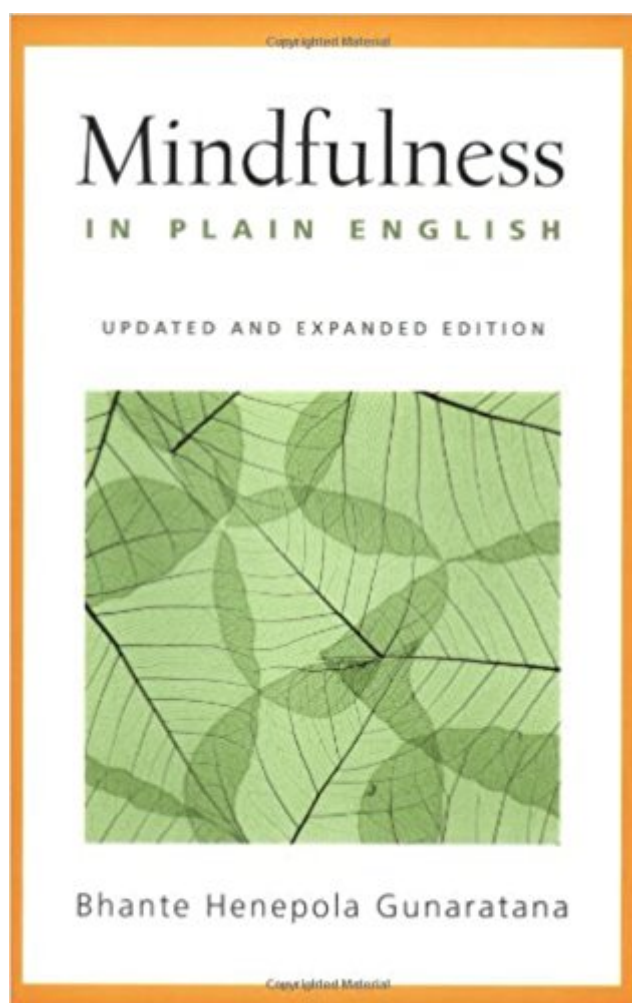


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Mindfulness In Plain English: Revised And Expanded Edition



Synopsis

With his distinctive clarity and wit, "Bhante G" takes us step by step through the myths, realities, and benefits of meditation and the practice of mindfulness. We already have the foundation we need to live a more productive and peaceful life — Bhante simply points to each tool of meditation, tells us what it does, and how to make it work. This expanded edition includes the complete text of its bestselling predecessor, as well as a new chapter on the cultivation of loving kindness, an especially important subject in today's world.

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Customer Reviews

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana is the author of the best-selling Mindfulness in Plain English, which has sold more than 50,000 copies. He was ordained at the age of 12 as a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from The American University, and has led meditation retreats, taught Buddhism, and lectured widely throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia. He lives in High View, West Virginia. Bhante Henepola Gunaratana is the president of the Bhavana Society in West Virginia and the author of the bestseller Mindfulness in Plain English --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The first third or more of the book sells the idea of mindfulness and meditation. That's nice, but I was already sold, so I didn't find this particularly usefulÃ¢Â"although, admittedly, I did find it reassuring. A thorough introduction for beginners thoughÃ¢Â"they'll find this useful, I'm sure. Then

we get down to brass tax—”to the nuts and bolts of practice. This text does a thorough job of detailing that, covering lots of material on the mechanics of how to meditate. If you’re just starting and have questions about the execution/technique of meditation, you’ll assuredly find all of your answers here. Toward the end—maybe the last fifth or less—the text starts touching on mindfulness in the context of meditation. I was super excited for this part, to actually get a feel for what my mind or body or "self" should be doing or thinking—or not doing or thinking—while deep in meditation. That’s where the book falls flat and feels lacking. If you’re someone who is trying to start a practice of meditation, get this book. It will send you down the right path. If, however, you’re already making your way merrily down that path, and can successfully meditate for a good length of time on a daily basis (say 30 - 60+ minutes), you’ll have to look elsewhere to really understand how to "level-up" your practice—how to make the most of your concentration.

Okay, I only gave this 4 stars because there were parts of it where I’d have much appreciated even more information and explanation. That said, I will admit that some of those parts dealt with processes that are hard to explain adequately in a book. But I still sat there at times thinking, "what? how, precisely, do I do that?" For example, in the section on dealing with problems that crop up during meditation, the author advises the reader to deal with physical pain by relaxing tensed muscles one by one, doing so very thoroughly. Now, that may sound simple to you. Perhaps I’m a dolt. I dunno. But I haven’t a clue how to relax each muscle one at a time. I’m constantly amazed to find I have muscles where previously I thought I had none. ;-) I’m supposed to accomplish this muscle relaxation strictly through thought processes? Okay, I believe that’s possible, but what do I do? Ack. Right after that, the author advises the reader to continue by going after the mental resistance next. Now, to be fair, the author admits there are no human words to precisely explain this process. And I feel in my gut that he’s right, but I’m disgustingly literal and really require precision in explanation in order to think I can get my head around something new and challenging. Have I turned you off? If so, let me now say that I LOVE this book. I’ve never read anything that so clearly was written to help someone understand how to meditate for insight. The writer takes great care to explain the process as much as he is able to. The stuff that he doesn’t explain--well, it’s just not enough of a factor to make me dislike this book. After reading this book, you’ll find yourself much more prepared to begin insight meditation, to begin walking a path of mindfulness, and hopefully, ultimately a peaceful and compassionate path. The goal of this book is not to teach you how to chant and simply relax (although relaxation is a wonderful side effect). Rather, the goal of this book

is to change your life, to help you become more mindful, to see life as you really have it before you, to truly understand so that you can become fully present in that life. The author makes clear that this is a long process, one that will require dedication and courage from the meditator, and I truly respect how clearly he has communicated what will be expected of me. I plan to give copies of this book to people I love.

This is actually a book about vipassana (insight) meditation and some of the teachings of the Buddha. It offers a better discussion of these topics than most other books that I have read on meditation. Gunaratana's writing style is clear and free from excessive jargon. The book will be understandable to most Americans. Gunaratana makes vipassana meditation seem desirable by discussing its benefits at various places in the book. I have just finished reading it and haven't practiced vipassana meditation yet so I'll mention some examples from the book. Gunaratana says that in vipassana meditation we face up to unpleasantness in our lives rather than avoiding it. We reduce tendencies to be greedy and lethargic. We are reminded of what we are supposed to be doing. We see things as they really are. We see the true nature of all phenomena. Another good aspect of the book is that it includes good instructions for the practice of vipassana meditation and for dealing with problems and distractions during meditation. I give this book five stars for what I mentioned above. But, I want to caution you about a couple of things before you buy this book. First, if you are considering meditation because you want to solve problems in life, vipassana meditation may not be the best place to start. Gunaratana says that vipassana meditation is not a problem-solving technique. More direct approaches for dealing with problems can be found in books such as *Coping with Difficult People* by Robert M. Bramson, *A Guide to the Good Life* by William B. Irvine, and *A Guide to Rational Living* by Albert Ellis. Recommendations in those books are practical. Insight meditation may improve problem solving capability in the long-term, but I think it should be used only after using more direct, reasoned approaches. It is worth noting here that Gunaratana was ordained a Buddhist monk at age 12 - as stated on the back of the book cover. Life in a monastery is unlikely to be as challenging as holding a job in a competitive or difficult situation. So, Gunaratana can't be expected to offer much help in dealing with immediate problems. My second caution is that, while Gunaratana's book is not a complete description of Buddhism, it does espouse some Buddhist beliefs. On page 144, Gunaratana says that if we practice mindfulness, we can perceive that the three prime characteristics which Buddhism advocates are the deepest truths of existence. One of these is selflessness. Gunaratana says that selflessness means that there is an "absence of a permanent, unchanging entity that we call Soul or Self." Further, in connection with

this, he says that "there are really no entities that are unchanging or permanent, only processes." When I have seen Soul and Self capitalized elsewhere, it is a reference to God. So, Buddhism holds that there is no God and/or we do not have souls that exist eternally. This is contradictory to what is said in many holy books. It is also in conflict with what is reported by mystics and by some people who have had near death experiences. This is a great book on meditation, but do we need this religious indoctrination? (The Buddha did not claim to be a god but he is discussed in this book as if he has the role of a savior.) If you are looking for a good overview of meditation and its benefits, I suggest The Relaxation Response by Herbert Benson, MD. Good books on dealing with difficulties in life include those by Albert Ellis and A Guide to the Good Life by William Irvine.

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