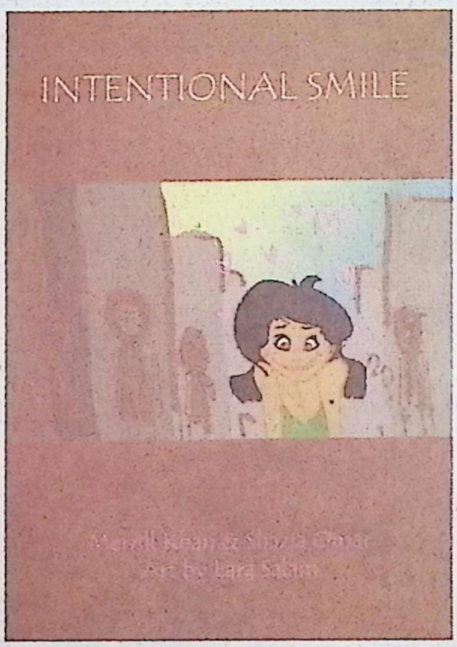
Intentional Happiness



Intentional Smile
By Merill Khan and Shazia Omar
Art by Lara Salam
Publlished by Merill Khan and Shazia Omar

It would be easy to dismiss this book as a whimsical attempt to tell people how to be positive and happy with themselves. The child-like illustrations, playful fonts and coloured pages may give the aura of it being frivolous and superficial. But everything in 'Intentional Smile' is intentional. The repetitive nature of well known mantras - to be positive, to love oneself, to get rid of negative energies and to basically see the world as some kind of paradise- all this is a deliberate way to tune the reader's brain and hopefully, body, to train them towards a better, healthier, more wholesome disposition.

Though we all know this the book keeps harping on two very simple, yet crucial activities that we give so little importance to: breathing and smiling. Knowing how to breathe properly and training one's lungs to do this takes quite a bit of determination and patience which our frenetic lifestyles tend to cut short on. But getting the proper amount of oxygen in our bodies, says the book, can help us to heal and relieve us of physical pain and mental stress.

Written by Merril Khan and Shazia Omar and illustrated rather lavishly by Lara Salam, the book has the effect of lifting up your mood with its determination to make the reading fun and also compelling you to take a few moments to think about your general attitude towards life.

For the incorrigible cynic, this book will seem a little perfunctory in terms of professing to solve all of life's problems with a few casual dos and don'ts and some self-appreciating mantras: 'I am a warrior princess', 'I love myself'... But that would be exactly the kind of dismissive attitude the book discourages.

Reading 'Intentional Smile' with the pure intention of keeping an open mind would be a better approach and may even be useful for people who are constantly bogged down by negative thoughts and mental self-flagellation.

It is important after all, to love oneself, to be grateful for all the blessings we have, to love others and help them and to embrace the gift of life with wonder and humility.These are the qualities the book aims for and provides some basic steps towards this kind of hard-to- believe contentment.

The writers, moreover, are amply qualified to give such advice. Shazia, a writer, is also a wellbeing psychologist and yoga teacher and Merill is a child counselor and school teacher.

The writers talk about something called Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) which involves 'engaging with specific pressure points on your body to release toxins and replace with healing energy'. Easier said than done, EFT, says the book, focuses on certain affirmations that help to flush out negative thoughts/emotions that often hamper the proper functioning of our body leading to illnesses. The book also recommends acupressure - a method of maintaining health and inducing self-healing by applying pressure to certain points on the palms and soles of the feet. One criticism would be that the section on acupressure which requires accurate, detailed information on its application, does not go into specific detail which leaves this part rather incomplete.

The diagrammes of various yoga postures are self-explanatory although people should be cautious and should know more about these exercises if trying them for the first time.

The book talks about eating healthily - six small meals a day- but it should have provided a diet chart - especially a realistic one. Hopefully the next book will talk about that.

Obviously the book intends to make the process of self-realisation and self-help a lot of fun, hence the colours, child-like drawings and things like meditation cards that can be cut out. This certainly works for people who are tired of staid, tediously verbose self-help books with no pictures. Deliberately targeted for women (though men need help just as much), one cannot help but wish that it had done away with references that only a handful of people in Bangladesh can relate to - Darth Vader, Thanksgiving. This may make this book appear to be geared to only an elite group rather than for all of the English reading women kind.

Other than that the book is a refreshing, rather quick read that makes you want to believe that it is possible to change one's outlook on life through some simple yet powerful mental tools.

-AASHA MEHREEN AMIN