

Spotlight on the Know Yourself Better Journal

October 18, 2021

People often ask me, **"What's the secret to happiness? If you had to choose one thing, what would you choose?"**

Depending on your perspective, that question can be answered in a few different ways.

One answer is: [Relationships](#). Contemporary scientists and ancient philosophers agree that to be happy, we need strong, enduring bonds to others.

Another answer is: **Self-knowledge**. As my [Fifth Splendid Truth of Happiness](#) holds, **we can build happy lives only on the foundation of our own nature, our own interests, our own values, our own temperament**. I've certainly found that to be true in my own case.

But it's so hard to know ourselves. You'd think, "Of course I know myself. I just hang out with myself all day long!" But in fact, it's easy to be distracted by the way we wish we were, or think we ought to be, or what others think we should be, until we lose sight of what's actually true. As Christopher Alexander observed:

It is hard, so terribly hard, to please yourself. Far from being the easy thing that it sounds like, it is almost the hardest thing in the world, because we are not always comfortable with that true self that lies deep within us.

[*The Nature of Order, Book Four: The Luminous Ground*](#)

So how do we boost our self-knowledge?

One way is by asking ourselves questions. A shrewd question can kick up unexpected insights, and often points the way toward useful change.

For instance, a friend told me, "My doctor asked me if I wore sunscreen, and I said I did, even though I almost never do." When we lie, we show that in some way, our actions don't reflect our values. And that's a very, very useful thing to observe.

Also, an astute question can help us notice an overlooked pattern or characteristic about ourselves.

This strategy—asking ourselves questions—is so effective, and so important for happiness, that on the [Happier with Gretchen Rubin](#) podcast, one of our recurring segments is "Know Yourself Better."

I've been talking to people about happiness and self-knowledge for years, so I knew that many people want to gain greater self-knowledge, but need direction.

To meet this need, allow me to present...**the [Know Yourself Better Journal!](#)**

This journal is made for people who want more self-insight, but need more direction than a blank page. It offers questions and distinctions meant to help you achieve deeper understanding—and discover ways you might make your life a little happier.

For instance...

- **Identifying the times of day you feel most productive may encourage you to re-think when you schedule certain activities.** You've been trying to go for a run early in the morning, when actually you feel most energetic in the mid-afternoon.
- **Reflecting on what you did for fun when you were ten years old**

might inspire you to pick up a new hobby. You spent every free afternoon exploring the woods when you were a child, but now you don't spend any time in nature.

- **Describing your perfect day could highlight ways to make *today* a little happier.**

This journal is useful, and it's also gorgeous; I wanted it to be pleasing to write in; beautiful tools make work a joy. Also, it's beautiful so that as an object, it can be a real keepsake item, as a record (and time capsule) of self-reflection.

So many people—including me—have the urge to keep a journal of some kind, but just don't have the time or energy to write for pages each day. The [Know Yourself Better Journal](#) is a way to scratch that itch, but in a directed, manageable way.

To create the *Know Yourself Better Journal*, I worked with some brilliant minds on [The Happiness Project team](#): Hannah Wilson, Emy Joyeux, Anne Mercogliano, and Lindsay Logan, with illustration by [Ana Miminoshvili](#).

Here's a question for you: What questions would you add to this journal, to help yourself know yourself better? It's such an important, and elusive, aim.