



Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation

Sharon Salzberg

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Thousands of years prove it, and Western science backs it: Meditation sharpens focus. Meditation lowers blood pressure, relieves chronic pain, reduces stress. Meditation helps us experience greater calm. Meditation connects us to our inner-most feelings and challenges our habits of self-judgment. Meditation helps protect the brain against aging and improves our capacity for learning new things. Meditation opens the door to real and accessible happiness.

There is no better person to show a beginner how to harness the power of meditation than Sharon Salzberg, one of the world's foremost meditation teachers and spiritual authors. Cofounder of the Insight Meditation Society, author of *Lovingkindness*, *Faith*, and other books, Ms. Salzberg distills 30 years of teaching meditation into a 28-day program that will change lives. It is not about Buddhism, it's not esoteric—it is closer to an exercise, like running or riding a bike. From the basics of posture, breathing, and the daily schedule to the finer points of calming the mind, distraction, dealing with specific problem areas (pain in the legs? falling asleep?) to the larger issues of compassion and awareness, *Real Happiness* is a complete guide. It explains how meditation works; why a daily meditation practice results in more resiliency, creativity, peace, clarity, and balance; and gives twelve meditation practices, including mindfulness meditation and walking meditation. An extensive selection of her students' FAQs cover the most frequent concerns of beginners who meditate—"Is meditation selfish?" "How do I know if I'm doing it right?" "Can I use meditation to manage weight?"

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From Reader Review Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation for online ebook

Jennifer says

Have you ever tried meditating and thought you weren't good at it? Are you sporadic with your meditation practice because you just don't have the time to do it? Have you ever wondered what is physically happening to your brain, your body while you meditate? Sharon Salzberg addresses these questions in her book "Real Happiness."

Salzberg starts by explaining what meditation is and what it isn't. She then goes into the benefits and the science of meditation, which for me was probably my favorite chapter. Learning that the brain physically changes when you participate in mindful meditation was fascinating to me.

From here the book is broken down into a four-week program with each week focusing on a different type of meditation. Each week is beautifully laid out; starting with an introduction and then going into the practice preview. I loved this because it's nice to know ahead of time what the meditation session will be like. You don't want to be thinking about the HOW when you should be focused on the meditation itself. Once you get a look at what's to come, Salzberg introduces you to several different types of meditations for that week's area of focus. She highlights or italicizes important concepts to remember, and provides tips and gentle reminders along the way. She ends each section with FAQs, reflections, and takeaways.

I really enjoyed and learned a lot from this book. I loved Salzberg's writing style and her organization. This book was just so well done. . .highly recommend!

Jessica says

A tremendously useful primer on meditation, structured into a four-week course. I read this, rather, over the course of a year, but anticipate that I will revisit it from time to time. The utility of having a full litany of meditation practices--with the intent of generating awareness about how one relates to situations, rather than the situations themselves--lies in the ability to craft a meditation practice that mimics life overall: dynamic, arising and falling away, calling for different resources in different situations. Of particular use, so far, has been re-approaching boredom: after a year or so of off and on practice, I often find myself feeling delighted to be bored? What a wild luxury to have a lull in which a habitually busy mind can rest. Definitely recommend Salzberg's book to both novice and veteran meditators.

Beth says

This book was well done and accessible, but honestly, if I've got some free time on my hands, I'm always going to choose reading over meditating. This is probably a compulsion that could be cured through meditation. Anyway, I'm hoping that some of this sticks with me.

Shannon says

I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interesting in learning about meditation. It's a quick and easy read. At first I hated the title of the book, because it sounds so self-helpish, but by the end of the book, I understand why it's called Real Happiness. Here is a passage:

"Real happiness depends on what we do with our attention. When we train our attention through meditation, we connect to ourselves, to our own true experience, and then we connect to others. The simple act of being completely attentive and present to another person is an act of love, and it fosters unshakeable well-being. It is happiness that isn't bound to a particular situation, happiness that can withstand change."

The practice of meditation contributes to such a profound shift in how you look at and cope with the world and your problems. Just thinking about meditation gives me comfort now, knowing that there is a way to stay calm and centered and present in the face of constant change. This has helped me cope with a very difficult year.

Emily says

I rate this book highly for its ability to make meditation accessible to the beginner, while adding additional depth and meaning to the experienced. Since reading Tolle's books, I have been trying to be more present and fully take in moments. Salzberg has helped me gain this presence through meditation, along with focus, peace, and lovingkindness. In a world of continuous distractions, turmoil, selfishness, nonpresence, and unkindness, I am grateful for a well written book that gives the tools to help combat all of these on a personal level. I like her writing style, her loving and forgiving attitude, and her ability to make meditation easy and available for all. I am going to take a few deep breaths to celebrate.

Io? says

Questo è il mio personale Libro sulla pratica della Meditazione, così come Lo yoga nella vita: la pratica quotidiana di una vita illuminata lo è per quella dello Yoga. Insomma, due pilastri. La cosa che li accomuna è che entrambi discettano sul proprio argomento principale (meditazione e yoga) in un modo per così dire olistico, inserendoli in un sistema complesso (ma per nulla distante da noi, nè tanto meno astruso) in cui scopriamo che la fine del viaggio non è altro che l'inizio del viaggio stesso. E il merito della chiarezza, della semplicità e della completezza, con cui tutto ciò è trattato, è tutto delle due bravissime autrici, che con passione straordinaria, senza elevarsi su di un piedistallo ma parlando come ci parlasse un amico, ci tendono la loro mano offrendoci la loro personale (e spirituale) esperienza.

[Dimenticavo, solo una sottigliezza, ma fondamentale. Non guardate il sottotitolo di questo libro - vi prego - cancellatelo. Davvero catastrofico. E fuorviante.]

Metta says

"Real Happiness depends on what we do with our attention."

"The act of beginning again is the essential act of the meditation practice."

"If you have to let go of distractions and begin again thousands of times, fine. That's not a roadblock to the practice - that is the practice. That's life: starting over, one breathe at a time."

Sharon Salzberg has a way of teaching, as if taking a walk in nature with a dear friend, side by side; very gentle, compassionate, clear, simple.

In this book she leads you step by step through a simple program of meditation.

28 days, a cd with 4 guided meditations.

Rev. Sheila says

I found out about this book while reading someone's blog. Absolutely loved it! I think it's a must-have for any meditation student. I have to admit I was a little disappointed (confused?) in the beginning because I was expecting 28 daily readings or assignments or something. The FAQs and takeaways each week were my favorite parts of this book. The accompanying CD was great. I was especially grateful for the guidance for the walking meditation.

This is the type of book I will come back to again and again. I talked about this book so much that one of my friends (who has never meditated) went out and bought a copy.

Bella says

I've been meditating off and on for about 15 years. This book is a must for beginners, mid-timers and old timers at mediation. It reminded me why I practice, explained how to kick start a sluggish practice, and provided "new" approaches (for me).

Ann Otto says

I've tried meditation many times- many books and discussions on the method. They never worked until I read Sharon Salzberg's. She points to all the challenges to meditation- most I can recognize- and explains how to overcome them. She really understands why we want to meditate, and the problems we have in getting there. It was like having a discussion with her.

Kathi Crawford says

I found Sharon Salzberg's "Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation" book very easy to understand and

apply. I purchased the book because I wanted to learn more about meditation and begin a meditation practice. The book is set up to read in a weekly format as you build on your knowledge and apply the approaches in your practice. The book includes a companion CD that you can listen to for guided meditations. Sharon shares examples throughout the book with personal anecdotes to make meditation accessible for everyone. Whether you have been practicing meditation for a long time or you are a beginner, you will learn something from Sharon's book to enhance or begin your practice.

Kevin says

I struggled to rate this book, it's very repetitive many times the author uses the exact same text 3 times which began to wear on my nerves. Not the kind of thing that you want to happen when you're reading a book designed to increase your happiness, so I planned on rating this 2 stars, but the final quarter of the book on loving kindness was so good that I bumped it up to 3 stars. The audio extras also make the book deserving of a three star rating.

Annette says

This practical guidebook has inspired me to begin the habit of meditating at least 20 minutes/day. I can feel the positive difference emotionally, spiritually, physically.

Quotes:

"This act of beginning again is the essential art of the meditation practice...If you have to let go of distractions and begin again thousands of time, fine. That's not a roadblock to the practice - that IS the practice. That's life: starting over, one breath at a time." (p. 49-50)

"Effort needn't be struggling or straining - it can be relaxed perseverance." (p. 58)

"Only when we are attentive in each moment do we find satisfaction in our lives." (p. 60)

"In the poem 'Escapist - Never,' Robert Frost writes,
'His life is a pursuit of a pursuit forever.
It is the future that creates his present.
All is an interminable chain of longing.'" (p. 60)

"We can be with two, three, maybe four breaths before our attention starts to wander to the past, to the future, to judgment, to analysis, to fantasy. The question is: What happens in the moment when you recognize that your mind has wandered? Can you gently let go and return your attention to the present moment, to feeling your breath? The real key to being with your breath is being able to begin again." (p. 63)

"As several teachers of mindfulness have said, 'Thoughts aren't facts.' And thoughts aren't acts. They're just thoughts, part of the passing mental landscape. Thoughts moving through your mind are like clouds moving across the sky. They are not the sky, and the sky remains unchanged by them. The way to be with them is just to watch them go by." (p. 65)

"I learned a valuable lesson from one of my earliest teachers in India. I went to him in great distress because

I'd had jealous thoughts during meditation. 'Why are you so upset about the thought that came up in your mind?' he said. 'Did you invite it?'" (p. 66)

"Nothing endures but change,' said the Greek philosopher Heraclitus." (p. 82)

"Mindfulness restores that balance; we catch our habitual reactions of clinging, condemning, and zoning out, and let them go." (p. 84)

"It trains us to be with a painful experience in the moment, without adding imagined distress and difficulty. If we look closely at it, the pain is bound to change, and that's as true of a headache as it is of a heartache: the discomfort oscillates; there are beats of rest between moments of unpleasantness. When we discover firsthand that pain isn't static, that it's a living, changing system, it doesn't seem as solid or insurmountable as it did at first." (p. 99)

"For most of us, mindfulness is fleeting. We manage it for a moment, and then we're gone again for a long period of time, preoccupied with the past, the future, our worries; we see the world through the goggles of long-held assumptions. What we're doing in practice is working to shift the ratio, so that we can gather and focus our attention more frequently. Mindfulness isn't difficult; we just need to remember to do it." (p. 104)

"Thich Nhat Hanh says, 'I like to define mindfulness as the energy that helps us to be there 100%; the energy of our true presence.'" (p. 106)

"The four steps in dealing with an emotion mindfully - recognition, acceptance, investigation, and nonidentification (...RAIN) - can also be applied to our thoughts. We tend to identify with our thoughts in a way we don't identify with our bodies. ... We say to ourselves, 'I am a sad person.' But if we bang our funny bone, we don't usually say to ourselves, 'I am a sore elbow.' Most of the time, we think we are our thoughts. ...The point of mindfulness is to get in touch with that witnessing capacity." (p. 110-111)

"Even during the relatively brief duration of our meditation session, we can see that our thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, no matter how powerful, arrive, depart, and alter kaleidoscopically. Accepting (if only for a moment) the fact of impermanence and continual change is acknowledging a big truth in a small way. Learning to feel comfortable with our thoughts and feelings as they change is the first step to being more comfortable with life as it is, not as we wish it would be. Mindfulness helps us make friends with the idea that nothing is permanent - not joy, not sorrow, not tedium." (p. 142)

Lovingkindness Meditation for caregivers:

"May I find the inner resources to be able to give to others and receive myself.

May I remain peaceful, and let go of expectations.

May I offer love, knowing I can't control the course of life, suffering, or death.

I care about your pain, yet cannot control it.

I wish you happiness and peace, and know I cannot make your choices for you.

May I see my limits compassionately, just as I view the limitations of others.

May I see you as I wish to be seen, as big as life itself, so much more than your need or your pain." (p. 160-161)

"Compassion is truthful: It's acknowledging with equanimity that this is what's going on. ...It might mean acknowledging that yes, this person is getting in his own way; he's not handling his troubles very skillfully. But compassion ultimately involves seeing difficult states like fear, greed, and jealousy not as bad and wrong and terrible but as states of suffering. The more we do that, the more compassion will spontaneously arise

within us." (p. 170)

"It's really about drawing on wisdom that we all possess and saying, 'Okay, everything changes. I'm going to move on.'" (p. 174)

"A sense of equanimity comes in - a kind of underlying peace and spacious stillness of mind that allows us not to be overcome or upset when something doesn't work out as we would like." (p. 175)

"Remember that everyone wants to be happy." (p. 178)

"The process is one of continually trying to greet our experience, whatever it is, with mindfulness, lovingkindness, and compassion; it helps us realize that everything changes constantly and to be okay with that. The effort we make in meditation is a willingness to be open, to come close to what we have avoided, to be patient with ourselves and others, and to let go of our preconceptions, our projections, and our tendency not to live fully. Meditation practice helps us relinquish old, painful habits...It also ignites a very potent and alive energy in us. With a strong foundation in how to practice meditation, we can begin to live in a way that enables us to respect ourselves, to be calm rather than anxious, and to offer caring attention to others instead of being held back by notions of separation." (p. 182)

"Just put your body there. Your mind will do different things all of the time, but you just put your body there. Because that's the expression of commitment, and the rest will follow from that." (p. 187)

"Real happiness depends on what we do with our attention. When we train our attention through meditation, we connect to ourselves, to our own true experience, and then we connect to others. The simple act of being completely attentive and present to another person is an act of love, and it fosters unshakeable well-being. It is happiness that isn't bound to a particular situation, happiness that can withstand change. Through the regular practice of meditation we discover the real happiness of simplicity, of connection, of presence. We cultivate the ability to disengage from unthinking and habitual struggles. We take delight in integrity, and we feel at home in our bodies, our minds, our lives." (p. 198)

"As Thich Nhat Hanh once said, 'Happiness is available...please help yourself.'" (p. 199)

Emir Ibañez says

Ignoren el título cursi que decidieron ponerle al libro.

Es ideal para quienes estén interesados en adentrarse en la práctica de la meditación, se van a sacar las dudas y descubrirán sus beneficios, lo recomiendo totalmente.

Lon says

Insight meditation, the particular tradition of meditation practice that Salzberg enjoins, takes a decidedly non-theistic approach to meditation, with the primary purposes being to live more fully in each present moment with full awareness, and gaining the skills to recognize, accept, and investigate the phenomena that arise in our bodies and minds. Through non-judgmental awareness, we are better able to live

mindfully. We are freed from the tyranny of conditioned, reflexive responses when we become aware of them and have come to better understand the nature of those responses. Insight meditation also promotes the understanding that we need not identify with the passing thoughts and emotions that pass into our lives so impermanently.

"They're just thoughts, part of the passing mental landscape. Thoughts moving through your mind are like clouds passing through the sky. They are not the sky and the sky remains unchanged by them."

Salzberg sequences her four weeks of "insight meditation" lessons much like Gil Fronsdal organizes his introductory lessons for the San Francisco-based Insight Meditation Center: meditations on the breath prepare a foundation, to which are added meditations on the body, and meditations to deal skillfully with emotions and thoughts. She adds Lovingkindness meditation, which, for me is a profoundly helpful practice. As a teacher, Salzberg radiates patience and encouragement. She shares a quote or analogy or a brief anecdote here and there, but only as necessary to elucidate a point; this is not one of those meditation books that recount story after story after story about John the pediatrician from Newark, or Sally, an accountant from Pensacola. As an author, Salzberg's prose is serviceable and stays grounded in contemporary life--not everything is a flower or a cup of tea or a smile, as in Thich Nhat Hahn's writing. It's a style that calls zero attention to itself, but also fails to elicit any of those literary goose-bumps other writers manage to deliver from time to time in their prose.

A worthwhile read, but when I need to be refreshed on this material, I think I'll find Gil Fronsdal's 6 very short, introductory handouts to be just as helpful and much more concise. They're downloadable from: <http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org...>

I'm curious how other people respond to an Insight Meditation approach. For me, It's a little like getting the health benefits of yoga at the gym while absolutely losing out on the fuller dimension of yoga as a spiritual practice. On the other hand, Insight Meditation doesn't require practitioners to espouse any dogma or reconstruct a new world view. Some may like that, but I think I enjoy a spiritual practice from within a more comprehensive spiritual framework--even if I don't commit myself to an exclusionary and permanent adoption of that particular world-view. It's like reading a book or watching a play in which we must willingly suspend our disbelief if we are to make the kind of investment that pays off in the end.

Any thoughts out there on the relative benefits of different traditions of meditation?
