we think and our attitude will definitely foster happier thoughts in our minds. There are some very memorable thoughts from this book - the one I liked most was the fact that happiness can never be based on external circumstances for they are fleeting. A loss of a loved one or a job can plunge a man from happiness to despair and darkness in an instant. If like Ricard, you believe that happiness can be a permanent state of mind, it has to be on the inside and all ephemeral, external circumstances will flutter the mind like lines written on water. But there are limitations and not-so-great things about the book which could have been improved. - Too much quoting philosophers and famous people Almost every chapter is filled with various philosopher's take on things like happiness, emotions etc. I was more interested in Ricard's own experience and his Gurus' opinions (which were also there at places) rather than a big collection of differing thoughts of other philosophers. - Lack of explanation on 'how to do' There is a clear lack of explanation of how to deal practically with the issues Ricard brings up. His theory that negative thoughts like hatred need antidotes like patience is great, but there is not much detail on how to cultivate them. Ricard says

the solution is meditation, but how and what to exactly meditate on is short in content. A recurring theme is that when say, you are very angry, look at the anger itself without attaching it to the target of the anger and meditate, and it will melt away.

Matthieu Ricard was born and raised in France. He had the makings of a stellar career in science, studying in his student days with a Nobel-prize winning scientist. But throughout his 20's, he shifted his interests more and more towards spirituality. For the past 30 years, he has lived and studied as a Tibetan Buddhist, in Nepal. He often serves as the French translator for the Dalai Llama. Ricard is a man who knows science. And, as a Frenchman, is deeply familiar with pessimism. He says, in France, happiness is considered boring, while pessimism and misery is considered quite interesting. "Happiness is only for the naive" is a common Western mindset. However, Ricard says: "Not true." Not only is happiness interesting - it is a skill, a challenging skill to be acquired only through intense practice. Pessimism, on the other hand, is boring - for it creates apathy, and a general lack of zest for life. As a man deeply interested in science, Ricard knows what he's talking about. He explains amazing discoveries made by the Mind & Life Institute. Placed under MRI brain imaging, Tibetan monks have shown to experience far greater happiness and are more emotionally balanced than any 'average' person. Scientists can gauge happiness by the amount of activity in the frontal lobe related to positive emotions. (There's also a section of the brain related to negative emotion, and criticism, which remains relatively dormant.) In one experiment, testing what's called a "startle" reflex - something that every human has (it's an uncontrolled flinch of one's facial muscles that occurs whenever a loud noise goes off) - a spiritually advanced monk was monitored for this reflex. When the loud noise went off, unlike anyone else ever tested, he did NOT flinch.

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