



The Science & Art of Happiness:

A Certificate Programme on Positive Psychology & Evidence-Based Transformative Practice

Co-offered by the Greater Good Science Center, University of California, Berkeley &
Tsz Shan Institute, Tsz Shan Monastery

Supported by Centre of Buddhist Studies Alumni Association

Programme Overview

We all seek happiness, yet it often feels just out of reach. Many of us chase ever-higher goals or hold ourselves to impossible standards, only to find that the pursuit itself pulls us further away from the very happiness we desire.

But what *is* happiness? How can we cultivate a deep and lasting sense of well-being? What mental habits foster true happiness, and what practical exercises can help develop them? How can we better manage stress, build resilience, and nurture authentic, compassionate relationships?

This programme approaches these questions from two complementary perspectives. On one hand, it offers science-based answers from psychology, neuroscience, and transdisciplinary studies of well-being, presenting cutting-edge research and practical tools for everyday life. On the other, it introduces insights from ancient wisdom traditions, not as abstract concepts, but as *living practices* — practices that can be seamlessly woven into every moment of your life.

The programme consists of two courses, '**Scientific Foundations Course**' and '**Practical Intensive Course**'. Both courses teach you scientifically supported techniques

for daily practice as well as a series of deep, transformative practices. Together, they cultivate greater awareness of our habitual patterns and transform them into patterns conducive to our well-being, productivity, happiness, kindness, compassion, and quality of life.

In the '**Scientific Foundations Course**', you will explore key discoveries from the transdisciplinary science of happiness to gain basic knowledge about what happiness is, why it matters, and how people can enhance it within themselves and in their communities. Skilled at making science fun and personal, UC Berkeley's instructors will help you discover how cutting-edge research can be applied to your own lives. Experienced in coaching mindfulness and meditation, Tsz Shan Monastery's instructors will offer you direct, step-by-step guidance in one of the core practices of the course — mindfulness and meditation.

In the '**Practical Intensive Course**', you will focus on learning a number of science-based practices and applying them to your everyday life and professional context. These practices are also useful for coaches, counsellors, teachers, healthcare professionals, social workers and team leaders to share with a wide range of people beyond this course. You will also broaden and deepen your mindfulness practice in this course.

Our teaching team is committed to supporting you on your journey of transformation and growth beyond the duration of the course. Dedicated students can deepen their practice through a **Community of Practice** programme after completion of the courses.

Award of Certificate(s):

Upon satisfactory completion of either one of the courses, you will be awarded a Certificate of Completion of that particular course. Once you have been awarded the Certificates of both courses, you will be further awarded an advanced Certificate of Completion of the entire programme.

All Certificates are jointly issued by the Greater Good Science Center, University of California, Berkeley and Tsz Shan Institute, Tsz Shan Monastery.

How to start:

Enrolment is course-based. To start, you apply for the enrolment of either one course when it is offered. Later when the other course is offered, you apply for its enrolment.

* The next Practical Intensive Course is offered in early 2026. Application to the course will be opened in the last quarter of 2025.

Scientific Foundations Course

Course Outline

Course Description:

This course explores the roots of a happy and meaningful life through the scientific lens. It focuses on the key discoveries in the transdisciplinary science of happiness, that is, how scientists characterise and measure various facets of happiness, and what factors and actions they find conducive to happiness. We will try interventions from studies that have been shown to increase happiness – strategies, activities, and practices that you can adopt in daily life right away. Specific experiential techniques include increasing self-awareness through reflective and contemplative practices, narrative exercises, inquiry of specific emotions and their role in overall happiness, and adopting a kinder, more generous style of social interaction.

Complementing this scientific perspective, the course also introduces insights from wisdom traditions and the time-honored transformative practices of mindfulness/meditation. These are not presented as abstract philosophies but as direct, experiential practices that help you rediscover inner space, clarity, and abundance wherever you are.

Instructors:

Emiliana Simon-Thomas, Ph.D.

Emiliana Simon-Thomas, Ph.D., is the Science Director at UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center. Emiliana is a leading expert on the neuroscience and psychology of compassion, kindness, gratitude, and other prosocial skills that bolster human happiness. She earned her doctorate in Cognition, Brain and Behavior at UC Berkeley, where her

dissertation used behavioral and neuroscience methods to examine how unpleasant emotions influence thinking and decision-making. During her postdoc, Emiliana shifted to studying the origins and effects of prosocial states such as love of humanity, gratitude, and awe. She then served as the Associate Director/Senior Scientist at the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Stanford, examining how compassion, both innate and learned, benefits health and well-being, and psychosocial functioning. At UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center, she co-teaches 'The Science of Happiness' as well as 'The Science of Happiness at Work' Professional Certificate Series. She also teaches regularly at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business and in various occasions around the globe every year. She runs key research initiatives like [Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude](#) and the [Network for Emotional Well-Being](#), and provides an expert scientific voice on the key roles that social connection, support, and belonging play in well-being to audiences worldwide. She is known for her accessible lectures on the biological underpinnings of social connection, as well as empirically-supported approaches to improving interpersonal dynamics – such as practicing mindfulness, and increasing compassion, gratitude, and generosity. Alongside her academic and popular writing, Emiliana recently co-edited the [Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science](#), a transdisciplinary compendium of articles from world-class researchers.

Walter Ngai, JP

Walter Ngai is currently the Secretary General of Tsz Shan Monastery. He also serves as a consultant for the Thomas Jing Centre for Mindfulness Research and Training of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He used to be a media person. In 2004, he studied for a Master's programme in Buddhism at the University of Hong Kong and started his spiritual exploration. From orphanages in Africa, holy places in India, to monasteries in the Himalayas, he has left his presence. He actively devotes himself to Buddhist spiritual education, strives to bring Buddhism closer to daily life, and strives to enable modern people, especially the younger generation, to follow in the footsteps of enlightened people and live soberly and comfortably in a troubled world.

Luke Shang, M.Phil.

Luke Shang serves as a programme consultant for the Tsz Shan Institute and has been a guiding force behind the *Science & Art of Happiness* Certificate Programme since its inception in 2020, contributing to its vision, design, and pedagogy. Luke's spiritual

journey has been defined by a deep openness to multiple wisdom traditions and teachers. He has found profound insights and moments of awakening through diverse sources, with the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village communities having the most transformative influence. Over the years, he has led and facilitated mindfulness practices in Hong Kong, mainland China, and Australia, aspiring to help others rediscover their innate freedom, peace, and true love amid the turbulence of modern life. Just as his spiritual path is broad and integrative, so too is his intellectual background. Holding master's degrees in philosophy, social sciences, and health sciences from the University of Chicago, HKU, and the University of Melbourne, Luke speaks the language of the academically inclined, welcoming critical inquiry while illuminating traditional wisdom with analytical clarity — seeking to make these teachings not only accessible but also a wellspring of insight and presence in daily living.

Dates & Time:

Zoom Online Sessions:

March 29; April 5, 12, 19, 26; May 17 (Saturdays) | 10:00am – 12:50pm

* We will be recording the Zoom sessions, allowing you to review afterwards. The recording will remain accessible for a period of 30 days following the class. As our classes are highly interactive, we encourage your active participation in real-time to make the most out of your learning experience.

Experiential Learning Sessions at Tsz Shan Monastery:

Session I: **May 10 (Saturday) | 9 am – 12 pm (English) OR 2 – 5pm (Cantonese)**

Session II: **May 24 (Saturday) | 9 am – 12 pm (English) OR 2 – 5pm (Cantonese)**

* To enhance the learning experience, the class will be divided into two groups for the in-person Experiential Learning Sessions. You will have the opportunity to indicate your availability and preferred group, and we will do our best to accommodate your request within the capacity of the venue.

* For overseas students unable to attend the in-person sessions, we understand your situation. These sessions are designed to deepen mindfulness and meditation practices. If you visit Hong Kong in the future, we welcome you to reach out in advance, and we will explore the possibility of offering you a similar session with our compliments.

Update

Please note a schedule change:

- On April 12, the session will now be a Zoom online class instead of the originally scheduled Experiential Learning Session.

- On May 10, the session will now be an Experiential Learning Session instead of the originally scheduled Zoom online class.

The above schedule has already been updated to reflect these changes.

Prerequisites:

There is no prerequisite for the Scientific Foundations Course, but you need to be able to follow intensive lectures delivered in academic English.

Admission priority will be given to applicants who have:

- (a) successfully completed the Practical Intensive Course, demonstrating the potential and commitment to continue their study;
- (b) been working in teaching, counselling, coaching, healthcare, or other caretaking professions;
- (c) meditation experiences;
- (d) studied psychology, mental health, health sciences or other relevant subjects; and/or
- (e) a strong academic background.

Course Readings:

(A much more advanced and elaborated bibliography of research will be provided in the class)

Zoom Session 1 - The What, Why, and How of Happiness

Simon-Thomas, E. (2017) [Three Things I Learned from Teaching Happiness](#), *Greater Good*.

McMahon, D. (2009) [Happiness the Hard Way](#), *Greater Good*.

Zoom Session 2 - Built for Connection: Attachment, Empathy, Generosity, and Cooperation

Klein, L. (2013) [Scratch a Happy Adult, Find a Socially Connected Childhood](#), *Greater Good*.

Allen, S. and Suttie, J. (2015) [How Our Brains Make Us Generous](#), *Greater Good*.

Adam-Smith, J. (2009) [Birds Do It, Bats Do It](#), *Greater Good*.

Zoom Session 3 - Strong Social Bonds: Gratitude, Compassion, and Reconciliation

Evans, K. (2018) [Why Relationships Are the Secret to Healthy Aging](#), *Greater Good*.

Jazairi, H. (2018) [Six Habits of Highly Compassionate People](#), *Greater Good*.

Suttie, J. (2019) [The Ripple Effects of Thank You](#), *Greater Good*.

Zoom Session 4 - The Role of Positive Emotions: Amusement, Awe, and Hope

Keltner, D. (2016) [Why Do We Feel Awe?](#), *Greater Good*.

Suttie, J. (2017) [How Laughter Brings Us Together](#), *Greater Good*.

Simon-Thomas, E. (2020) [What Happy People Think about Luck](#), *Greater Good*.

Zoom Session 5 - Mental Habits of Happiness: Mindfulness, Self-Compassion, and Honest Optimism

Goleman D. (2014) [Is Attention the Secret to Emotional Intelligence?](#), *Greater Good*.

Newman, K. (2016) [Neuroscience Strategies for Resilience](#), *Greater Good*.

Sanderson, C. (2019) [How to Prime Your Mind for Optimism](#), *Greater Good*.

Zoom Session 6 - Global Happiness: Bringing out the Best in Each Other

Gregoire, C. (2018) [How Money Changes the Way You Think and Feel](#), *Greater Good*.

Zaki, J. (2019) [In a Divided World We Need to Choose Empathy](#), *Greater Good*.

Allen, S. (2017) [Does Good Government Make People More Generous?](#), *Great Good*.

Assessment:

You will be assigned some home practice exercises and short reflective writings. Details to be announced in the class.

Course Fee:

The fee for this course is HK\$5,000.

How to Apply:

Apply here: <https://forms.gle/jA8H2vksng4S9sLm8>

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