

The Periodic Table of Happiness Elements

Mindful awareness is a certain way to pay attention to what is happening around you and within you. It involves three attentional skills working together:

- **Concentration power:** The ability to focus on what you deem relevant.
- **Sensory clarity:** The ability to detect and untangle the strands of your sensory experience.
- **Equanimity:** A kind of inner balance within your consciousness. It represents a third possibility between pushing sensory experience down (suppressing) and being pulled away by the sensory experience (grasping).

Sensory experience is what you see, hear, and feel. This includes “inner activity”—mental image, mental talk, and emotional body sensation—as well as “outer activity”—physical sight, physical sound, and physical body sensation. (Smell and taste can be considered a physical body sensation, i.e., something you “feel.”) **Noting** is one way to develop mindful awareness by clearly acknowledging the existence of sensory experiences then gently, intently focusing on them at a pace that works for you. **Labeling** is an option that can be used when noting. Labels are mental or spoken words that name specific sensory experience you are focusing on at that moment.

The **goal of mindfulness** is optimal happiness—for oneself and others.

The **Periodic Table of Happiness Elements** cross-classifies happiness using two basic axes: type, which involves qualitative distinctions, and level. Level is quantitative but not in the sense of intensity. Level represents the degree to which a certain type of happiness is obvious to the average person. The analogy with the Periodic Table of Chemical Elements is quite strong. Each of the 20 boxes contains numerous sub-types which are roughly analogous to isotopes in the chemical table.

The purpose of this classification is to highlight both the power and the limitations of mindfulness skills. With respect to each of the $4 \times 5 = 20$ basic “elements”, we can:

1. clearly state a mechanism whereby concentration power, sensory clarity and equanimity individually contribute to optimizing that element of happiness.
2. state ways in which mindfulness may be insufficient to achieve happiness with regards to that element; and
3. suggest the ways in which mindfulness skills can be supplemented in order to achieve optimality with regards to that element.

People familiar with positive psychology might initially be surprised when they notice that certain dimensions of happiness that they hold near and dear (such as meaning, self-actualization, communal connection, and so forth) do not appear on my grid. That however is an optical illusion. They’re absolutely included but as subsets or combinations of my basic elements. The reason is that this table is designed for a very specific purpose: to elucidate the power and limitations of mindfulness skills and techniques with regard to optimizing human happiness. That practical goal influences what is shown as a fundamental dimension versus what is placed in a sub-category.

Periodic Table of Happiness Elements

Type Level	Minimize Suffering	Maximize Fulfillment	Understand Yourself	Act Skillfully	Serve From Love
I	You are able to eliminate undesirable objective situations	You are able to have desirable objective situations	You understand yourself at the surface psychological level	You attain fun performance skills	You derive deep fulfillment from indirect service (philanthropy and such)
II	You are able to eliminate unpleasant sensory experiences	You are able to have pleasant sensory experiences	You understand yourself at the deep psychological level	You attain useful performance skills	You derive deep fulfillment from direct service (raising a family, volunteer work, and such)
III	You are able to focus away from unpleasant sensory experience	You are able to focus on pleasant sensory experiences	You understand yourself as a sensory system	You attain character skills	You derive deep fulfillment from subtle service (positively influence others by vibe and example)
IV	You are able to completely experience unpleasant sensory experience	You are able to completely experience pleasant sensory experience	You understand yourself as primordial perfection	You attain spontaneity skills	You derive deep fulfillment from total service (help others apply mindfulness skills to all types and levels of happiness in this table)