

# A First-Rate Madness Summary

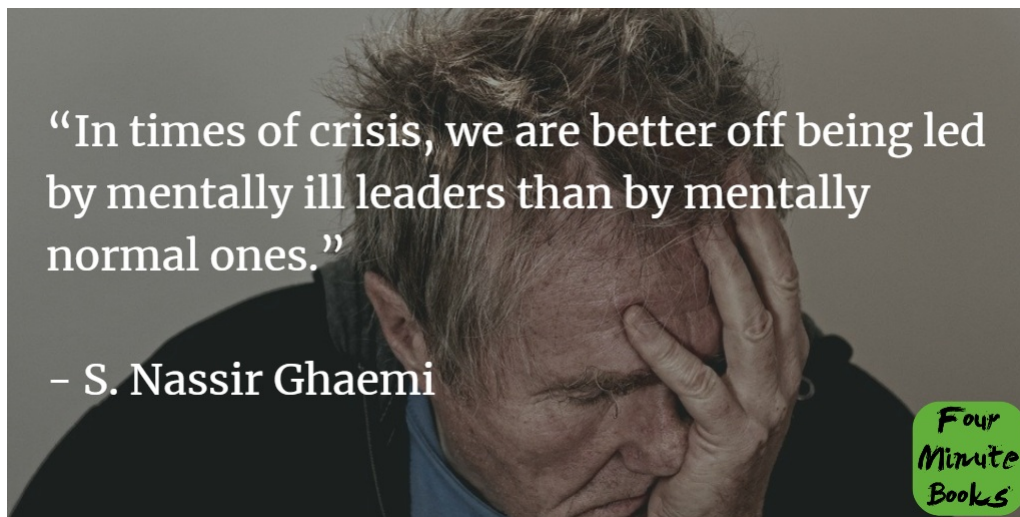
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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *A First-Rate Madness* argues that mental illness has its benefits that helped many world leaders make better decisions in times of crisis.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Some of the most brilliant people I know suffer from depression or other mental illnesses. Look throughout history and you'll see many influential people had similar ailments. I've often wondered if there is a connection between sickness of the mind and brilliant leadership. Although not all great leaders are depressed, I now have some evidence to back up this belief.

Nassir Ghaemi's *A First-Rate Madness: Uncovering the Links Between Leadership and Mental Illness* gives some strong arguments for my hypothesis. While I believe there is more science needed to determine the truths Ghaemi teaches, it's still a fascinating start to an important conversation.

After all, mental illness often gets cast in a bad light. Because of this, there is a stigma around it that runs strongly throughout society. However, by acknowledging the struggles many world leaders had, and the possible benefits that mental state had on society, we can break the stigma. We can come to celebrate the usefulness of psychiatric illnesses instead of fearing them.

Here are 3 of the most interesting lessons about the potential benefits of mental illness:

1. Depression and bipolar disorder have benefits that may be helpful in leadership positions.
2. Historical leaders like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Winston Churchill, and JFK had disorders that helped them make better decisions.
3. Knowing the upside of mental illness can help us remove the stigma around it.

Looking for hope amid yours or others mental illness? Get ready to find what you're looking for in these lessons!

## Lesson 1: The benefits of illnesses like bipolar disorder and depression can be good to have as a leader.

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The serious and devastating nature of depression and anxiety makes us easily ashamed of them. Depression runs in my family, and we've always struggled to talk about it. Although we are getting better, the social taboo around mental illness still lingers today. But there's hope in the abilities that mentally unwell individuals have that others don't.

Let's take a look at Major Depressive Disorder and Bipolar Disorder as examples. Major Depressive Disorder, or more commonly known as depression, is, for simplicity's sake, like a deep, unbreakable sadness.

**Ghaemi claims that because of what most people with depression feel, or sometimes don't feel, they are more empathetic.** People who are depressed can thus better understand the difficulties of human experience.

Bipolar Disorder, on the other hand, is when people experience depressive episodes but also manic periods as well. They may oscillate between sadness and euphoria frequently, even within hours. Often spontaneous, these people have heightened moods on both ends of the spectrum.

People with Bipolar Disorder spend time in the outlier regions of emotional highs and lows, where most other people never go. Ghaemi believes that because of this, they're more likely to see things from those outlier perspectives. They may be more creative than the rest of us. Let's see how this, along with the benefits of depression, have helped society in times past.

## Lesson 2: Nations have made it through difficult times throughout history because of their mentally ill leaders.

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Did you know that Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi both tried to commit suicide when they were young? The two of them suffered from depression that started in childhood. Later in life, it appears that the stresses they had made their mental state worsen. This

makes sense knowing the great changes each of these individuals brought about in the world.

Consider the heightened sense of compassion that depressed people have. The civil rights movements of King and Gandhi both were, at their core, just radical empathy. Both of these great men highlighted the importance of love above all else. **They knew of the despair that others were feeling because they had felt it themselves.** Their level of concern for others is well-summarized by a quote from King:

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Winston Churchill was another case of a depressed leader making better decisions because of his illness. In 1938 British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain heroically declared that he would meet with Hitler directly. Chamberlain hoped to persuade Hitler that war wasn't necessary. Churchill, on the other hand, was more realistic because of his depression. His sound mind helped him make better decisions throughout his leadership.

Here's one last example, this time of the possible benefits of Bipolar Disorder. John F. Kennedy exhibited many of the symptoms of Hyperthymic Personality Disorder, which is similar to Bipolar Disorder. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy held his position when everyone else told him to call for a pre-emptive nuclear strike. Because of his mental illness, he successfully averted a nuclear catastrophe.

## Lesson 3: Recognizing that mental illness has its good sides is a step toward breaking the stigma around it.

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Let's wrap up with a deeper dive into a point we've mentioned before. We know that mental illness continues to be a taboo subject in many places around the world. While many people are breaking free of the stigma, countless others continue to struggle in silence.

It only makes sense for society to be afraid of something they can't understand. But we must stop the progression of mental illnesses, and the spread of the stigma around it. This is where these upsides we've discussed come in handy.

First, we need to accept the mentally unhealthy states of some of our past leaders. We must admit the positive contributions these individuals made despite their challenges.

This leads to the conclusion that those with illnesses like depression and Bipolar Disorder have made a difference in the world. Society is a better place because of the decisions of these leaders which were influenced by their mental illnesses.

From here, we can see that anyone, regardless of mental state, can make a positive contribution to society. **Depressed or anxious people, those with Bipolar or eating disorders, and all who struggle with mental illness can change the world.** By acknowledging these facts, more will admit that they need help. And when people accept their weakness, they can start the first steps to healing and recovery.

## A First-Rate Madness Review

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Wow, this book blew my mind and was a very interesting read! While I would caution everyone to take its conclusions with a grain of salt, I also recommend *A First-Rate Madness* to anyone. Although I didn't agree with everything the book taught, the idea that mental illness has benefits is fascinating.

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## Who would I recommend the A First-Rate Madness summary to?

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The 29-year-old who is depressed and feels like there isn't anything good about herself, the 44-year-old who has a child with bipolar disorder and is losing hope for their future, and anyone who is a student of history or psychology.