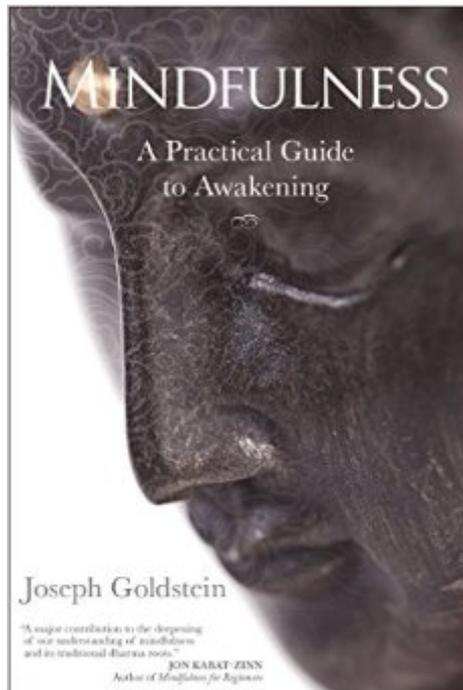


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Mindfulness: A Practical Guide To Awakening



Synopsis

The mind contains the seeds of its own awakening—seeds that we can cultivate to bring forth the fruits of a life lived consciously. With *Mindfulness*, Joseph Goldstein shares the wisdom of his four decades of teaching and practice in a book that will serve as a lifelong companion for anyone committed to mindful living and the realization of inner freedom. Goldstein's source teaching is the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha's legendary discourse on the four foundations of mindfulness that became the basis for the many types of Vipassana (or insight meditation) found today. Exquisite in detail yet wholly accessible and relevant for the modern student, *Mindfulness* takes us through a profound study of:

- Mindfulness of body, including the breath, postures, activities, and physical characteristics
- Mindfulness of feelings—how the experience of our sense perceptions influences our inner and outer worlds
- Mindfulness of mind—learning to recognize skillful and unskillful states of mind and thought
- Mindfulness of dhammas (or categories of experience), including the Five Hindrances, the Six Sense Spheres, and the Seven Factors of Awakening

There is a wealth of meaning and nuance in the experience of mindfulness that can enrich our lives in unimagined ways, writes Goldstein. In *Mindfulness* you have the tools to mine these riches for yourself.

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Customer Reviews

I believe this to be the magnum opus of Joseph Goldstein's writings. This book is physically exquisite. Sounds True did a fine job of editing and publishing this book. The book is derived from a

series of lectures on a particular sutta (talk) of the Buddha, the Satipatthana Sutta, which is found in a collection of talks called the Majjhima Nikaya. (The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, edited by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications). However, the sutta itself is also to be found as an appendix in Goldstein's new book. Goldstein's lectures were given at the Forest Retreat of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. Goldstein used, for these lectures, a recent interpretation of this sutta by a Buddhist monk Analayo, named Satipatthana: the Direct Path to Realization, Windhorse Publications. Over a series of retreats Goldstein systematically commented on every verse of the sutta, using the Venerable Analayo's commentary as a comparative guide for his own commentary. This kind of commentary is a classical method of working with a sutta in the Buddhist world. (Also, Sounds True has issued the actual talks as a three part cd series, Abiding in Mindfulness.) The Satipatthana Sutta is meant to be a complete and sufficient description of a particular form of meditation that is called vipassana or Insight Meditation. (This meditation has also just been called Mindfulness and has become increasingly popular as a means for reducing stress.) The Buddha says that if this sutta's methodology is strictly adhered to, it will lead to realization or Enlightenment. Goldstein takes that claim very seriously. His book reflects a careful, years long, relationship to both this sutta and to the meditations revealed by the Buddha. I believe Goldstein's work to be one of the most complete and beautifully written books about Buddhist meditation, I have read in the fifty years of my own Buddhist practice. So what thematic concerns drive the content of Goldstein's commentary? He addresses four major foundations of inquiry for this form of Buddhist meditation. These four are mindfulness of Body, Feelings, Mind, and the Dhammas. 'Body' is here understood as physical reality, the actual physical basis of the phenomena given to consciousness. 'Feelings' include the whole range of emotive reactions to the phenomena being investigated. 'Mind' describes the vehicle for consciousness and its characteristics which help and also hinder realization. Finally, the larger part of Goldstein's book considers the fourth foundation, the Dhammas. This word is from Pali which is the language which the Theravadin school of Buddhism used for its texts. "Dhammas" includes an encyclopedic collection of all those conceptual factors which the Buddha considered necessary for the complete liberation from suffering. Such factors include both negative hindrances and positive aids in one's meditative investigation of Liberation. Goldstein says four qualities of mind are necessary for this investigation: Ardency, Clearly Knowing, Mindfulness, and Concentration. Briefly these qualities of mind can be described as dedication, a deep knowing of that which is being investigated, a consistent and close awareness of all phenomena being investigated, and, finally, a capacity for single pointed or intense concentration of the subject being examined. In other words, one

dedicates to a level of realization which is purified by a complete examination of the subject under consideration, and which is also characterized by deep and undistracted attention. Okay, why is this book so good? First, because it is complete. Goldstein has been practicing for years, and he has studied with most of the major living Theravadin teachers. In addition he has gone to monasteries, temples, and centers in India and Southeast Asia to study. His knowledge and practice are nuanced and thorough. Second, he is vulnerable. He has learned from his "mistakes". He is open about his limitations and clearly expresses his gifts and learning. Third, he is a very advanced practitioner. He has become truly wise from his experience. I was asked once at a retreat by a well known Theravada monk, Bhante Gunaratana (author of Mindfulness in Plain English), if I had a teacher and who was it? I said Joseph Goldstein. Bhante Ji (as he is sometimes called affectionately) said, "You could not do better!" You can not do better than with this book if you are serious about Buddhist meditation. The book is not meant to be read straight through. Rather, it should be considered in the context of one's own meditation practice. When used as a commentary to your own practice, it will reveal how truly comprehensive and cogent the Buddha's teaching was. In the end, the Buddha's Teaching is a radical method to confront and heal your suffering. The Dharma will reveal the true basis of your suffering. It will show the way out of it. It will reveal the very real possibility of a wise, compassionate, and peaceful life. Joseph Goldstein's new book is fully adequate to the challenge of revealing just what meditation can do in one's life. We live together now in a time when real wisdom and peace is possible. I very much believe that the deepest realization of what it means to be fully human is now available. For the sake of ourselves and for one another, please consider using Joseph's new book as a valuable resource in your own spiritual journey.

As a reader with a Hindu upbringing and essentially a secular view, my early experiments with mindfulness were based on numerous books that prescribed specific lists of exercises without fully articulating its intent (perhaps not the authors' fault - they assume that a reader may have some understanding of the theoretical/philosophical underpinnings of mindfulness) or perhaps oversimplify (lists of one-minute exercises). To borrow an analogy from Goldstein, such books felt like "trying to row a boat across a river, exerting a lot of effort in the process, but never untying the rope from the dock". Perhaps, Goldstein was trying to address similar issues many have felt - and he delivers. (Readers familiar with other Eastern philosophies could find parallels in B K S Iyengar's efforts in *Light on Life: The Yoga Journey to Wholeness, Inner Peace, and Ultimate Freedom* and *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* in the context of the practice of yoga) In a very accessible exposition, Goldstein first systematically guides a reader through the various

components of mindfulness and the hindrances that afflict the mind. He then explains the various dimensions of "awakening" and approaches for mindfulness in the context of the fundamental tenets of Buddhist thought. Goldstein adheres to the sequencing and tone of Satipatthana Sutra throughout this book, though the various anecdotes and reflections on his own personal journey makes this less of a commentary on the Sutra and more of a meticulous guide to understand mind-body processes that could lead to improved awareness. A purist could argue that Analayo's *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization* already provided an authoritative retelling of this critical sutra and there is very little to add to it. That may be partly true. The author clearly acknowledges that work and quotes significantly from it. Goldstein's book inspired me to get the above-cited work of Analayo and reading both almost simultaneously, I was able to better appreciate what Goldstein may be trying to accomplish with this effort - a less academic, accessible retelling that doesn't oversimplify or unnecessarily tries to "secularize" or 'westernize' the content. Of course. Analayo's cited work was essentially a doctoral dissertation, but that format has some advantages - a rigorous characterization and modularization of key concepts aided by a generous use of figures that helped clarify the concepts. Goldstein's approach can be mildly confusing at times for a beginner with numerous references to "five hindrances", "seven factors", "six spheres" without providing no immediate recourse for a quick check on what is being referenced (a couple of figures or a "roadmap" could have aided the beginner). But as a reader works through the initial chapters, the sheer clarity of thought, the simplicity of the expressions, the choice of the anecdotes and the well-curated level of details chosen to expound on any particular topic becomes self-evident and the book soon becomes a pleasurable journey in thought experiments. An experienced reader in this field will immediately notice the remarkably superior editing that has shaped this effort. Both a beginner and experienced reader may benefit more from this book by treating this as a companion to Analayo's work. Despite the obvious overlaps, the different styles could serve as effective reinforcement tools. While accessible, this is not an "easy" book. With over 400 pages of dense text, a reader will be forced to think and reflect very frequently. "Finishing" the book is less important than beginning the journey, one could argue. The editorial process comes to the rescue again - with very well curated sections and logical flow and chapters that can exist almost independently. The thoughtful selection of anecdotes is what clearly stands out for me - and how it inspired me to invest in the series by Wisdom Publications (*The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya*, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya* (Teachings of the Buddha), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Teachings of the Buddha)). I know that is ambitious, but this book can inspire to

be more curious. Overall, the depth, clarity, choice of anecdotes, and the systematic approach with attention to detail, makes this a foundational book for any student of mindfulness. Strongly recommended along with Analayo's treatment.

This is a great follow up to Joseph Goldstein's (and Jack Kornfield's) "Seeking the Heart of Wisdom". This book repeats some of the finer points of the aforementioned book and goes into more detail than his other works. I have been meditating for a few years and there were certain sections that discussed problems that I am currently facing. This definitely isn't a beginner's book so if you are new to Buddhism / meditation you may be better off starting with "One Dharma". I would recommend this book to someone who has taken a meditation retreat before or someone who is already familiar with some of the content in this book. It is definitely not an easy read, as the other reviewer pointed out, although the information contained is definitely priceless. Would recommend to everyone who is interested in learning more about Buddhist meditation from the Theravada tradition.

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