

# The Art of Happiness

Reviewed by Sylvia Brown

This book is a fascinating study of Eastern and Western psychology, revealing how they differ and where they meet. The Dalai Lama's Buddhist-based views on life are discussed by Dr Howard C Cutler, an American psychiatrist.

**T**he Dalai Lama believes that the main purpose of life is to achieve happiness. He believes that every one of us has the basis within us to be happy, and that human nature is fundamentally gentle and compassionate.

True compassion lies at the heart of Buddhism and the road to happiness. It can be defined as the "wish for others to be free from suffering, associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility and respect towards others".

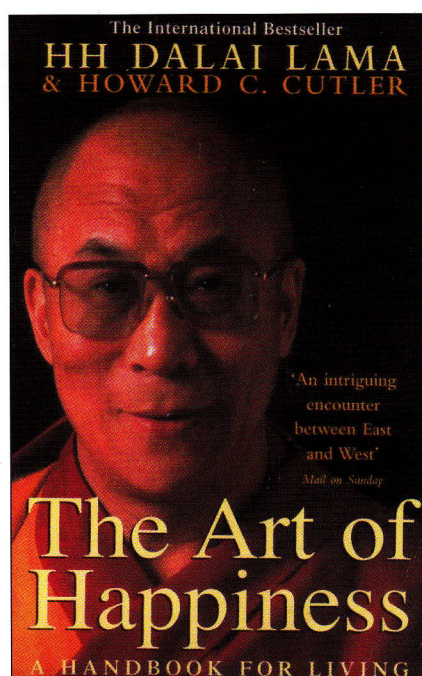
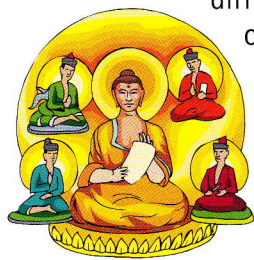
In this book this great spiritual leader offers us a wealth of practical wisdom and advice on how we can best overcome our everyday human problems and achieve lasting happiness.

The Dalai Lama explores the differences between,

our "wants" and our "needs", and "happiness" and "pleasure". After our basic needs, such as food, clothing and

shelter are met, we don't actually need anything else in order to be happy. Further "wants" such as more money, success, or the perfect mate, can lead to excessive desires or greed, which do not ultimately lead to self-contentment or happiness.

Physical "pleasure" is also



transient and unstable, whereas true "happiness" relates to matters of the heart and mind and so lasts.

Happiness is determined more by one's state of mind than by external events.

If you are fundamentally unhappy and frustrated in yourself, then physical comforts, though consoling, will not bring you lasting happiness. Whereas it is possible to be in poor health and yet be calm, peaceful and happy.

A challenging chapter in this book tackles suffering. The Dalai Lama has no easy answers to this one, just helpful advice in how to deal with it. Problems are always best confronted even if there are no apparent solutions.

Suffering has to be accepted

as part and parcel of existence. This leads to a greater tolerance to suffering which in turn helps counteract the feelings of mental unhappiness, dissatisfaction and discontent.

Buddhists believe that suffering arises as a result of negative past actions. But instead of judging it as "bad", they view it as a catalyst for spiritual liberation.

Even pain, which may appear to have no redeeming qualities, is actually there to protect us and alert us to danger and injury. In fact it is the very unpleasantness of pain which makes it so effective; it demands that instant action be taken to protect and save us.

So although we may not be able to be grateful for the experience of pain, maybe we should be grateful for the system of pain perception. Our western attitude to pain as the "enemy" only increases our suffering to a certain degree.

Though simply reading this book alone cannot bring you happiness, it will make you think and teach you a lot about the human mind.

What you do with this knowledge is up to you...

### Info Box

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