

Happiness Formulas

How to assess our subjective well-being?

How to live joyfully in the 21st century?

$$H = A * M * A' * R * E$$

Which stands for:

H: Happiness

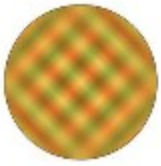
A: Aware (being)

M: Meditating

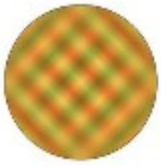
A': Active (being)

R: Respectful (being)

E: Eating properly



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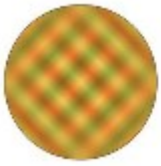
Letter to the reader

Through our awareness and actions, we gain the courage to change the things we can change; the serenity to accept the things we cannot change; and the wisdom to know the difference.

Dear friend,

thanks for downloading this eBook about subjective well-being and living joyfully! Our goal is to make you think about **what happiness means for you**; it is also to make you consider **how the different variables (mentioned in the described happiness formulas) facilitate your joyful living**. These are, in a nutshell, the main points emerging from our research:

- **being happy is a choice we make right here and now**, by living joyfully. It is not a place to reach in the future.
- **there are ways we facilitate happiness**, they can be summarized with the acronym AmAre: being Aware, Meditating, being Active, being Respectful, Eating properly.
- **there are ways we measure subjective well-being** and thinking about what such formulas mean for us, is even more important than the numbers we get out of them.
- **we get happier by making other people happier**, living joyfully starts from each of us, and materialize with shared happiness
- **there are several "fringe" benefits to living joyfully**, for example happier people are more sociable and energetic, more caring and cooperative, better liked by others, more likely to get married and stay married, to have wider social networks and receive support from friends, show more flexibility and creativity in their thinking, are more productive and work, are recognized as better leaders and negotiators, and so earn accordingly. They are more tenacious when times are not pleasant, have stronger immune systems, are healthier both physically and mentally, and live longer.



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The eBook is distributed for free, what we would like you to consider to do:

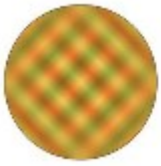
- **share this book with at least 8 friends**, who are interested in living joyfully. Support the only Multilevel Happiness (MLH) program!
- **share your opinion and input for future releases**, by write us an email (ebook@iswb.org). We look forward for additional material to add, etc.
- **localize this eBook**, and make it available in your native language. Some chapters may need to be expanded, some to be removed because not so relevant to your country. Please get in touch with us (ebook@iswb.org) if you are interested.
- **adapt this eBook**, to fit specific purposes. Would you like to edit a “Happiness formulas for expats”, “Happiness formulas for sophomores”, etc? In this case, too, please get in touch with us (ebook@iswb.org).

And, above all, let's take a big breath, and start living joyfully right here and now!

frank

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Chapter 1 – AmAre Way

$$\text{Happiness} = \text{Aware (Being)} + \text{Meditating} + \text{Active (Being)} + \text{Respectful (Being)} + \text{Eating (Properly)}$$

1.1 How to calculate it?

| Aware | | Meditating | | Active | | Respectful | | Eating | |
|-------|---|------------|---|--------|---|------------|---|--------|---|
| W | G | W | G | W | G | W | G | W | G |
| | | | | | | | | | |

Explanation of variables:

A: Aware (being) of each other and couple’s feelings, thoughts, needs and wants

M: Meditating together, or at least sharing thoughts

A1: Active (being) together, do things together

R: Respectful (being) of each other and couple’s feelings, thoughts, needs and wants

E: Eating properly and support each other healthy lifestyle, and also feed the relationship with positive feelings and thoughts

(...): if there are additional aspects considered too important to be included in the rest of the formula, they can be weighted and graded here

For each variable, please specify:

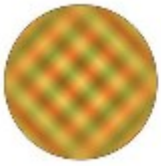
w: weight, importance given to each aspect (sum of all weights should be 100)

g: grade, rating given to each aspect (each grade is a value between 0 and 1)

If you want to use a spreadsheet, where you can insert the values and see them automatically calculated, you can use: <http://spsht.amareway.org/>

1.2 What does it mean?

AmAre formula is meant to be descriptive and preventive, but not predictive. That is, it quantifies the current situation, and the strengths and weaknesses we should be aware of and act upon. Regardless of what the number says, we are always responsible, here and now, for our happiness, so a high result means we should keep building our happiness as we have successfully done so far, and a lower result means there are aspects to act upon to improve our lives.



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One of the formula's strengths is its unlikeness to reach One, the perfect score, or Zero. This formula is useful so we can improve our awareness about the situation so far, and build a better present. Once the formula served its purposes, we can move on. Because the ultimate happiness is not reaching number 1, it is in finding and renewing the appropriate life-dynamics. If we can accept the way life is, and the fact that different people assign different weights and grades to the pillars of their happiness, and still respect and care about all of us, doing our best for the mutual happiness, we are on the way to build together a lasting happy living.

This is a scale to interpret the overall result of the formula:

0-0.3: This is a very unlikely result, so please double check each values inserted. If values are correct, it is very likely the perception of your SWB tends toward emphasizing the non-positive aspects, or that you had a short-term serious issue. This means there is a need to work on all your priorities to make them more satisfying to you in the medium term.

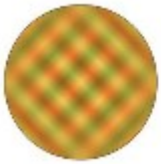
0.31-0.60: Your level of SWB could be higher, if you are closer to 0.31 result. If you are closer to 0.5, you are near an exact average value where you perceive the same value of positive and non-positive components in your life. In both cases, by working on the AmAre variables (starting from the ones with higher weight and lower grade), you can substantially improve your well-being.

0.61-0.90: You tend towards an optimal level of SWB. You feel happy, and likely experienced most or at least many of the happiness "fringe benefits". You likely live joyfully everyday: no matter the ups and downs we all have, you can make the best of them for yourself and the people around you.

0.91-1: This result is very unlikely to be reached, so please double check each values inserted. If values are correct, you achieved the maximum level of SWB.

To interpret the value of each AmAre variable, you can use the same scale. If a variable is high in weight, and low in grade, then it requires attention and action to improve it. If a variable is low in weight, and high in grade, then you may ask yourself if its grade is slightly over estimated.

We suggest to calculate your AmAre Index once per week for the first 5 weeks. Then, to calculate it once per month. Please make sure to start from scratch at each calculation, meaning you should not check values assigned in the past; after calculating your current AmAre Index, you can then check what changed compared to the previous calculations. If you want to be



reminded about monthly calculation, you can register the AmAre newsletter on. <http://www.amareway.org/>

1.3 Where are references and further information?

<http://www.amareway.org/>

(Redirect to official website)

<http://www.amareway.org/personal-development-free-personal-development-ebooks/>

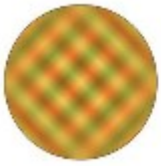
(Free eBooks: AmAre applied to blogging, social media, etc.)

<http://www.facebook.com/aawpersonaldevelopment>

(Facebook profile)

<http://hubpages.com/hub/How-to-keep-your-New-Year-resolution>

(Using AmAre for new year resolutions)



Chapter 2 – Oxford Happiness Questionnaire

$$\text{Happiness} = A - R$$

2.1 How to calculate it?

The Questionnaire is also available on <http://www.meaningandhappiness.com/oxford-happiness-questionnaire/214/>
This whole chapter is copied verbatim from it.

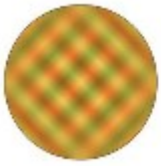
Instructions: Below are a number of statements about happiness. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each by entering a number in the blank after each statement, according to the following scale:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = moderately disagree
- 3 = slightly disagree
- 4 = slightly agree
- 5 = moderately agree
- 6 = strongly agree

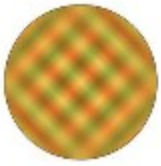
Please read the statements carefully, because some are phrased positively and others negatively. Don't take too long over individual questions; there are no "right" or "wrong" answers (and no trick questions). The first answer that comes into your head is probably the right one for you. If you find some of the questions difficult, please give the answer that is true for you in general or for most of the time.

The Questionnaire:

1. I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am. (R) _____
2. I am intensely interested in other people. _____
3. I feel that life is very rewarding. _____
4. I have very warm feelings towards almost everyone. _____
5. I rarely wake up feeling rested. (R) _____
6. I am not particularly optimistic about the future. (R) _____



7. I find most things amusing. _____
8. I am always committed and involved. _____
9. Life is good. _____
10. I do not think that the world is a good place. (R) _____
11. I laugh a lot. _____
12. I am well satisfied about everything in my life. _____
13. I don't think I look attractive. (R) _____
14. There is a gap between what I would like to do and what I have done. (R) _____
15. I am very happy. _____
16. I find beauty in some things. _____
17. I always have a cheerful effect on others. _____
18. I can fit in (find time for) everything I want to. _____
19. I feel that I am not especially in control of my life. (R) _____
20. I feel able to take anything on. _____
21. I feel fully mentally alert. _____
22. I often experience joy and elation. _____
23. I don't find it easy to make decisions. (R) _____
24. I don't have a particular sense of meaning and purpose in my life. (R) _____
25. I feel I have a great deal of energy. _____
26. I usually have a good influence on events. _____
27. I don't have fun with other people. (R) _____



28. I don't feel particularly healthy. (R) _____

29. I don't have particularly happy memories of the past. (R) _____

Calculate your score:

Step 1. Items marked (R) should be scored in reverse:

If you gave yourself a "1," cross it out and change it to a "6."

Change "2" to a "5"

Change "3" to a "4"

Change "4" to a "3"

Change "5" to a "2"

Change "6" to a "1"

Step 2. Add the numbers for all 29 questions. (Use the converted numbers for the 12 items that are reverse scored.)

Step 3. Divide by 29. So your happiness score = the total (from step 2) divided by 29.

I recommend you record your score and the date. Then you'll have the option to compare your score now with your score at a later date. This can be especially helpful if you are trying some of the exercises, and actively working on increasing your happiness.

2.2 What does it mean?

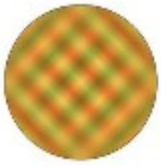
This part is copied verbatim from

<http://www.meaningandhappiness.com/oxford-happiness-questionnaire/214/>

I suggest you read all the entries below regardless of what score you got, because I think there's valuable information here for everyone.

1-2: Not happy. If you answered honestly and got a very low score, you're probably seeing yourself and your situation as worse than it really is. I recommend taking the Depression Symptoms test (CES-D Questionnaire) at the University of Pennsylvania's "Authentic Happiness" Testing Center. You'll have to register, but this is beneficial because there are a lot of good tests there and you can re-take them later and compare your scores.

2-3: Somewhat unhappy. Try some of the exercises on this site like the Gratitude Journal & Gratitude Lists, or the Gratitude Visit; or take a look at the "Authentic Happiness" site mentioned immediately above.



3-4: Not particularly happy or unhappy. A score of 3.5 would be an exact numerical average of happy and unhappy responses. Some of the exercises mentioned just above have been tested in scientific studies and have been shown to make people lastingly happier.

4: Somewhat happy or moderately happy. Satisfied. This is what the average person scores.

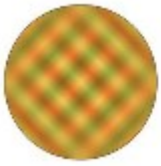
4-5: Rather happy; pretty happy. Check other score ranges for some of my suggestions.

5-6: Very happy. Being happy has more benefits than just feeling good. It's correlated with benefits like health, better marriages, and attaining your goals. Check back – I'll be writing a post about this topic soon.

6: Too happy. Yes, you read that right. Recent research seems to show that there's an optimal level of happiness for things like doing well at work or school, or for being healthy, and that being "too happy" may be associated with lower levels of such things.

2.3 Where are references and further information?

Hills, P., & Argyle, M. (2002). The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire: a compact scale for the measurement of psychological well-being. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 33, 1073–1082.



Chapter 3 – Positive Psychology Questionnaires

$$\textit{Happiness} = \textit{Pleasure} + \textit{flow} + \textit{meaning}$$

3.1 How to calculate it?

Martin Seligman, leading positive psychologists, offer a wealth of questionnaires in their books and websites, more information are provided in 3.3. Considering such questionnaires are self-calculated using their online version, here we just provide extremely simplified versions:

$$\textit{Happiness (Seligman)} = \textit{Pleasure} + \textit{flow} + \textit{meaning}$$

$$\textit{Simplified version} = [(\textit{Hours spent doing pleasant activities}) + (\textit{Hours spent in total immersion}) + (\textit{Hours spent doing meaningful activities})] / \textit{Number of days considered}$$

| Pleasant activities | Total immersion | Meaningful activities | Total hours | Number of days | Happy hours per day |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------------|
| | | | | | |

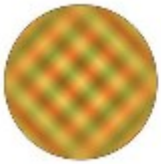
For simplicity, you can calculate this by adding the average amount of hours you spend in one day doing what brings you pleasure, what starts a flow and what really gives a meaning to your life.

For example: 30 minutes spent eating + 120 minutes spent speaking on the phone with clients + 60 minutes spent volunteering

Or you can have a more detailed view, for example by keeping a diary for one month where you write the way you allocate your time daily, and then divide it by the number of days in that month.

3.2 What does it mean?

Martin Seligman, thanks to four decades of research in the field, found there are three main pillars for happiness. Pleasure is the most commonly experienced, and also the least lasting; for example, the pleasure derived from eating an ice-cream, with declining marginal benefit derived from each bite. Flow is about total absorption in a specific task, which can be as short as writing an important email or as long as working on a book. Meaning is

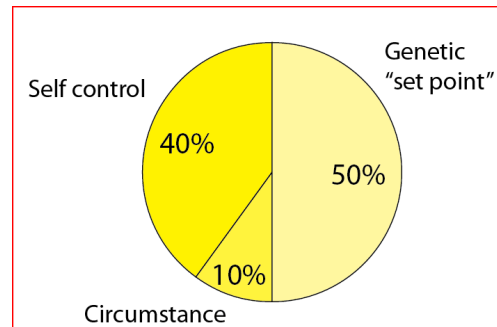


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the life with a purpose which, for its own definition, is not happening often and is the longer lasting.

Another positive psychologist, Sonja Lyubomirsky, offers an equation where Happiness = Genetic Set Point + Life Circumstances + Intentional Activities, which can be expressed visually as:



Source: Wikipedia

3.3 Where are references and further information?

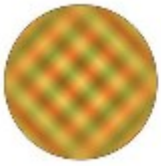
About Martin Seligman's research:

<http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>

<http://www.stanford.edu/class/msande271/onlinetools/LearnedOpt.html>

About Sonja Lyubomirsky's research:

<http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~sonja/>



Chapter 4 – Satisfaction With Life Scale

Happiness = social relationships + work/study satisfaction + confidence

4.1 How to calculate it?

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 1) 7 - Strongly agree
- 2) 6 - Agree
- 3) 5 - Slightly agree
- 4) 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 5) 3 - Slightly disagree
- 6) 2 - Disagree
- 7) 1 - Strongly disagree

_____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

_____ The conditions of my life are excellent.

_____ I am satisfied with my life.

_____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

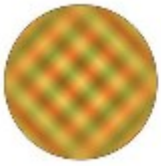
_____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

4.2 What does it mean?

The SWLS is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgements of satisfaction with one's life. The scale usually requires only about one minute of a respondent's time.

30 – 35 Very high score; highly satisfied

Respondents who score in this range love their lives and feel that things are going very well. Their lives are not perfect, but they feel that things are about as good as lives get. Furthermore, just because the person is satisfied does not mean she or he is complacent. In fact, growth and challenge might be part of the reason the respondent is satisfied. For most people in this



high-scoring range, life is enjoyable, and the major domains of life are going well – work or school, family, friends, leisure, and personal development.

25- 29 High score

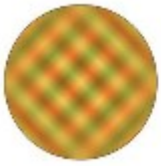
Individuals who score in this range like their lives and feel that things are going well. Of course their lives are not perfect, but they feel that things are mostly good. Furthermore, just because the person is satisfied does not mean she or he is complacent. In fact, growth and challenge might be part of the reason the respondent is satisfied. For most people in this high-scoring range, life is enjoyable, and the major domains of life are going well – work or school, family, friends, leisure, and personal development. The person may draw motivation from the areas of dissatisfaction.

20 – 24 Average score

The average of life satisfaction in economically developed nations is in this range – the majority of people are generally satisfied, but have some areas where they very much would like some improvement. Some individuals score in this range because they are mostly satisfied with most areas of their lives but see the need for some improvement in each area. Other respondents score in this range because they are satisfied with most domains of their lives, but have one or two areas where they would like to see large improvements. A person scoring in this range is normal in that they have areas of their lives that need improvement. However, an individual in this range would usually like to move to a higher level by making some life changes.

15 – 19 Slightly below average in life satisfaction

People who score in this range usually have small but significant problems in several areas of their lives, or have many areas that are doing fine but one area that represents a substantial problem for them. If a person has moved temporarily into this level of life satisfaction from a higher level because of some recent event, things will usually improve over time and satisfaction will generally move back up. On the other hand, if a person is chronically slightly dissatisfied with many areas of life, some changes might be in order. Sometimes the person is simply expecting too much, and sometimes life changes are needed. Thus, although temporary dissatisfaction is common and normal, a chronic level of dissatisfaction across a number of areas of life calls for reflection. Some people can gain motivation from a small level of dissatisfaction, but often dissatisfaction across a number of life domains is a distraction, and unpleasant as well.



10 – 14 Dissatisfied

People who score in this range are substantially dissatisfied with their lives. People in this range may have a number of domains that are not going well, or one or two domains that are going very badly. If life dissatisfaction is a response to a recent event such as bereavement, divorce, or a significant problem at work, the person will probably return over time to his or her former level of higher satisfaction. However, if low levels of life satisfaction have been chronic for the person, some changes are in order – both in attitudes and patterns of thinking, and probably in life activities as well. Low levels of life satisfaction in this range, if they persist, can indicate that things are going badly and life alterations are needed. Furthermore, a person with low life satisfaction in this range is sometimes not functioning well because their unhappiness serves as a distraction. Talking to a friend, member of the clergy, counsellor, or other specialist can often help the person get moving in the right direction, although positive change will be up the person.

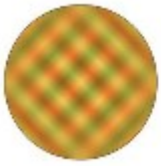
5 – 9 Extremely Dissatisfied Individuals who score in this range are usually extremely unhappy with their current life. In some cases this is in reaction to some recent bad event such as widowhood or unemployment. In other cases, it is a response to a chronic problem such as alcoholism or addiction. In yet other cases the extreme dissatisfaction is a reaction due to something bad in life such as recently having lost a loved one. However, dissatisfaction at this level is often due to dissatisfaction in multiple areas of life. Whatever the reason for the low level of life satisfaction, it may be that the help of others are needed – a friend or family member, counseling with a member of the clergy, or help from a psychologist or other counsellor. If the dissatisfaction is chronic, the person needs to change, and often others can help.

4.3 Where are references and further information?

Ed Diener, Robert A. Emmons, Randy J. Larsen and Sharon Griffin as noted in the 1985 article in the Journal of Personality Assessment

Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE)
<http://www.psych.illinois.edu/~ediener/SPANE.html>

Flourishing Scale
<http://www.psych.illinois.edu/~ediener/FS.html>



Chapter 5 – Facebook Collective happiness

$$\text{Happiness} = (\text{positive words}) - (\text{non-positive words})$$

5.1 How to calculate it?

Facebook itself calculates the index, by automatically and anonymously analyzing the number of positive and negative words in status updates for selected Countries. Of course, this means that, even when facebookers are just passing along a story, the words contained in a breaking-news can influence the index. For example, the Australia's index was lowest on Feb. 13, 2008, the day Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologized in Parliament to indigenous Australians, reflecting the 4 percent of Aussie status updates containing the word "sorry."

Data is aggregated in graphs, containing several metrics. GNH, represents Facebook measure of Gross National Happiness. Positivity and Negativity represent the two components of GNH: the extent to which words used on that day were positive and negative. Gross National Happiness is the difference between the positivity and negativity scores, though they are interesting to view on their own. The same model is applied separately to each country analyzed. Each model is thus calibrated differently, which eliminates effects due to differences in the countries' population and language use. .

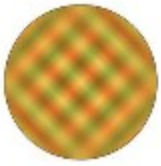
5.2 What does it mean?

These are some findings, as published on March 2010 by Facebook Data Team:

* Christmas, New Year's Eve and Valentine's Day are still among the happiest days for all of these nations, and Friday, Saturday and Sunday are happiest days of the week.

* Canadians are happier the day before Canadian Thanksgiving (a Sunday) than on the actual Canadian Thanksgiving Day (a Monday).

* Happiness levels in the UK seem to have the least variation, with the fewest large peaks among all the graphs due to holidays.

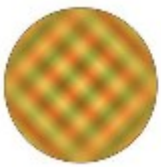


5.3 Where are references and further information?

Facebook GNH

http://apps.facebook.com/gnh_index/

Google Insight: a tool similar to Facebook GNH, to show where (please keep in consideration people mainly use native language to search online) and what people are searching for when it comes to Happiness
<http://www.google.com/insights/search/#cat=19&q=happiness&date=1%2F2010%2012m&cmpt=q>



Chapter 6 – Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

Happiness = Life Evaluation + Emotional Health + Physical Health + Healthy Behaviour + Work Environment + Basic Access

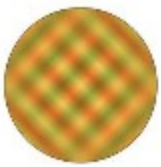
6.1 How to calculate it?

The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index measures health and well-being in USA. For at least 25 years, the Well-Being Index will collect and measure the daily pulse of US well-being. Survey respondents are asked an in-depth series of questions associated with health and well-being about:

- Life Evaluation
- Emotional Health
- Physical Health
- Healthy Behaviour
- Work Environment
- Basic Access

As reported on their site <http://www.well-beingindex.com> “The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index segments the data for respondents in both adverse and optimum situations according to household income, location demographics (based on zip code), and personal health status. The results are reported in continuous daily, weekly, and monthly averages. The survey methods for Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index relies on live (not automated) interviewers, dual-frame random-digit-dial (RDD) sampling (which includes landlines as well as wireless phone sampling to reach those in wireless-only households), and a random selection method for choosing respondents within a household. Additionally, daily tracking includes Spanish-language interviews for respondents who speak only Spanish, includes interviews in Alaska and Hawaii, and relies on a multi-call design to reach respondents not contacted on the initial attempt. The data are weighted daily to compensate for disproportions in selection probabilities and nonresponse. The data are weighted to match targets from the U.S. Census Bureau”.

For corporate use, the same organization designed the Healthways Well-Being Assessment. It is administered by Healthways to employers, health plans and other organizations, leveraging Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index questions for a baseline comparison against the nation and



Institute of subjective well-being

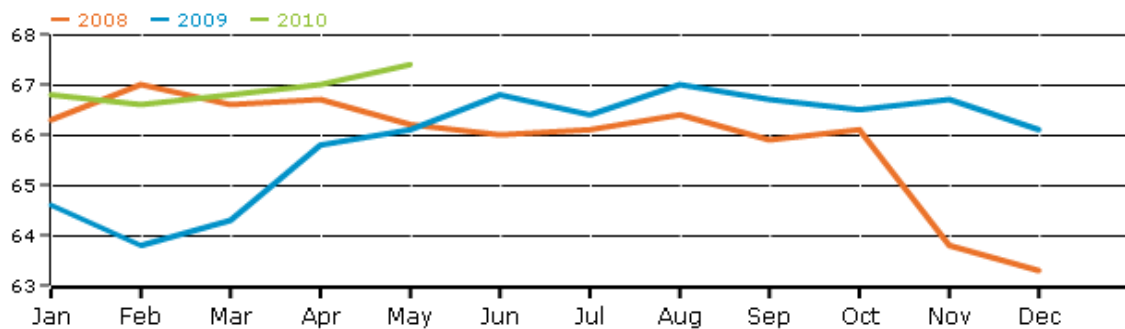
Science of happiness

geographical areas. It emphasizes employee health, employee productivity, work environment (including job stress, satisfaction with benefits, employee engagement), a culture of health assessing the organization's support of healthy lifestyle choices. The Healthways Well-Being Assessment also contains additional depth of measurement on health risks and employee productivity.

6.2 What does it mean?

By helping Americans understand how work impacts life and health and conversely how life affects work and health, Gallup-Healthways aims to work together to improve well-being for a better way of life.

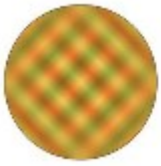
This is an overview of the index from 2008 to 2010:



6.3 Where are references and further information?

<http://www.well-beingindex.com/>

<http://www.well-beingindex.com/newsroom.asp>



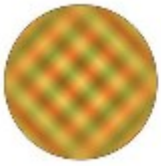
Chapter 7 – Gross National Happiness (Buthan)

*Happiness = Economic + Environmental + Physical + Mental + Workplace
+ Social + Political Wellness*

6.1 How to calculate it?

There is no exact quantitative definition of GNH, but elements that contribute to it are subject to quantitative measurement. Med Jones, President of International Institute of Management, introduced an enhanced GNH concept, treating happiness as a socioeconomic development metric. It tracks socioeconomic development in 7 areas

- Economic Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of economic metrics (consumer debt, average income to consumer price index ratio, income distribution, etc.)
- Environmental Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of environmental metrics (pollution, noise, traffic, etc.)
- Physical Wellness: measurement of physical health metrics (severe illnesses, etc.)
- Mental Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of mental health metrics (usage of antidepressants, rise/decline of psychotherapy patients, etc.)
- Workplace Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of labour metrics (jobless claims, job change, workplace complaints and lawsuits, etc.)
- Social Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of social metrics (discrimination, safety, divorce rates, complaints of domestic conflicts and family lawsuits, public lawsuits, crime rates, etc.)
- Political Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of political metrics (quality of local democracy, individual freedom, and foreign conflicts, etc.)

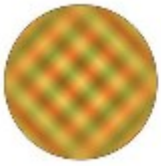


6.2 What does it mean?

Gross national happiness (GNH) was coined in 1972 by then Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. GNH is based on the premise that some forms of development are not measurable in monetary terms (a concept that is advanced by the nascent field of ecological economics) while conventional development models stress economic growth as the ultimate objective.

6.3 Where are references and further information?

<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/>



Chapter 8 – SWB - Science of happiness

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

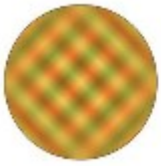
8.0 Disclaimer

Scientific research about happiness provides a wealth of information, and facilitates substantially to live a happy life. It makes accessible to all the aggregated experiences of many other human beings, who are daily living their lives in the best way they can. It also provides several valuable inputs to policy makers, not just individuals.

Some important points to consider, in order to make the best out of the positive effects that scientific research has on living joyfully:

- **self-fulfilling prophecies:** with “exact” sciences like physics, describing a phenomenon doesn't change it, even if of course it influences the way we look at it. Regardless of what we measure as the value of the gravity law, the speed at which stones fall is not affected. Research about happiness, and what makes people happy, is bounded to influence happiness-reinforcing actions.

- **diminishing returns and intentions:** what facilitate our happiness today may have lower positive impact in the future, because we get used it; this is especially true with pleasant activities; lasting happiness is about our outlook about the present, not only about what we do. Also, intentions count a lot: sharing time and resources with other people makes us more happy than buying something for ourselves; this is what both our experience and scientific research tells us. Still, just based on this, we would give everything away and expect to become happy for ever, we would be in for disappointment. Sharing facilitates happiness when we feel the importance of sharing, and not when we pursue sharing like a task to egoistically enhance our well-being.



8.1 Defining happiness and subjective well-being

Eudaimonia is a classical Greek word, commonly translated as happiness. Consisting of the word "eu" ("good" or "well being") and "daimōn" ("spirit", used by extension one's fortune), it often refers to human flourishing. It was a central concept in ancient Greek ethics, along with the term "arete" ("virtue") and phronesis (practical or moral wisdom). Webster dictionary defines happiness as “A) state of well-being and contentment, joy. B) a pleasurable or satisfying experience”.

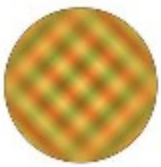
These definitions show that the different aspects of happiness are given different importance by different people; the meaning of happiness in the ears of the listener. For some, it is an inflated term plastered on self-help books; for others, a way of living achieved by living in harmony with ourselves, events, conditions, people and environment around us.

Subjective well-being is not the same as happiness, even if such terms are often used as synonymous. Subjective well-being, as defined by Ed Diener, covers "a broad category of phenomena that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgements of life satisfaction. Subjective well-being consists of two distinctive components: an affective part (evaluation guided by emotions and feeling), which refers to both the presence of positive affect (PA) and the absence of negative affect (NA), and a cognitive part (information-based appraisal of one's life, evaluated using expectations and “ideal life” as benchmark). It is commonly abbreviated as SWB.

The usage of the term “subjective well-being”, or even the term “joy”, is much less widespread than the one “happiness”. For this reason, while we use happiness in the title of this eBook because that is what people search for online and it is widely mentioned in the field of positive psychology, a suitable way to rephrase it is, in our opinion, is “living joyfully” (when referred to the ordinary meaning of the word), and to use the already mentioned "subjective well-being" which is the accepted standard when it comes to scientific research.

8.2 Measuring subjective well-being

We have already covered some approaches to measure SWB in the previous seven chapters. There are several ways SWB has been measured, both on a collective and individual basis. Often, countries are ranked by their happiness, and cities by how liveable they are.



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This ranks how well nations combine level and differences in happiness, for the period 2000-2009, as reported by Veenhoven, R., World Database of Happiness, Erasmus University Rotterdam (available at: <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl> accessed on July 7th, 2010):

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Costa Rica | 79 |
| Denmark | 78 |
| Switzerland | 74 |
| Finland | 73 |
| Netherlands | 72 |

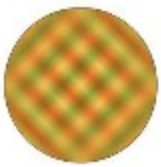
This ranks the most liveable cities in the World, as reported by Economist Intelligent Survey (available at: http://www.economist.com/blogs/gulliver/2009/06/liveable_vancouver accessed on July 7th, 2010):

| Liveability | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 2009 (100=ideal) | | |
| Rank | | Liveability |
| 1 | Vancouver | 98.0 |
| 2 | Vienna | 97.9 |
| 3 | Melbourne | 97.5 |
| 4 | Toronto | 97.2 |
| 5 | Perth | 96.6 |
| | Calgary | 96.6 |
| 7 | Helsinki | 96.2 |
| 8 | Geneva | 96.1 |
| 9 | Sydney | 96.1 |
| | Zurich | 96.1 |

*Weighted index rating whereby 100%=exceptional quality of life and 0%=intolerable
Source: Economist Intelligence Unit

8.3 Maximizing subjective well-being

Since social-sciences This is a selection of scientific findings about SWB; as every selection, more could have been add, and we can discover more about it by reading in full the books of the authors mentioned here, and their colleagues.



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Mindfulness: as reported by psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky, study participants who appreciate positive moments of their day, “showed significant increases in happiness and reductions in depression”.

Money aren't everything: researchers Tim Kasser and Richard Ryan found that “The more we seek satisfactions in material goods, the less we find them there. The satisfaction has a short half-life—it’s very fleeting.”. Money-seekers also score lower on tests of vitality and self-actualization. These findings are consistent across nations and cultures.

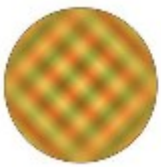
Have Meaningful Goals: this has been a recurrent theme along the eBook. “People who strive for something significant, whether it’s learning a new craft or raising moral children, are far happier than those who don’t have strong dreams or aspirations. As humans, we actually require a sense of meaning to thrive.” say Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener. “Happiness lies at the intersection between pleasure and meaning. Whether at work or at home, the goal is to engage in activities that are both personally significant and enjoyable” according to Tal Ben-Shahar.

Exercising matters: exercising delivers a sense of accomplishment, plus opportunity for interaction with people and environment, releasing endorphins and boosting self-esteem. And, under the supervision of a doctor, it may be very effective in healing depression.

Positive outlook: “Happy people...see possibilities, opportunities, and success. When they think of the future, they are optimistic, and when they review the past, they tend to savor the high points,” say Diener and Biswas-Diener.

8.4 Sustaining subjective well-being

If we pursue a meaningful life, or flow, happiness tends to be sustainable, and even self-reinforcing. But if we are on the hedonic treadmill, running here and there but in reality always being at point zero in terms of living joyfully, then in reality we are just aiming at pleasure (with its hedonic adaptation which results in declining value in how we perceive the same activities other time). And, in this case, variety doesn't really help us; as Daniel Gilbert (Harvard Professor of Psychology and author of "Stumbling on Happiness") says: "Research shows that people do tend to seek more variety than they should. We all think we should try a different doughnut every time we go to the shop, but the fact is that people are measurably happier when they have their favourite on every visit - provided the visits are sufficiently separated in time". As Daniel Gilbert (Harvard Professor of Psychology and author of "Stumbling on Happiness") says: "The main error, of course, is that we vastly overestimate the hedonic consequences of any event. Neither positive nor negative events hit us as



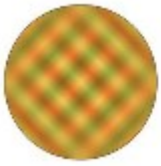
hard or for as long as we anticipate. This "impact bias" has proved quite robust in both field and laboratory settings". He also adds: "We are often quite poor at predicting what will make us happy in the future for two reasons. First, we have been given a lot of disinformation about happiness by two sources: Genes and culture. Both genes and cultures are self-perpetuating entities that need us to do things for them so that they can survive. Because we are interested in our own happiness and not theirs, both entities fool us into believing that's what is good for them is also good for us". Does this mean we should rely only on scientists to know more about our happiness? Surely not, but we also to be aware of the effects gene and meme have on our assumptions about happiness; assumptions and beliefs are formulated when we do not know, let's live joyfully so we can then evaluate by ourselves what are appropriate ways to act in each situation.

8.5 Subjective well-being and generosity

Elizabeth W. Dunn is assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of British Columbia, and is well-known for her research in the field of happiness, self knowledge, affective forecasting, implicit social cognition. In the conclusions of her paper titled "Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness", she wrote "While much research has examined the effect of income on happiness, we suggest that how people spend their money may be at least as important as how much money they earn. Specifically, we hypothesized that spending money on other people may have a more positive impact on happiness than spending money on oneself. Providing converging evidence for this hypothesis, we found that spending more of one's income on others predicted greater happiness both cross-sectionally (in a nationally representative survey study) and longitudinally (in a field study of windfall spending). Finally, participants who were randomly assigned to spend money on others experienced greater happiness than those assigned to spend money on themselves.

8.5 Subjective well-being and social networks

Human relationships are consistently found to be the most important correlation with human happiness. Happier people tend to have good relations with family and friends, as said by Diener and Biswas-Diener, who also add that "We don't just need relationships, we need close ones" that involve understanding and caring. Studies, including the one published on the British Medical Journal, reported that happiness in social networks may spread from person to person. Quoting its conclusions: "While there are many determinants of happiness, whether an individual is happy also depends on whether others in the individual's social network are happy. Happy people tend to be located in the centre of their local social networks and in large clusters of other happy people. The happiness of an individual is associated with the happiness of people up to three degrees removed in the

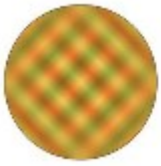


social network. Happiness, in other words, is not merely a function of individual experience or individual choice but is also a property of groups of people. Indeed, changes in individual happiness can ripple through social networks and generate large scale structure in the network, giving rise to clusters of happy and unhappy individuals. These results are even more remarkable considering that happiness requires close physical proximity to spread and that the effect decays over time.

Our results are consistent with previous work on the evolutionary basis of human emotions and with work focusing on the fleeting direct spread of emotions. In addition to their internal and psychological relevance, emotions have a specifically social role: when humans experience emotions, they tend to show them. Like laughter and smiling, the emotion of happiness might serve the evolutionarily adaptive purpose of enhancing social bonds. Human laughter, for example, is believed to have evolved from the “play face” expression seen in other primates in relaxed social situations. Such facial expressions and positive emotions enhance social relations by producing analogous pleasurable feelings in others, by rewarding the efforts of others, and by encouraging ongoing social contact. Given the organization of people (and early hominids) into social groups larger than pairs, such spread in emotions probably served evolutionarily adaptive purposes. There are thus good biological, psychological, and social reasons to suppose that social networks (both in terms of their large scale structure and in terms of the interpersonal ties of which they are composed) would be relevant to human happiness.

Our data do not allow us to identify the actual causal mechanisms of the spread of happiness, but various mechanisms are possible. Happy people might share their good fortune (for example, by being pragmatically helpful or financially generous to others), or change their behaviour towards others (for example, by being nicer or less hostile), or merely exude an emotion that is genuinely contagious (albeit over a longer time frame than previous psychological work has indicated). Psychoneuroimmunological mechanisms are also conceivable, whereby being surrounded by happy individuals has beneficial biological effects.

The spread of happiness seems to reach up to three degrees of separation, just like the spread of obesity and smoking behaviour. Hence, although the person to person effects of these outcomes tend to be quite strong, they decay well before reaching the whole network. In other words, the reach of a particular behaviour or mood cascade is not limitless. We conjecture that this phenomenon is generic. We might yet find that a “three degrees of influence rule” applies to depression, anxiety, loneliness, drinking, eating, exercise, and many other health related activities and

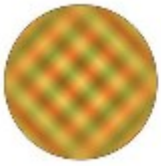


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emotional states, and that this rule restricts the effective spread of health phenomena to three degrees of separation away from the ego.

Our findings have relevance for public health. To the extent that clinical or policy manoeuvres increase the happiness of one person, they might have cascade effects on others, thereby enhancing the efficacy and cost effectiveness of the intervention. For example, illness is a potential source of unhappiness for patients and also for those individuals surrounding the patient. Providing better care for those who are sick might not only improve their happiness but also the happiness of numerous others, thereby further vindicating the benefits of medical care or health promotion. There is of course a tradition of community approaches to mental health, but this longstanding concern is now being coupled with a burgeoning interest in health and social networks. More generally, conceptions of health and concerns for the well-being of both individuals and populations are increasingly broadening to include diverse “quality of life” attributes, including happiness. Most important from our perspective is the recognition that people are embedded in social networks and that the health and well-being of one person affects the health and well-being of others. This fundamental fact of existence provides a conceptual justification for the speciality of public health. Human happiness is not merely the province of isolated individuals”.



Overture to future releases

One's end is another's start

This eBook is just the beta version a path we hope you'll decide to walk together. We briefly mention here some topics which could have complemented this book, we look forward for the many more which will come only if you decide to provide us your feedback and share your happiness story with us. The next version of this eBook will be substantially different, your contribution in terms of content and inputs is vital to make it relevant to your happiness story.

Starting a paradigm shift: degrees of appropriateness

In an analogical world, it was efficient to think digitally. That is, in a world without our current technological know-how, people preferred to reduce accuracy in favour of thinking in terms of right and wrong, discrete values, 0 or 1. In a digital world, it is effective to think analogically. That is, in a world where specialization is wide-spread and processing power easily available, people can improve accuracy and think in terms of degrees of appropriateness, with continuous values. Many debates are floating in the air, including the ones about SWB, where different schools of thought aim to prove they are totally right, and everyone else totally wrong. The paradigm shift is to think inclusively: given one opportunity to analyze, its values may tend towards one direction in a specific context, and towards another direction in another context. By pooling together our experiences and expertise, we can discuss which course of actions are more appropriate, or which outcomes more likely to occur, instead of thinking in terms of right or wrong, 0 or 1.

Being happy is a choice

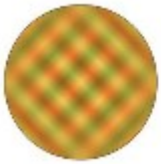
A recurrent theme in this eBook, and a fact for everyone who is taking happiness seriously: living joyfully is a choice. We can partially control what happens with us, we can totally control what happens within us.

Free-will is a fact, if we are mindful

We are free to act and we can take charge of our lives, as long as we are mindful. If we just act based on reflex and instinct, then we are bounded to “fight or flight” behaviour.

SWB has implications for public policy

Politicians can no longer focus only on monetary indicators when designing and implementing their policies. Subjective well-being is



important for voters, often when they are not even fully aware of it. For example, environmental conditions influence voters' moods: what is the point of a few points increase in GDP, or local business turn-over, if the cost for that is measured in parks being wiped away, with much lower air quality etc? This is not to say monetary indicators are not important, this just means they are not enough and need to be integrated with SWB indicators, like the ones provided by Gallup. Also, with proper research which estimates the savings of SWB policies on the health-bill (for example, "it is estimated that \$ XYZ are saved every month thanks to policies which facilitate healthy living"), and improvement in results, of Countries, it becomes easier for policy-makers to take fact-based decisions.

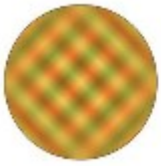
SWB has implications for international relations

Subjective well-being plays leading role in 21st century public diplomacy: would you be grateful to a foreign Country, whose traditions and current infrastructure allows you to improve your health? China and India, with their TCM and Ayurveda, are especially well placed to contribute to the SWB of people around the World, both in terms of incoming tourists who are visiting clinics etc. and foreign citizens who can benefit in their home Country from the expertise of Chinese and Indian expatriates, and their students.

SWB agents, objects, actions can be classified as hot, mild, cool

There are "agents", "objects" and "actions" facilitating SWB: agents are the providers/producers/facilitators of a given SWB object; an object is the physical substance, or the approach/procedure, of a SWB action; an action is what is required by a person to embrace a SWB object. To make some examples: a meditation instructor, or a pharmaceutical company, are agents; a given approach to meditation, or a pill, are objects; the act of meditating, or taking/being given a pill, are actions. Agents are often subject to public policy; objects, to industry/regulatory agencies standards; actions, to the common sense of the person performing/receiving them.

"Agents", "objects" and "actions" can be classified based on the different degrees of participation they require from the person who embraces (or is prescribed) them. "Hot" indicates an object which require little participation from the person choosing it; it is usually a silver-bullet solution to address one specific issue, often appropriate in life-threatening situation. Medicines are often "hot" objects. "Cool" indicates an object which require considerably greater participation from the person choosing it; it is usually a holistic solution to address a wide range of aspects, often appropriate when immediate results are not the main goals. Improving one's eating habits is an example of "cool" object. "Mild" indicates an object, or a bundle of objects,



which require average participation from the person choosing it; it usually brings a mix of immediate and long term results.

Being happy together: multilevel happiness

People can be wealthy while other people are starving, unfortunately that occurs quite often. But we cannot be happy in a vacuum, joyful beings who are an island to themselves; as mentioned, happiness is social and contagious. We also find the idea of Multilevel happiness appropriate. When it comes to multilevel marketing, often early the first movers (the ones at the top of the scheme) are the one profiting, while others are just feeding them; multilevel happiness creates joy for all, and sometimes the last to join even benefit from aggregated experiences and happiness of the friends who preceded them. Let's be agents of happiness!

Being happy together: without dependency

Sometimes, we may think that, by carrying other people on our shoulders, we are going to make their lives better. In reality, we are just contributing to making them dependent on us. There are exception, but in most of the cases, people can usually take them of themselves, and are happier when they do. We should be generous with all, without making them dependent on us. We should help in case of emergency and for long term projects, but making other people dependant on us for their daily living presents dangers: to them, because they no longer feel empowered: to us, because it grows our ego, by making us feeling so important for others.

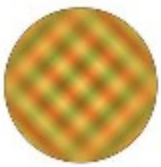
Lasting happiness

Provisional happiness can be influenced by external short-term events; lasting happiness, is influenced both by objective (genetics and natural predispositions) and subjective (educating our emotions; ensure that, if they crystallize into moods, they are positive ones) personal factors . By knowing better how to develop our subjective factors, and how to maximize our objective factors, we increase our happiness.

Happiness is a way of living

Happiness is the result of what we think and do. Happiness is not a target to aim to, nor a place to reach and blissfully sit there forever. If we are concerned only with happiness, we are going to miss it; if we live our lives in ways appropriate the context, we are happy.

Happiness is like a garden: it comes in different shapes, sizes, colours; it grows on different soils, under different weather conditions; it brings different flowers. What's common about our garden of happiness is that it needs to be understood and nurtured, cultivated and loved. And there is no



such thing as cultivating our small fenced garden in a vacuum: it depends on how other gardens are, which seeds are carried around by bees, etc.

Power of context

We also need to understand strengths and weaknesses are never absolute, and always contextual: a shy person makes an ideal listener, and maybe not the most performing social butterfly. For this reason, shy people may put themselves in the contexts where they can facilitate happiness for them and other people; and also let themselves go in more social situation. Still, happiness is more building in strengths, and not force ourselves in filling what we see as voids.

We can change: Neuroplasticity and Neurogenesis

Science discovered that our brain can be rewired (neuroplasticity). And not only that, new neurons can be generated (neurogenesis). At any age, and in almost every condition. Of course, there are some stages of our lives, and certain conditions, where neuroplasticity and neurogenesis are facilitated more; still, how we think and what we do rewires our brain, and the way our brains are wired influence how we see the world and what we do. We can make this a virtual circle, supporting our growth as individuals and member of society.

Being aware of awareness: consciousness matters

Scientific research made giants steps toward a deeper understanding of consciousness. While we do not all need to be experts in neuroscience, an understanding of its discoveries can facilitate our happiness, making us more aware of how our awareness works .

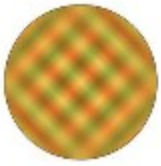
Evolution explains a lot about our instincts

Why, as individuals, our behaviour may be so unpredictable, but as “crowds” patterns are easy to spot? Because, among other reasons, there was an evolutionary advantage in following the wisdom of the crowd, especially in situations of emergency: if a member of the tribe was suddenly running, chances he/she spotted a potential source of food, or a predator who was ready to attack; and, in a relatively small community, it was easy for peers to know the odd case of a tribe-member who was always running for no reason.

Why is sex so often present in our minds? Because most of the beings with low libido are, well, extincted due to lack of off-springs.

Meme explains a lot about our customs

Meme is a label used to identify units of cultural ideas, symbols or practices; meme are, by their own nature, transmittable from one mind to another. This means that customs which are easily transmissible in a given context, are likely to stick around for long regardless of their degree of



truthfulness, sometimes even when they are objectively detrimental to the people implementing them.

The need for more research

Science already made remarkable discoveries in the field of subjective well-being, this justifies investing more resources in research, both longitudinal (across time) and latitudinal (across different demographics).

The need for more wide-spread awareness

Initiatives like the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index are extremely important to spread awareness about SWB, and remind to policy makers the importance of keeping SWB into high consideration. We hope these kind of measurements will become even more prominent.

The need for critical thinking

Subjective well-being requires, among other things, to act accordingly to our interpretation and evaluation of data, information, communications, and argumentation. It requires us to quantify a degree of confidence with which we embrace, or decline, the different options available. Considering the importance, and number of stakeholders, active in SWB, we do need to think critically about what we do; there are several good points made by researchers and thinkers about the pitfalls of a society which, instead of a genuine interest in SWB, develops a superficial “feel good” approach to life. We'll suggest some of them, in new releases of this book.

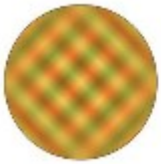
About religion, metaphysics, spirituality and ethics

Religions include several aspects, like theology, metaphysics, spirituality, ethics, etc. Many religions deeply differs from each other about theology and metaphysics; even more in the way they label and describe them. Spirituality and ethics can be a subset of a religion, with many similarities across different traditions; or they can be a way we relate with ourselves and all the beings, outside a religious framework.

Religious choices, based on what we believe, are not a subject of this eBook. Spirituality and ethics, based on what we experienced as appropriate in given contexts, will be discussed further in future releases.

About opportunities, challenges, and problems

Everything is as it should be, given the current components of the present context. If we want to change the outcome of the situation, then we need to take action. In the case of opportunities, the upside for us is the most evident. When we see challenges, we are focused on the question marks



raised by a situation; still, by taking action, we can overcome them. When we see problems, then the focus is all on the threats; problems cannot be solved with the same mind-set which created them, they demand a brand new approach, otherwise they would not even be problems in the first place.

Happiness to be found East?

Rudyard Kipling's line from the "The Ballad Of East And West" is mentioned many times: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet". Unfortunately, the rest of the quotation is often omitted: "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!".

East and West, North and South, they can all meet and share the fruits of their cultures and understanding. It is important to say that, all along the history of the "West", there were voices who had a more holistic view about life and happiness; also, from the East, there were dual doctrines. That means to look East is not necessary to live joyfully, even if of course the wealth of wisdom developed in the East can facilitate us. There were philosophers, like Epicurus, who hinted to ways of living happily; unfortunately, these voices were not considered supportive to the ruling classes and status-quot, and so were ignored, misrepresented or even repressed.

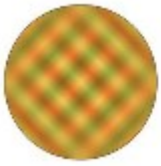
What's in an eBook title?

We like to write about our experiences and opinions in this blog. We also hope other people can read them, add their own take and benefit from them. This means the blog need to be found, and search-engines are the way information is found nowadays.

Being found by search-engines means using appropriate keywords in titles, descriptions etc. This bring one challenging question: are these keywords really an appropriate way to describe what we write about? For example, self-development and self-help are popular search terms. They are also contradictions in terms :-). Most of us do not really need to strenghten the self, most of us benefit from focusing on real awareness.

To make another example: the word happiness is inflated. It is used a lot, often to identify pleasure and other feelings which aren't really happiness. Still, people perform happiness-related searches on Google et al, and a fair amount of friends visit us thanks to such searches.

How did we decide to balance these different opportunities, for now? We keep happiness in our posts and tags. We also mention self-development from time to time. And we also add what we believe is appropriate to describe the formula to a happy life: living joyfully. And also



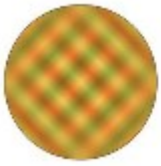
Institute of subjective well-being

Science of happiness

living joy fully. Because, based on our personal experiences, happiness is a way of living: acting in appropriate manners (because we really are all on the same boat, and we all deserve respect; and not because we know only because that makes us happy) creates joy, here and now, for all..

Future releases

This eBook is currently in beta version. Future publications will include new releases, and also “plug-ins”: short pamphlets, usually focused on one topic only. If you want to provide suggestions etc. please send them to ebook@iswb.org



Institute of subjective well-being

Science of happiness

Dedicated to my loving wife, my caring parents, my strong grand-parents, relatives, ancestors, friends, all the people I met so far, and the ones I'll meet. Thanks for giving your example of joy, love, hope, humbleness and determination to do good.

Dedicated to the breath-taking Canada, the peaceful nature of Estonia, the charming good-heart of Italy. Thanks for giving a context where to live joyfully, and flourish.

Vancouver, 14 July 2010

Thanks to

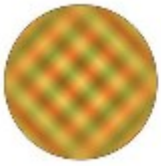
You, as a start...

May you benefit from the knowledge contained here as much as I did. May you take it and transform it into wisdom. May all the people who contributed, directly and indirectly, receive all the credit for what is good in these pages. Any short-coming you may find in these pages is my own, your feedback is appreciated to improve this eBook. Please send your messages to ebook@iswb.org

About the author

Frank is a Lay Dharma instructor within the Seon (Korean Zen) tradition. He holds a diploma in Buddhist studies (World Buddhist University, Thailand) and also studied Humanistic Buddhism (University of the West, Los Angeles, USA).

Frank is Italian, has spent most of his adult life in North America, England and Estonia, and lives in beautiful British Columbia (Canada). He has been working in eCommunication since late 1995, studied business, graduated in International Relations and Diplomacy. Travelling around the World and meeting different cultures, he understood what we need to be happy is already available here and now; we just need to look and see the context with open eyes. He also think that life is the ultimate koan, with hints can be found both within and outside one's tradition, and the final answer lies only within oneself – or the lack of it as understood in the conventional way. You can contact him through an “art of happiness” blog on <http://www.amareway.org/>



About the Subjective Well-being Institute

The Institute of Subjective Well-Being (<http://www.iswb.org/>) is a non-sectarian, non-political institute devoted to sharing both established and pioneering research in the field of subjective well-being, more commonly known as happiness. Subjective well-being is a suitable way to refer to happiness: subjective, because it is in the eyes' of the beholder; well-being, because it is always in progress and not a place to reach and hold for good. Membership is free and open to researchers, meditators, philosophers and the public at large. ISWB publishes pamphlets and white-papers, freely available on their site; they also edit a newsletter for media experts who want to receive updates about developments in the field of subjective well-being.

Scientific research has already proven happiness is a matter of many factors, including personal choices, environmental influences and genetics; ISWB aims to keep the discussion open. An analogical approach to happiness (where different factors influencing happiness are weighted according to the context) has proven more effective than a digital approach (where the discussion is focused on finding one exclusive, or leading, cause for all); even of course the yes/no approach seems always the most efficient, the additional knowledge we are gaining and the exponential growth in computing power when it comes to scenarios-building, makes possible to opt for a more effective approach, with efficiency taken care by progress. Discussing about different degrees of appropriateness, instead of zero-sum right or wrong positions, brings more positive results, at the advantage of all parties involved in the discussion. Research has also shown that happiness is a two-way street: our brain influences what and how we see; at the same time, external elements – channelled through our senses – can physically change our brain, rewiring it. This means the brain has a major role in subjective well-being, but should not be seen as the only player in the field.

About AmAre Way

The verb “AmAre” means “To Love” in Italian. As written on the blog which bears the same name (<http://www.amareway.org/>), it also shows we are united in an interconnected universe: there is no (I) Am without (We) are. As an acronym, it summarizes a fivefold approach to happiness:

Aware (Being)

Meditating

Active (Being)

Respectful (Being)

Eating (properly)