

Summary of 10 Percent Happier

1-Sentence-Summary: [10% Happier](#) is an introduction to mindfulness and meditation for skeptics, taking a non-fluffy, science-based approach to this practice in order to show you how letting go of your ego can help you live a stress-free life.

Read in: 4 minutes

Life as an ABC News correspondent must feel pretty good right? The pay is great, millions of people know your face and name, and you get to tell everyone what's important. But for some, the pressure can become too much — and they crack.

This happened to [Dan Harris](#) 12 years ago. [His voice broke in a live, on-air panic attack on national television](#). The incident convinced him that it was time to do some digging into his self and life. Harris went on a long journey into the science of stress and, eventually, mindfulness. Originally a skeptic himself, Dan eventually learned to tame his ego with the power of meditation. In his 2014 bestseller, [10% Happier](#), he shares his takeaways.

Here are 3 lessons to show you why your ego causes problems, that letting it go won't make you lose your touch, and how meditation helps with this process:

1. The problem with your ego is that it's never satisfied.
2. Be simple, not a simpleton — why letting go of your ego won't make you a pushover.
3. Meditation increases your mindfulness and compassion by giving you a fourth habitual response.

Ready to crank up your happiness by at least 10%? Let's go!

Lesson 1: Your ego gets in the way of your happiness by constantly wanting more.

The friction between acting in the present, but constantly thinking about the future and past is what causes your ego to be impossible to satisfy. This issue is also addressed in [The Power of Now](#) by Eckhart Tolle in a very similar manner.

Dan Harris says your ego constantly assesses your worth by looking at your own wealth, looks and social status, and then finding the next best person with more of it to compare it against. Therefore, **your ego's default setting is more**. The minute you feed your ego a new achievement, toy or compliment, the baseline for desire is reset and it starts looking for the next thing.

It thrives on drama and worry, and will instantly look for the next bigger achievement to compare yourself to, and if none is there, dig up some ancient problem or crisis and pester you with it. That's why the ego is never [happy](#), and it's up to you to take charge of that, because no matter which new heights you reach, it'll never be enough.

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Time to reign it in!

Lesson 2: Be simple, not a simpleton—why letting go of your ego won’t make you a pushover.

Now you might say: “If my ego is my drive to achieve greater things, won’t I lose my edge if I completely let go of it?”

Nope! That doesn’t have to be the case at all. To the contrary. Often people overdo it with the Buddhist attitude of letting go and in some cases even end up not letting themselves [orgasm](#) during sex or letting other people order for them at restaurants in order not to express personal preference.

That’s just stupid. As Indian meditation teacher Munindra taught his students to keep things simple and easy, one of them approached him when he was fiercely negotiating the price of a bag of peanuts at the local market about how this matched his earlier lesson. Munindra replied: “**I said be simple, not a simpleton!**”

Mindfulness just makes you [more creative](#) and productive, not a pushover. It removes the need for competition and fuels your drive by removing wrong assumptions and bad thoughts, so instead of the usual stress you’ll approach things more clearly, because you’re not giving in to aggressive temptations.

Dan found himself filling pages upon pages with notes during a meditation retreat, because his mind was less cluttered and chaotic, and his creativity flowed freely.

Lesson 3: Meditation makes you more mindful and compassionate by giving you a fourth habitual response.

So what is it that meditation can help us do to tame the ego and fuel our drive?

It makes us more mindful and helps us live in the moment, as well as act more compassionately towards others. Meditation achieves this by giving you a fourth habitual response. According to ancient Buddhist wisdom, we usually exhibit three characteristic habitual responses to all of our experiences:

1. **We want it.** Ever passed by a hamburger place when you were hungry? Yeah. That.
2. **We reject it.** Did a spider ever land on your hand? You probably instantly threw it off.
3. **We zone out.** I bet you always listen to the flight attendant’s safety instructions all the way to the end too. Yeah, right.

But once you [start meditating properly](#), you’ll be able to choose a fourth alternative: **Observing, without judging.**

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It usually starts with physical pain, and you notice when your legs are sore or your nose itches, but you can resist the urge to scratch it and just let it be. But after a while, this transfers to your emotions and thoughts as well. You'll catch yourself while gossiping, acting out on a bad habit, or when you're thinking negative thoughts – and can just observe your feelings until they pass by, without reacting to them.

It's this little pause between thinking and acting that makes you realize often no action is necessary and thus helps you [make better choices altogether](#).

When I originally wrote this summary of [*10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works—A True Story*](#) (isn't that title a mouthful?), I was a skeptic about meditation too. By now, I've meditated every day for the last 5+ years ([here are some lessons from around day 800](#)).

If you're unsure as well, this book is perfect for you. It cuts away all the mumbo-jumbo, flower-power, hippie stuff and takes a purely scientific, down-to-earth approach to mindfulness. The book spends more time using logic arguments to get you to *try* meditation than explaining it, and that's exactly right, I think.

The process itself really is that simple: sit and focus on your breath. If your thoughts wander, bring them back. That's all there is to it. The book explains that but then mostly focuses on the benefits, which are more important for beginners to understand than to exactly nail the technique.

It takes a lot of guts to write a book about the most embarrassing moment of your life, but in this case, Dan Harris' courage sure paid off!

Who would I recommend our summary of 10% Happier to?

The 15-year-old high schooler who often gets angry at her classmates and doesn't know why, the 32-year-old journalist with a demanding and stressful career in a competitive environment, and anyone who thinks meditation is hocus-pocus.

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