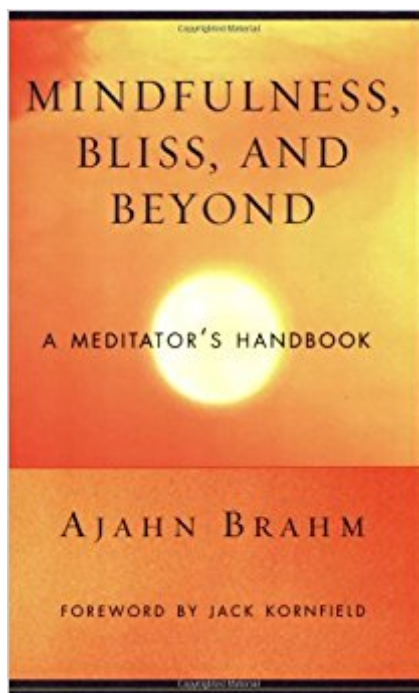


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Mindfulness, Bliss, And Beyond: A Meditator's Handbook



Synopsis

Meditation: it's not just a way to relax, or to deal with life's problems. Done correctly, it can be a way to radically encounter bliss and to begin - and sustain - real transformation in ourselves. In *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, self-described meditation junkie Ajahn Brahm shares his knowledge and experience of the jhanas - a core part of the Buddha's original meditation teaching. Never before has this material been approached in such an empowering way, by a teacher of such authority and popularity. Full of surprises, delightfully goofy humor, and entertaining stories that inspire, instruct, and illuminate, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond* will encourage those new to meditation, and give a shot in the arm to more experienced practitioners as well.

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Customer Reviews

For over thirty years, Ajahn Brahmavamsa has been a monk in the Thai "forest tradition," a branch of Theravada Buddhism known for its strict adherence to both the spirit and the letter of the Buddha's teachings. Tibetan Buddhism is exotic and Zen is aesthetically pleasing, but for the meditation that led the Buddha himself to enlightenment, we must look to the Theravadans. Now one of the best-known faces of Buddhism in the world (although just becoming known in the States), Ajahn Brahm is one of the most admired meditation teachers in the world, and this book shares EVERYTHING. You can take this book to your hut in the woods (or spare bedroom in your house) and work its plan to ultimate bliss. I was lucky enough to meet Ajahn Brahm last year in Chicago at Transitions Book Place, when he was visiting in support of his book of teaching stories, *Who*

Ordered This Truckload of Dung? (An excerpt from the interview with him appears below.) As wonderful and inspiring as his first book is, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond* is what we've all been waiting for, an encapsulation of the meditation wisdom Ajahn Brahm has cultivated since 1973. If you're interested at all in what happiness comes from meditation, PLEASE do yourself a favor and read this book. It is everything I had hoped it would be -- and let me tell you, that was a tall order after meeting the writer himself!

Q. People call you "the Elvis of Buddhism," "the Seinfeld of Buddhism." They want to make you into a celebrity. Do you ever have difficulty reconciling that with being a monk--and not just a monk, but a forest monk, which is very different from living as a famous person?

A. You know, I think one of the first times when it really hit me is I was giving a talk in Singapore. There was a huge crowd of five thousand, cheering as if they were watching a basketball match or something. Huge crowd. In the front where I was sitting, I was just by myself on this huge stage. As I walked in, I thought, now what am I doing? But then I thought of my teacher, Ajahn Chah. I thought he would be very happy that I was spreading Dhamma to so many. So you never think of yourself; you think of your teachings. You think of what you're doing, rather than who's doing it. So you actually depersonalize everything.

Q. That's how you avoid the cult of personality?

A. [You get] where you can actually play the role without being the role, so you get up there and you can really connect with your audience. You can enjoy the interaction between yourself and five thousand [other people]. That way you are not shortchanging the Dhamma. Too often, people -- because they're concerned about their ego -- don't actually put themselves forward enough to be able to present the Dhamma in a beautiful way. Whatever you believe in, you just give it everything you've got, you go for broke. If you're going to talk to ten people, it might as well be ten thousand. It's the same as how I'm talking to you now. You just connect and just give a talk to the very best you can, and then off you go. So it's very powerful. If you've got a good teaching, then go out there and give it.

Q. Do you see yourself and your popularity as a vehicle for the Dhamma?

A. Sure, yeah, sure. I mean, when I started [as abbot and giving talks], I thought, "Well, I'll give it everything I've got. If it works, great. If it doesn't work, I can be a nice, peaceful, solitary monk." So you've got nothing to lose.

Q. It's funny. You almost have to disguise your useful teachings in an entertaining and funny way --

A. Packaging, that's what it is.

Q. -- but you're known for being totally scrupulous to the Vinaya. In the evening, you'll have orange juice while other people are having their steak dinners, things like that. That gives you a kind of authority that simply being a monk or an abbot doesn't necessarily confer, because there are scandals every day with religious figures.

A. That's correct, yeah.

Q. So what do you think that the Theravada tradition as practiced and taught by Western monastics has to offer that maybe the other traditions don't?

A. I think it's just clarity. Clarity

and simplicity. That just shows that you can keep all your rules scrupulously without being uptight. If you see a person who really keeps those rules, they just so easily go along with it and they're just relaxed because it's one of those almost, like, koans of life--the more rules you keep, the more freedom you feel. People think, "Ah, if you keep precepts and you keep these rules, you feel just so enclosed. You can't go where you want. You can't do what you want." But [monastics] don't feel it that way at all. All these rules -- I can't do this, I can't do that -- seem so free and liberating.Q. And part of the clarity of the Theravada is that there are not a lot of cultural accretions added to it.A. That's right. Of all of the types of Buddhism, Theravada has been the least cultural and most international. [As] a Theravadin, I can go to Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, and the other traditions -- old traditions and new traditions -- and know exactly what I'm doing. Like last night, I stayed in the Sri Lankan temple in Toronto. Tonight is in the Thai temple [in Chicago]. So you just fit in so easily. If you're a Theravadin monk or nun, it's like having a Diner's Club card or gold card, and you can go to any of these hotels called "monasteries" in the whole world and get free bed and board. [Laughs.] It's a great, great club to join.

Presently when you learn meditation almost any teacher will tell you that what you are learning is from the master himself. However this unusual english book is method specific and teaches the same method that the Buddha himself was practicing and teaching in over 32 suttas of the Tripitaka. It teaches you in a practical way how to develop samadhi. Very rare to find in modern Buddhist writings. Though many reviews on here might question the validity of Ajahn Brahms teaching, they are not following Buddha's actual teaching but merely repeating the cultural constructs of Buddhist practice as learned through the voices of teachers. When reading some of the reviewers, you have to wonder if anyone anymore actually reads through the Buddhas teaching (Tripitaka)? Or they just repeat like parrots what they learn from teachers who are not the Buddha? If you have read more than just the standard suttas like the sattipattana etc.? Buddha recommends jhana in over 32 suttas. In fact there is no where in the 3 sets of sutta's that Buddha teaches meditation where he also does not mention jhana. This is because it was meant to be the precursor to Vipassana. He does not recommend styles of practice like U BA Khin's (S.N. Goenka) or various other supposed vipassana styles. Have you read the LAM RIM (from Tibetan Buddhist) teachings of Tsong Kha Pha? you can actually find jhana being taught in there. Buddha taught a system of meditation called Samatha Vipassana. The 1st part was the development of concentration and serenity or samadhi. This has 8 stages and is what Ajahn Bhram has been generous enough to teach openly. Once you have acquired Samatha you can then use your samadhi to acquire Vipassana; often translated as insight

thought literally means clear seeing like clairvoyance (also can mean burning away).I can understand that you might have a bias towards jhana teaching if you have not been able to access jhana. However Because Buddha never teaches Samatha without emphasizing Jhana, because it was his practice and because if you have gone into jhana you can see the night and day differences between practicing vipassana with and without it, this is why Ajahn Brahm is so intense on it. It is also a reaction against all the years of, quite frankly (lets be honest) fear of Jhana practice promoted out into the field by Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, Goenka, U BA Khin and and several others who were sure about what they were sure about. Even now in these reviews there is someone warning people saying, " you better read what ajan sumeddo or ajhan chah says!" rather than, "you should read what the source teaching says". Fascinating, and we wonder why a teaching degenerates.In the 70's there were several American Jews who were traveling in Asia and happened upon what was the dominant teaching style of meditation at that time which was the Mahasi Sayadaw and U Bha Khin style of body scan. They referred to thier methods as Vipassana practices. These Americans studied these methods and brought them back to the U.S. American practitioners here such as Kornfield, Salzberg and others pushed this method hard. Practicing in this way however is known in the Visshudhimagga as being a dry insight practitioner because you have generated no samadhi, no jhana-absorption. Practicing in this way can bring some insight but not much joy or serenity because that is not the nature of the practice. It can also never take you to other of Buddhas realizations like Sunyata.As I have said in another review, Americans have been given a one sided view of Buddha's practice which they eagerly accept from thier teachers, (who can blame anyone for trusting their teacher) however because most Americans do not read the sutras themselves they do not actually see the way Buddha teaches his method of meditation (see the Pottapadda sutta: Digha Nikaya). I highly recommend a short free article by the Theravada monk, Thanissaro Bhikkhu. It is called "One tool among many; the place of Vipassana in Buddhist practice".[...]By the way, just because Kornfield, Salzberg and the other Americans came back and wrote books does not make them any more expert than any other Buddhist monk. In fact, they got a lot wrong and are recently coming to terms with the fact that they have been teaching an incomplete system; this presently shows as the IMS has been hosting more and more Jhana teachers like Catherine, Brahm and the great Pa Auk Sayadaw. They pushed the body scan method for many years but have recently began to see that there has been a very superficial understanding of Samatha.This is a highly illuminating book from a very serious practitioner of meditation. Someone who has devoted his life to learning and elucidating the Buddhas own methodology. What is funny about reviews on this book is the Americans and others who have not dedicated their complete lives

to practice (being a monk) tell us whether or not this book can provide enlightenment or not? If they already have the enlightenment then why even read this book in the 1st place?

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