

THE BIG IDEAS

The Four Archetypes

Rat racers, hedonists, nihilists and happy peeps.

The Ultimate Currency

Is happiness.

Happiness Rituals

Start 'em up!

Negative Rituals

What will yours be?

Expressing Gratitude

Is a very good thing.

The Science of

Following your bliss.

Lifelines

vs. Deadlines.

Knapsacks

& Commitments.

Zones:

Comfort, panic & stretch.

Time Affluence

Beats material affluence.

110-Year Old You

In a time machine.

"I did not accept her question with its implicit either-or approach to happiness. I told her that instead of asking 'Should I be happy now or in the future?' she should ask, 'How can I be happy now and in the future?'"

~ Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz

Happier

Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment

BY TAL BEN-SHAHAR · MCGRAW-HILL © 2007 · 224 PAGES

"As I see it, the role of positive psychology is to bridge the ivory tower and Main Street, the rigor of academe and the fun of the self-help movement. That, too, is the purpose of this book."

~ Tal Ben-Shahar from *Happier*

Tal Ben-Shahar is brilliant. And so is this book. His Positive Psychology class at Harvard was the most popular class on campus and, after reading his book, I can see why.

The book is really well written and PACKED with a great overview of why happiness matters along with scientifically supported Big Ideas and exercises to help us rock our greatest lives. Truly amazing. If the Note resonates with you, I *highly* recommend you pick it up and get your "happier" on. :)

Let's start with Ben-Shahar's definition of happiness and then we'll check out a few of my favorite Big Ideas!

"I define happiness as 'the overall experience of pleasure and meaning.' A happy person enjoys positive emotions while perceiving her life as purposeful. The definition does not pertain to a single moment but to a generalized aggregate of one's experiences: a person can endure emotional pain at times and still be happy overall."

THE FOUR ARCHETYPES

"The rat racer's illusion is that reaching some future destination will bring him lasting happiness; he does not recognize the significance of the journey. The hedonist's illusion is that only the journey is important. The nihilist, having given up on both the destination and the journey, is disillusioned with life. The rat racer becomes a slave to the future; the hedonist, a slave to the moment; the nihilist, a slave to the past.

Attaining lasting happiness requires that we enjoy the journey on our way toward a destination we deem valuable. Happiness is not about making it to the peak of the mountain nor is it about climbing aimlessly around the mountain; *happiness is the experience of climbing toward the peak.*"

Ben-Shahar kicks the book off with a story of four archetypes and the importance of finding pleasure and meaning now AND in the future.

Here's a quick peek at the four archetypes:

"The Rat Race Archetype": According to Ben-Shahar, we started playing this game of putting off enjoying life at the age of 6 when we started school and were told to work hard for good grades so we can get ahead in life. (Odd we weren't encouraged to enjoy school because learning is inherently fun, eh? :) No pain, no gain kinda thing. The problem here is that we're always pushing forward, rarely enjoying what we're doing and we can't seem to figure out why we're rarely consistently happy.

" Money-beyond the bare minimum necessary for food and shelter (and I am not talking caviar and castles)-is nothing more than a means to an end. Yet so often we confuse means with ends and sacrifice happiness (end) for money (means)."

" Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence."

~ Aristotle

"The Hedonism Archetype": Here we go for what gives us pleasure *now*. No goals, no long-term planning. Just doing what feels good in the moment. This lifestyle leads to boredom and meaninglessness.

"The Nihilism Archetype": This group focuses on past failures to experience happiness (the Rat Race didn't work and neither did Hedonism... eek!) and has effectively given up, adopting what Martin Seligman calls "learned helplessness" (check out the Note on [Learned Optimism](#) for more).

So... Our culture is pretty much all about the rat race. Then when we realize *that* isn't what it's all about we tend to jump into the hedonist archetype. Then, when **that** doesn't bring happiness, we can often throw our hands up and fall into the helpless nihilist camp. Eek.

Clearly, we want to play in **"The Happiness Archetype"**: Here we realize that it's not an either/or equation. As Ben-Shahar says: **"Happiness is not about making it to the peak of the mountain nor is it about climbing aimlessly around the mountain; happiness is the experience of climbing toward the peak."**

So...

Where have you/are you spending most of your time!?!?

THE ULTIMATE CURRENCY

"A human being, like a business, makes profits and suffers losses. For a human being, however, the ultimate currency is not money, nor is it any external measure, such as fame, fortune, or power. The ultimate currency for a human being is happiness."

This is another central theme to getting Happier. Ask yourself why you do anything enough times and you're going to come to one final answer: Happiness.

Go ahead and try it.

What do you want?

To make a lot of money? To get "enlightened"? To make a difference in the world? To have a wonderful family?

Why? Why? Why?

Because we want to experience happiness.

When we get this, we become more aware that all those other things (wealth, prestige, great relationships, etc.) are just means to an end and then we can structure our lives such that we're basking in the wealth of our ultimate currency: Happiness.

Might wanna noodle on this: **"In 1968, college freshmen were asked what their personal goals were: 41 percent wanted to make a lot of money, and 83 percent wanted to develop a meaningful philosophy of life. The pattern was significantly different in 1997, when 75 percent of freshmen said their goal was to be very well off financially, and 41 percent wanted to develop a meaningful philosophy of life. As larger numbers of people come to perceive material wealth as an end in itself, and, thus, as more individual members of society are unhappy, society as a whole nears a state of emotional bankruptcy."**

HAPPINESS RITUALS

"For athletes, being a top performer is a deeply held value, and therefore they create rituals around training; for most people, hygiene is a deeply held value, and therefore they create the ritual of brushing their teeth. If we hold our personal happiness as a value and want to become happier, then we need to form rituals around that, too."

" Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, the very purpose of life is happiness, the very notion of our life is towards happiness."

~ His Holiness the Dalai Lama

"The most creative individuals—whether artists, businesspeople, or parents—have rituals that they follow. Paradoxically, the routine frees them up to be creative and spontaneous."

~ Tal Ben-Shahar

Rituals.

LOVE. THEM.

We talk about the power of habits and rituals often in these Notes.

Ben-Shahar refers to the great book *The Power of Full Engagement* (see Notes) and its authors' emphasis on the importance of rituals. They remind us that: "All great performers rely on positive rituals to manage their energy and regulate their behavior." And: "The more exacting the challenge and the greater the pressure, the more rigorous our rituals need to be."

That, of course, leads us to a couple logical questions: Is happiness a deeply held value for you? If so, what rituals do you wanna bring into your life?

As Ben-Shahar says: "What rituals would make you happier? What would you like to introduce to your life? It could be working out three times a week, meditating for fifteen minutes every morning, watching two movies a month, going on a date with your spouse on Tuesdays, pleasure reading for an hour every other day, and so on. Introduce no more than one or two rituals at a time, and make sure they become habits before you introduce new ones. As Tony Schwartz says, 'Incremental change is better than ambitious failure. ...Success feeds on itself.'"

So, let's pick the top ritual you want to bring into your life, shall we?

(Minimum of one new one. Max of two. :)

I'm going to have fun rockin this ritual in my life starting TODAY: _____

While we're talking about rituals, let's talk about some:

NEGATIVE RITUALS

"Change, especially of deeply ingrained habits and patterns, does not happen overnight. Most important, once again, is to ritualize your activities. In addition to creating a habit of activities that you want to engage in, introduce negative rituals—times during which you refrain from doing certain things. For example, if feasible, create an Internet-free time zone, each day between certain hours. We spend an increasing amount of time on the Web; checking our e-mail every few minutes takes away from our productivity and creativity and ultimately makes us less happy. You can also introduce phone-free or meetings-free time zones, when you can fully focus on other activities, whether getting work done or spending time with your friends."

Negative rituals.

Love those, too. :)

My greatest creative pushes have come when I've not allowed myself to check email before doing my most important creative act of the day (whether it's writing or recording or reading or whatever). Tim Ferriss inspired me with this practice in his great book *The Four Hour Workweek*.

Simple: Decide on what you need to do have a great day and then do THAT before you do all the other stuff. Truly magical. :)

So...

What negative rituals can you build into your life?!?

(For the record, when Ben-Shahar tells us that "checking our e-mail every few minutes takes away from our productivity and creativity and ultimately makes us less happy," he's not making a flippant remark. He cites a study that shows workers so distracted suffer a greater loss of IQ than someone smoking marijuana. So, uh... :)

"Happiness is not just a luxury, something to be pursued once all our personal and societal ills are resolved. Increasing the levels of the ultimate currency improves the quality of individual lives and can make the world a better, safer place."

~ Tal Ben-Shahar

"To experience a sense of purpose, the goals we set for ourselves need to be intrinsically meaningful."

~ Tal Ben-Shahar

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

"In research done by Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough, those who kept a daily gratitude journal—writing down at least five things for which they were grateful—enjoyed higher levels of emotional and physical well-being. Each night before going to sleep, write down at least five things that made or make you happy—things for which you are grateful. These can be little or big: from a meal that you enjoyed to a meaningful conversation you had with a friend, from a project at work to God."

Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude.

This is one of the most powerful happiness strategies out there.

Two main reasons: first, it's proven to boost your happiness mojo; and, second, it's super easy to implement!

So, I ask you, o' lover of wisdom, for what are you grateful? I am grateful for:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

(One more question: You wanna make keeping track of the things for which you're grateful a happiness ritual? 5 out of 5 positive psychologists will tell ya that's a good idea! Just keep it fresh and really feel into your appreciations! :)

THE SCIENCE OF FOLLOWING YOUR BLISS

"As research on self-concordant goals illustrates, Campbell's belief is much more than a superstition. When we follow our bliss, we not only enjoy the journey, we are also more successful."

Ben-Shahar gives us an entire chapter on the importance of goals and stresses the importance of what psychologists call "self-concordant" goals: "those we pursue out of deep personal conviction and/or a strong interest."

It's awesome to see a scientist validating Campbell's wisdom for us to discover and follow our bliss.

The fact is that when we're internally motivated to do something we truly care about we tend to work more passionately and persist in the face of challenge—two variables that go a long way in creating success.

Oh, and we enjoy the process a lot more, too, which is always a good thing—especially when amassing a fortune of "ultimate currency" (aka happiness) is a priority. :)

LIFELINES VS. DEADLINES

"My wife, Tami, and I often help each other set goals for ourselves—personal as well as joint ones. A few years ago, as I was talking about setting a deadline for one of the goals, she pointed out to me that because self-concordant goals inspire—literally, can put the spirit in us—it would be more appropriate to speak of lifelines. Similarly, when in pursuit of goals that are both pleasurable and meaningful, that yield both present and future benefit, we are enlivening time rather than killing time."

I love that. Let's swap our "deadlines" for "lifelines" and quit "killing time" and start "enlivening time," shall we? :)

"The psychologist Abraham Maslow once wrote that 'the most beautiful fate, the most wonderful good fortune that can happen to any human being, is to be paid for doing that which he passionately loves to do.'"

~ Tal Ben-Shahar

"The average is indicative of a trend, not of a necessity or of a universal truth. Often, it is those outside the norm, the exceptional ones, who point to the truth of what is possible."

~ Tal Ben-Shahar

"The most successful people are lifelong learners; they constantly ask questions and never cease to explore the wonder-filled world around them. Regardless of where you are in life—whether you are fifteen or a hundred and fifteen, whether you are going through a rough patch or are thriving—create an education program for yourself."

~ Tal Ben-Shahar

"As J. P. Morgan, one of the most successful and creative entrepreneurs of all time, said, 'I can do a year's work in nine months, but not in twelve.' Sometimes, indeed, less is more."

~ Tal Ben-Shahar

"Helping oneself and helping others are inextricably intertwined: the more we help others, the happier we become, and the happier we become, the more inclined we are to help others."

~ Tal Ben-Shahar

KNAPSACKS & COMMITMENTS

"In 1879 Thomas Edison announced that he would publicly display the electric lightbulb by December 31, even though all his experiments had, to that point, failed. He threw his knapsack over the brick wall—the numerous challenges that he still faced—and on the last day of that year, there was light. In 1962, when John F. Kennedy declared to the world that the United States was going to land a man on the moon by the end of the decade, some of the metals necessary for the journey had not yet been invented, and the technology required for completing the journey was not available. But he threw his—and NASA's—knapsack over the brick wall. Though making a verbal commitment, no matter how bold and how inspiring, does not ensure that we reach our destination, it does enhance the likelihood of success."

Ah... Commitment.

Ben-Shahar quotes W.H. Murray's brilliant thoughts on the matter from his *Scottish Himalaya Expedition*: "Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness concerning all acts of initiative and creation. There is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans; that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen events, meetings and material assistance which no one could have dreamed would have come their way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets: 'Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now!'"

Queue chorus of singing angels

Is it time for you to make a commitment?

Do you have a knapsack you need to throw over a brick wall?

COMFORT, PANIC & STRETCH ZONES

"...they were encouraged to take risks and find their stretch zone (the healthy median between their comfort and panic zones)."

Ben-Shahar talks about Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and his great book [Flow](#) quite a bit. See the Notes for a full discussion and remember this: "In all the activities people in our study reported engaging in, enjoyment comes at a very specific point: whenever the opportunities for action perceived by the individual are equal to his or her capabilities. Playing tennis, for instance, is not enjoyable if the two opponents are mismatched. The less skilled player will feel anxious, and the better player will feel bored. The same is true for every other activity... Enjoyment appears at the boundary between boredom and anxiety, when the challenges are just balanced with the person's capacity to act."

Too much stress = panic zone.

Too little stress = comfort zone.

Just the right amount of stress = stretch zone.

LOVE THAT! Let's find our stretch zones and do the flow happy dance, yah?! :)

TIME AFFLUENCE

"Psychologist Tim Kasser shows in his research that time affluence is a consistent predictor of well-being, whereas material affluence is not. Time affluence is the feeling that one has sufficient time to pursue activities that are personally meaningful, to reflect, to engage in leisure. Time

"What we need if we are to implement change in our lives is courage. And courage is not about not having fear but about having fear and going ahead anyway."

~ Tal Ben-Shahar

poverty is the feeling that one is constantly stressed, rushed, overworked, behind. All we need to do is look around us—and often within ourselves—to realize the pervasiveness of time poverty in our culture."

Material affluence isn't a consistent predictor of well-being but time affluence is. Powerful.

How can you simplify your life and create time affluence that'll produce the ultimate currency you're looking for?!

110-YEAR OLD YOU IN A TIME MACHINE

"You are one hundred and ten years old. A time machine has just been invented, and you are selected as one of the first people to use it. The inventor, a scientist from NASA, tells you that you will be transported back to the day when, as it happens, you first read *Happier*. You, with the wisdom of having lived and experienced life, have fifteen minutes to spend with your younger and less experienced self. What do you say when you meet? What advice do you give yourself?"

Ben-Shahar presents this awesome exercise as he reminds us that we ALREADY know what we need to know to live an incredible life. The challenge is the fact we rarely bring it into our awareness and then actually LIVE from that knowing.

He brings the point home powerfully by describing stories told by people whose lives are transformed when they get a cancer diagnosis. All the sudden their lives shift and they start living in more integrity with their deepest values.

Imagine this: You're 110 years old and get a chance to hop into a time machine that brings you back to today. You've got 15 minutes. What do you tell yourself?

And is now a good time to start following your inner sage?

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Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.