

Mindfulness in Plain English Summary

By Henepola Gunaratana

What is the one thing that you think will make you happy? Is it to pay off your bond, to buy a new car, to find the perfect relationship, or to win the lottery? For many of us, life isn't as fulfilling or meaningful as we would like, and we attribute a lot of this to what we lack, rather than what we have. Many of us create anxieties for ourselves, and believe that objects, things, and relationships will alleviate feelings of inadequacy and longing.

Mindfulness in Plain English is a go-to text and introduction to mindfulness and meditation. For anyone struggling to find meaning and self-awareness, or feeling constantly dissatisfied, this book provides critical insights. The lessons help to cultivate feelings of inner peace and tranquility, and reveal that true happiness really does come from within.

Mindfulness practices and meditation help us to reconcile feelings of dissatisfaction. By probing feelings below the surface, it allows us to control the typical and predictable behaviors that arise when we're upset, unsatisfied, or irritated. Being mindful is a way to predict our behavior and emotion so that we can learn to deal with them more effectively. Mindfulness is an effective way to channel peace and happiness, and abolish negative feelings such as selfishness and a need to be instantly gratified by material objects.

The problem with associating happiness with material things, is that it doesn't last. Purchasing a shiny new object might make us feel good in the moment, but it doesn't solve the problem. It's a quick fix, which is why we continue to acquire things, while never truly being satisfied with what we have. So how do we learn to control our desires and cravings,

and how do we learn to become happier and more fulfilled?

Bhante Gunaratana is a teacher and lecturer, founder of a monastery and retreat center, and a renowned author. His focus on mindfulness and meditation, aims to show us how to be more at peace and kinder to those around us.

Let's briefly take a look at meditation and mindfulness, and how they can help us to lead richer and more fulfilling lives.

What if I'm Averse to the Idea of Meditation?

Meditation does have a bit of a marketing problem, and can seem a little "far out" for some people. The idea of meditation tends to work for those who subscribe to yoga, mindfulness, and the more so-called "alternative" aspects of life. Whereas others think it's all a bit "airy-fairy" and contrived, and some think it's about scary out-of-body experiences.

Maybe you've painted pictures of what meditation looks like, or what people who meditate look like?

If you're resistant to meditation and mindfulness, it's worth keeping in mind that meditation is your own practice, and you can define how you perform it in your specific and unique way. Meditation and mindfulness need to work for you, and come from within, so it's definitely not about mimicking others, or doing what you think you should be doing.

Perhaps you're resistant to the idea because you think you're handling all that life throws at you, and that you don't have any problems that need attention? Maybe you think that you're happy and fulfilled? What if you

could be more relaxed, more contented, more fulfilled, and could heighten your coping mechanisms? Self-improvement is, after all, something that's set on a continuum, rather than an end goal. The suggestion is to give it a try, and although it takes a little time and discipline, the rewards are remarkable.

Meditation in Very Plain English

You may have met someone who yammers on and on about meditation and found yourself switching off because of all the jargon. Perhaps you've seen apps on your phone promising instant results for a subscription fee?

Meditation needn't be that complicated, and this book deals with the basics of vipassana meditation. The first thing is that it requires concentration. Concentration then leads to mindfulness and self-awareness. But why is self-awareness or mindfulness so crucial?

Pause for a moment and just observe the silence for a bit. You may think it's quiet, but it's not silent; those voices in your head are probably going a bit crazy, aren't they? Perhaps they're reminding you to do things. Maybe they're telling you you want a slice of cake. Then you go off on a tangent about the name of that place you once went to where they had the best cakes... and then you realize you've got a deadline, and why aren't you working on your project? And it goes on and on, and on. Our thoughts often hold us to ransom, and while they can be entertaining, they can also be incredibly distracting.

In contemporary life, we're very over-stimulated. Think about all the sights, and sounds, and smells, and people we encounter on a daily

basis? With each one of these factors comes a wave of feelings and thoughts. Meditation practices allow us to be a lot more self-aware when presented with stimuli, and to be observers rather than participants. This is important because with increased self-awareness, we become less likely to succumb to habit, temptation, impulsive behavior, and be a lot more measured and controlled.

I Don't Have the Patience or Time for Meditation

Meditation comes down to having the right attitude. You don't have to be the best, and it's certainly not a competition. The first thing you need to realize is that you don't win at meditation, and there are no medals or trophies for doing it right.

The right attitude is about being open-minded, sensitive, and caring to yourself, and above all, realistic.

We all have misconceptions and expectations about meditation. A lot of this is based on what we've seen on television, and this perception can be very intimidating. Meditation is best viewed as an experiment with yourself. Don't expect anything, don't bring any preconceptions of how it might feel. Just go with it and see what happens. Meditation should also never be rushed or hurried. There's no end goal, so just give yourself up to the process and avoid the temptation to move towards a tangible result. Be honest with yourself during meditation; whatever you feel and experience is okay. You shouldn't feel guilty, so accept the feelings that arise and move them aside. Finally, try to avoid fixating on anything. You need to see your thoughts as they come into your head, but you shouldn't think about them. Acknowledge that they're there and then allow them to move out of focus.

Once you've adopted an open-mind and managed your expectations for the process, you can begin.

Don't fixate on a specific time frame for your meditation practice. Many of the mental and emotional blocks that people associate with meditation are around the idea of time. Fixating on time only puts pressure on us, so start with 10 to 20 minutes and don't overthink the clock. The clock shouldn't be there to put pressure on you, but rather to record the process.

It's Time To Get Comfortable

You don't have to sit cross-legged on a cold floor to meditate. The only thing you have to do is get comfortable enough so that you don't want to change position for the duration of your practice. *Mindfulness in Plain English* provides many tips and tricks to get comfortable and to work out

what's best for you.

One of the best times to start meditating is in the morning because it sets the tone for the day ahead of you; or you might find meditation before bed works best for you. Begin by meditating once a day, and then you may find the need to schedule another meditation when you get more attuned to your body and what it needs.

Whether you're sitting on the floor or a chair, find a position that's comfortable and sustainable. Sit with your back nice and straight, but don't create any stiffness or discomfort while trying to achieve this. You just want a nice straight spine, in a comfortable position. Being comfortable also means that you want to wear the right kind of clothes. Anything too binding or tight will restrict your body, so it's best to put on something comfy and take your shoes off.

That's it. You're now ready to begin.

Just Breathe

Once you're prepared and sitting motionless, close your eyes.

Take three deep, effortless breaths and focus on your nostrils where the air is flowing through. Just focus on the breath going in and out, and all of the pauses in between. Don't concentrate too much on this; just be mindful of your breath movements.

There is one absolute guarantee when you do this, and that is that your mind is going to wander. The book suggests a few tips for bringing attention back to your breathing. Counting is an excellent way to distract

yourself from getting distracted. Count "one" when inhaling and "two" when exhaling. Or count to ten while you're breathing in, and again when you're breathing out. Eventually, your mind will be focused on breathing, and you can stop counting.

Remember the guarantee about your mind wandering? Well, you need to accept this. Your mind will wander a lot, and the last thing you want to do is get angry or despondent with yourself when this happens. Meditation isn't about judging yourself or being perfect; it's merely about learning to become more self-aware. If you're hard on yourself, and judge yourself for what you're doing wrong, this will only make things worse. Accept when your mind wanders, refocus, and try again.

Choose Kindness

Meditation and mindfulness are also ways to bring more kindness, peace, and tranquility into the world. The book offers a range of beautiful recitations that wish well on other people and frame kindness and compassion as central.

Wishing kindness and well-being on other people is a way to keep the ego in check, and to focus on other people rather than ourselves. We all know how important gratitude is, and being positive and well-meaning are excellent ways to ward off feelings of resentment, bitterness, and judgment.

The book has a powerful and enlightening focus on forgiveness. Forgive yourself and your enemies. Realize everyone is suffering and enduring hardship. And, by helping people as often as you can, being kinder and more empathetic, the fewer enemies you're likely to have.

Choose Satisfaction

Once we accept that we will never have everything we want, life becomes a lot simpler. Furthermore, once we acknowledge and accept that experiences are fleeting and impermanent, we will learn to appreciate them more. Enjoy each moment, be fully present, and realize that everything ends. We also need to accept that bad things will happen to us, but often these are the moments that teach us the most and make us more appreciative. Seeking out pleasure, while avoiding pain, means we're not experiencing the richness of life.

Choosing peace means that we rid ourselves of noise and distraction. We also find ourselves more fulfilled because we don't need objects, desires, or cravings to dictate our happiness. The book suggests cleansing our minds of "psychic irritants," and by doing so, we will learn what our true values are and how we can best serve the world and others.

In Conclusion

The lessons from meditation practices and becoming self-aware help us to see more truth and clarity in the world around us. By practicing mindfulness meditations, you'll experience many different emotions and feelings. These feelings and emotions may be challenging to face, but they're part of the process of self-awareness and enlightenment.

Mindfulness in Plain English

offers valuable and practical advice on how to recognize and deal with these feelings.

As we know, the world is continuously changing and evolving. We have no control over this, and it can be scary sometimes. Not only is the world changing, but as each day passes, we grow older. We've all experienced that moment when we ask ourselves how we got to the age we are, and how quickly time has passed. Practicing mindfulness and meditation makes us a lot more aware of the fleeting and transitory nature of life and the world.

We often think that satisfaction can be bought. Lots of things are unsatisfactory, so find satisfaction and gratitude in being part of the world. Find satisfaction through kindness and empathy, and give willingly and with abundance.

Although meditation is a solitary activity, it shows us how we are all part of the universe. We're all members of a family, a community, and society. Once we chip away at our egos, we learn to become part of the bigger picture and accept that our actions have consequences.

Meditation starts with concentration, and through this, we gain a more profound sense of morality and wisdom.