

"Meditation teaches a similar lesson, as does the still youthful field of "acceptance and commitment therapy", outlined in Russ Harris's excellent book *The Happiness Trap*. The point isn't to improve your thoughts and feelings, or stamp out negative ones, so much as to "unhook" from them; to stop being a puppet they jerk around. This isn't a Secret, nor really a Power. It's more of a Useful Insight. Somehow, I doubt that'll be the title of Byrne's third book."

--This Column will Change Your Life, Guardian UK, September 2010 {link}

"Calm, cool (and effective) Buddhist-based advice. With mindfulness exercises and meditation techniques, Harris teaches us to handle feelings with courage and space instead of tempting yet unhealthy, fleeting fixes. Free yourself from an emotional finger trap and embrace true happiness! These exercises actually work—I tried them all. Perfect for everyone from therapy-lifers to children."

--Caroline Treadway, Elephant Journal

"Russ Harris has been on a mission to convince Tasmanians happiness isn't normal. Indeed, the Victorian doctor believes the pursuit of happiness is actually making people miserable. "We all enjoy feeling good so it's no surprise we chase happy feelings," Dr Harris says. "But feelings of happiness don't last and the harder we pursue pleasurable feelings the more we are likely to suffer from anxiety and depression." Dr Harris says most of the meaningful things in life involve the full range of emotions. "For example, having children brings feelings of love and joy but it also brings frustration, anxiety and anger," he says. "While people continue to think happiness is only about feeling good they are going to be struggling with reality." Instead, Dr Harris advocates accepting emotions for what they are. "If you fall in quicksand, struggling is the worst thing you can do. Instead, you are meant to lie as still as possible floating on the surface. "The same principle applies to difficult feelings -- the more we try to fight them the more they smother us. It is much easier to learn to let feelings come and go."

Dr Harris's preferred method of achieving this is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) based on the ancient Eastern practice of mindfulness. "Mindfulness is about being in the present moment and when you become more mindful the emotions no longer control you," he says. Dr Harris, who was in Hobart last week to train doctors and psychologists, said that when he discovered ACT it was love at first sight. "It is quick to learn, easy to practise and it works," he says. "A 2002 study with severe schizophrenic patients found those treated with just four hours of ACT had a 50 per cent reduction in hospital readmission rates." Dr Harris said that the therapy could be used in treating a range of medical conditions as well as simply helping people deal with everyday challenges. A former general practitioner, Dr Harris turned to psychology when he became disenchanted with writing prescriptions. He taught his patients "mindfulness" skills with impressive results -- particularly for those with such conditions as chronic pain, hypertension, depression, stress and anxiety. His interest in the psychological aspects of illness led to a career change and he now works full time as a therapist and coach. In 2007 Dr Harris published a book, *The Happiness Trap*, to spread the ACT word and it is now a best-seller in 20 countries."

-- Gina Vowles, Sunday Tasmanian 20/09/2009

"Happiness should be the greatest gift that we possess. But how many people are happy? And by trying to achieve happiness are we make ourselves miserable? ... "We all want it. We all

crave it. Even the Dalai Lama has said: 'The very purpose of life is to seek happiness.'" So writes Dr Russ Harris, author of *The Happiness Trap*. So what are we doing wrong? Dr Harris says in any given year, one third of all adults suffer from a psychiatric disorder. The World Health Organisation says depression is the fourth biggest disease in the world. One in five people will suffer from clinical depression at some stage in their life. One in two will consider suicide for two weeks or more, and one in 10 will actually attempt to kill themselves. If meeting our needs makes people happy, then many in the west would truly have achieved their nirvana. Yet clearly this is not so ... Australian GP Dr Russ Harris was interested in the connection between human psychology and medical illnesses, particularly between the mind, the nervous system and the immune system. He investigated various forms of therapy because he had become disenchanted with writing prescriptions for people's ailments. When he discovered ACT, he was so impressed by it that he travelled to the US and trained with its creator. Upon his return to Australia he wrote *The Happiness Trap*."

-- Denise Carter, *The Weekender* (Cairns Post) 28/08/2009

"Harris certainly has broken the mould of the self-help book with this enthusiastic and unique approach to making the most of our lives ... a book like this, with its fresh, innovative and interactive style, might prove to be 'just what the doctor (Harris) ordered'."

-- Michael L. H. Collins, School of Psychology, University of Ulster North Ireland for The British Psychological Society