

Books by the Stack

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

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

DAN HARRIS

—GRETCHEN RUBIN, author of *The Happiness Project*

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 by Dan Harris

After a televised panic attack, Dan Harris found himself on an adventure involving a disgraced pastor, a self-help guru, and brain scientists. He takes readers from the outer reaches of neuroscience to the fringes of America's spiritual scene, and leaves them with a takeaway that could actually change their lives.

Why you'll like it: *Sincere, skeptical mindfulness, practical.*

About the Author: Dan Harris is a correspondent for ABC News and the co-anchor for the weekend edition of Good Morning America. Before that, he was the anchor of the Sunday edition of World News. He regularly contributes stories for such shows as *Nightline*, *20/20*, *World News with Diane Sawyer* and *GMA*. Harris has reported from all over the planet, covering wars in Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine and Iraq, and producing investigative reports in Haiti, Cambodia, and the Congo. He has also spent many years covering America's faith scene, with a focus on evangelicals -- who have treated him kindly despite the fact that he is openly agnostic. He has been at ABC News for 13 years. Before that, he was in local news in Boston and Maine. He grew up outside of Boston and currently lives with his wife, Bianca, in New York City.

Questions for discussion

1. Dan Harris opens *10% Happier* by talking about the destructive chatter of the voice in his head. What is your internal narrator like? Describe your inner voice. How does the voice influence your day and how you react to events?
2. Dan admits that he initially thought meditation was silly, new-agey nonsense. What factors and events change his opinion? Why does he finally attempt meditation, and what led him to fully embrace it? Trace his arc, from before his panic attacks to where he is today. How did meditation help him tame his inner voice?
3. Throughout the book, Harris talks about the ego. "The ego is constantly comparing itself to others." What is ego? How does ego contribute to our success and our unhappiness?
4. "The pursuit of happiness becomes the source of our unhappiness." What message is Harris conveying with this sentence? Do you agree? How do you define happiness? Are we a culture that places too much emphasis on being happy? Or are we just going about it the wrong way? What made Dan unhappy in his life? How did meditation help him achieve "10% more happiness"? How could it help you?
5. Meditation is about becoming more mindful. Describe mindfulness and how it can be beneficial. Dan writes that mindfulness is "an alternative to living reactively." Expand on this statement. How does one live reactively? Were you surprised by the number of mainstream organizations Dan mentions that have adopted meditation?

- 6.** A big part of mindfulness is about being present. Dan admits, “I was a pro at avoiding the present.” Why is it difficult for so many people to be present---to be in the moment? Take a few minutes with your group to focus on the moment. Share what you are all feeling---the sensations you experience in your body, the noises you may hear around you, what you notice about the space and the people around you. Dan calls mindfulness a “superpower.” Do you think that it is? Do you believe that mindfulness can change the world?
- 7.** Midway through the book, Dan describes his first retreat. Discuss that experience and what he learned from it. Have you ever been on a retreat, and if not, would you be interested in attending one? Could you go with little conversation and no outside stimulants---books, television, the Internet---for a week or two?
- 8.** Dan also discusses compassion and the practice of metta---loving-kindness meditation. Why is metta initially difficult for him? Consider our society today. Do you think we are lacking in compassion? If so, why? Why is the notion of caring sometimes sneered at or dismissed? Have you ever been accused of “caring too much”? Are Americans too cynical today? How do we overcome cynicism? How can we encourage people to become more compassionate? Think about your day. Did you experience any acts of compassion or kindness---either an act you participated or one you received?
- 9.** Dan often talks about being skeptical. Is skepticism a good thing? What is the difference between skepticism and cynicism? When is skepticism productive and when is it negative? How does Dan overcome his skepticism throughout the book, whether to meditation, metta, or the idea of enlightenment itself? What is enlightenment? Think about Buddhism and the period of western history known as the Enlightenment. Are they connected?
- 10.** Were you skeptical about meditation before you read *10% Happier*? How did you feel after finishing the book? What influenced your opinion? Dan uses an unscientific but intriguingly doable estimate---meditation makes his life 10% happier---to help spread his message about the benefits of meditation to unbelievers. If his message resonates with you, how would you address skeptics to read his book?
- 11.** Throughout the book, Harris mentions various authors he has read, met, and interviewed, including Eckhart Tolle, Deepak Chopra, and Joseph Goldstein. Before reading *10% Happier*, had you heard of these other authors or read their books? If not, are you interested in exploring their works now?
- 12.** In the preface, Harris writes, “What I’m attempting to do in this book is demystify meditation, and show that if it can work on me, it can probably work for you, too.” Does he succeed? While reading the book---or having finished it---have you tried to meditate? If so, talk about your experiences? If not, discuss what is holding you back.
- 13.** What did you take away from reading *10% Happier*?



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