



Book Recommendation

Happiness Studies by Tal Ben-Shahar

I have great respect and admiration for many leaders and pioneers in the field of wellbeing and positive psychology, and Tal Ben-Shahar, is one of these inspiring figures. I feel fortunate to have connected with Tal during his visits to Geelong Grammar School, completed his 12-month Certificate in Positive Psychology course, and absorbed the wisdom from his powerful, life-changing books. Tal has written extensively on the topic of happiness. His first book, *Happier*, was published in 2007, and in 2009, he released *Even Happier – A Gratitude Journal for Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*. I purchased 30 copies of this book and loved gifting it to family and friends. You can learn more about Tal, his work, his courses, and his extensive list of books [here](#).

I'm not quite sure how it has taken this long to recommend one of Tal's books, but it fills me with joy that I may be introducing some members of our growing My Manifesto community to this inspiring leader. We reference Tal in our own [book](#) on multiple occasions, and several of his works are listed in Appendix 5: *50+ Authentic Living Books That We Love*. Tal describes himself as both an author and a teacher. Personally, I believe Tal's ability to 'teach' this work – the art and science of living well – is his true superpower. Along with his best-selling books being translated into more than 30 languages, Tal also taught two of the most popular classes in Harvard University's history - *Positive Psychology*, and *The Psychology of Leadership*.

Our current book recommendation is Tal's latest release, *Happiness Studies – An Introduction*. This concise, 132-page book offers an articulate and accessible explanation of happiness, which Tal refers to as the 'ultimate currency'. Despite its brevity, the book is packed with wisdom. Tal introduces us to a wide range of scholars - from psychologists and philosophers, to theologians, biologist and economists – who contribute to the interdisciplinary field of happiness studies.

One of the quotes Tal draws on is from Helen Keller, who, more than a century ago wrote: 'I define happiness as the experience of whole-person well-being.' Tal adapts this by blending the words *wholeperson* and *wellbeing* to create his definition of happiness as 'the experience of *Wholebeing*.' He explains that *Wholebeing* is a multifaceted concept that includes five key elements which he summarises using the acronym SPIRE – Spiritual Wellbeing, Physical Wellbeing, Intellectual Wellbeing, Relational Wellbeing, and Emotional Wellbeing. We've provided a brief summary of each of these elements on the following page.

Happiness Studies, is now the first book I recommend to educators and school leaders exploring wellbeing education. I have also gifted many copies of this book to colleagues, and I hope you find it equally inspiring and helpful.



SPIRE Elements Overview.

SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

While many associate spirituality with religion, spirituality can also be experienced outside religious contexts. It refers to finding a sense of purpose and meaning in life, as well as elevating ordinary experiences into extraordinary ones through mindful presence.

PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Understanding the connection between mind and body is crucial for physical wellbeing. This challenges the Western dualistic view of separating the two. Our mental and physical states are interconnected, and happiness relies on both. To realise our potential for Wholebeing, we need to meet our physical needs for exercise, proper nutrition, sleep, and touch.

INTELLECTUAL WELLBEING

Although intelligence does not necessarily correlate with happiness, how we use our intellect can greatly influence it. True intellectual wellbeing comes from curiosity, openness, and deep engagement in learning, not simply from academic achievements. These qualities are the foundation of intellectual wellbeing and, by extension, Wholebeing.

RELATIONAL WELLBEING

The primary predictor of happiness isn't money, prestige, or success, but the time spent with those we care about and who care about us. Healthy relationships form the cornerstone of a fulfilling life, and this extends beyond our relationships with others — it also includes cultivating a healthy relationship with ourselves.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Our emotions play a vital role in our overall happiness, shaping and being shaped by our thoughts and actions. Emotional wellbeing involves both fostering positive emotions, like joy and gratitude, and managing difficult ones, like envy and sorrow, in healthy ways.