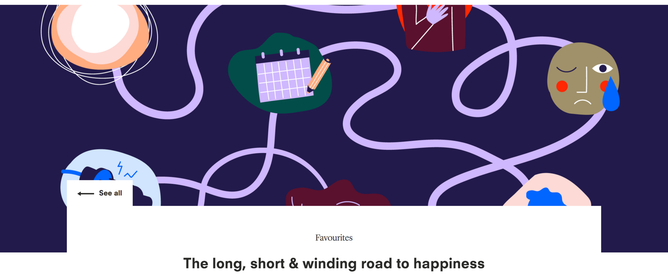

Favourites

The long, short & winding road to happiness

Ben came and held some wellbeing workshops focused on happiness with us at UF. Here he shares with us his own recipe for happiness (take note!).

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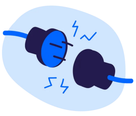
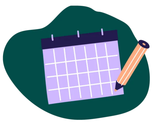
topic I have thought, studied and meditated on for most of my adult life. Yet I hesitate to use the word happiness for the inner sense of fulfilment and of a life well lived I wish to describe. It is relatively easy to write about happiness and yet living a life full and well lived is both beautifully simple and deeply challenging.

I believe that our journey towards true happiness rests on the continuous reflection on two important questions. What does happiness mean to me? And what is my personal path towards deep and lasting happiness? Some small handful of years ago I completed my masters thesis and published an article on understanding peoples' recipes for long-lasting happiness. Two important lessons I have learned in the years since are that the best recipes change with the flow of time, and each individual's recipe is a magical thing unique to that person. Recently I have found myself focusing less on the practical components of a life well lived and more on the deeper themes of what makes me feel a sense of lasting fulfilment over time. Here is my recipe for today...



Ingredient #1: Connectedness

Devote yourself to living a life that is connected. To me this means looking within myself to find what is important to me, and what gives me energy, inspiration and meaning. Find your moments of connectedness and flow and use these as a guide to what is important to you. As your awareness of what is important to you grows put your energy to these things.



Ingredient #2: Commitment

Take a committed and practical approach to making sure you prioritise what is important to you. Schedule time for your family, friends and loved ones, be committed and attentive to your work, schedule a lunch hour and enjoy your meal, spend time in nature to revitalise. I am a passionate surfer and waterman so I make sure to make space for my time in the ocean. Be willing to diarise and create routines that provide the space and time to connect. And make sure you spend this energy on the things that are important to you. This can take effort but the reward is unmeasurable.

Ingredient #3: Fluidity

Once you have made space, put your heart into the activity you are doing. You have chosen to make time for this because it is important to you. Be mindful, meaning devote yourself to this activity with a fluid and intentional awareness that gives the best possibility of enjoyment. Don't expect too much, but do put all you can in. I have been using a simple mindfulness practice of tuning in as deeply as I can to each of my senses as I walk down the beach to the ocean. This generally gives me a more connected and enjoyable experience.

Ingredient #4: Sadness

Life has sadness, sorrows and loss. If we spend our lives trying to escape and avoid painful emotions, deeply experienced happiness will ever remain illusive to us. The joyous and hard felt emotions of life are wrapped up together in our living. How can we deeply love someone without feeling sorrow when they are in pain or mourning their passing? This is perhaps the hardest and deepest lesson in understanding happiness. It is easy to put in words, but practically so hard to embrace emotional discomfort and pain. And yet there is no escaping it and the more I understand this simple truth, the more peaceful I can feel.

Ingredient #5: Devotedness

Stay connected as best you can through these sad and challenging times. We cannot constantly chase moments of perfect joy and clarity. I have learned that hard times are essential for understanding what is important to me, and what I wish to devote myself to. If we are brave enough to tune in we can see that things fade and die and pass away. Being connected through hard times is as much part of a life well lived as our bright and bouncy moments, perhaps more. Happiness is a long short and winding road:

Happiness is a long, short and winding road

Can you shake off all your personal baggage and be deeply happy right now? Certainly you can. You are something far greater, deeper and more expansive than you think. And the core of who you are is happiness.

Experiencing these moments of deepest joy is part of happiness, but it is not the whole picture. Long-lasting happiness is the journey of a lifetime. Stay devoted to seeking for the things that make your heart feel full. Watch these change as you age and try to evolve with these changes and be open to them. Your individual journey toward happiness is the only single journey that is right for you. If there is one thing I believe deeply to my core it is that no two people's journeys to inner happiness and living in the world peacefully can be quite the same. So read, reflect, learn and introspect, while realising the answers you seek are ultimately found within you. They are your own and they are unique to you.

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