

Book Review

Beyond happiness

Seldon, A. (2015). *Yellow Kite*.

Beyond Happiness has a wonderful combination of theory, personal experience and how-to steps, providing layers to the conversation about reaching personal joy. The main objective of the book is to help you notice and reclaim your song inside, to uncover it, and help lead you to ultimate joy. This comes from the Henry David Thoreau idea that “most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.”

Seldon promotes the theory of positive psychology which claims “that it makes sense to study what is right about people in addition to what is wrong”. The term was coined by psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1950, and Seldon wishes to focus on this concept for people to reach joy, a deeper and richer fulfilment of life.

Understanding the meaning of happiness

Seldon does a wonderful job in using the words you know (pain, happiness, pleasure) and asking you to truly understand the meanings for each word and be mindful with your usage of them. He supports his explanations with quotes and excerpts from literary work as well as religious texts from multiple backgrounds providing a wider understanding and greater cultural scope for anyone reading and wishing to reach personal joy. The concepts in the book are simplistic, but because of their simplicity, understanding each word and the concepts around them are complex and thought-provoking.

There were two sections of the book which stood out to me the most, one was understanding “to choose is to be human... the notion that we are mere victims is a product of incorrect and lazy thinking”. For me, this is one of the hardest levels of acceptance to overcome to reach joy, because it requires everyone to take responsibility of their actions and personal drive. Seldon explains the notion of victimisation is from “learned helplessness” and one way of combating this notion is positive self-belief.

The second is giving, “if we see ourselves as isolated individuals, then our focus might naturally be on ourselves alone”. Seldon explains that giving does provide happiness for the giver but it is not only that, giving is the simple understanding that when you are aware and take notice to then give to someone, you are reaching outside yourself and connecting with the people around you, spreading kindness and happiness.

Beyond Happiness is an enjoyable read, simple in its writing, yet provocative in its concepts. I think someone who is seeking happiness, or someone who believes themselves to be happy, should read this book and continue to understand the levels of happiness and become mindful of their personal journey.

Reviewed by Kate Cherven, Fundraising and Communications Intern at the Mental Health Foundation.

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