

Heart of Wellness: A Short History of a New Age

S. J. Spiegel

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This is a fascinating and unusual guidebook through the history and practicality of the wellness movement.

S. J. Spiegel's *Heart of Wellness* navigates the intersection of science and spirituality, highlighting the wellness movement as an interdisciplinary effort with depth and understanding.

While the term “wellness” has become so commonplace that it's now being used to promote everything from organic dog food to corporate health plans, this work goes a fair distance in truly exploring the many layers that come with the term, and more importantly, the practices and beliefs that go into it. This creates a valuable context that's often missing from advice on how individuals can achieve wellness for themselves, and shows there's still a great deal of depth to be plumbed when it comes to understanding what wellness includes.

As the book notes early on, wellness has helped people worldwide to see health and happiness as involving not just their bodies, but also their minds, emotions, and spirits, and to finally begin to see the connections between all.

From the outset, Spiegel admits that he's an unlikely navigator in this brave new age, since he's not a physician or researcher, but rather a lawyer and entrepreneur. However, as he begins to mix in his own stories—as an executive of a behavioral health-care program, a litigator of environmental actions, a lung cancer survivor, and an advocate for green movements—it becomes clearer that he offers a valuable and unique perspective that enriches this exploration.

Rather than approach wellness from what he calls the “qualitatively fuzzy” method that leans toward inspiration and uplift, Spiegel draws on his business and law background to set a more formal method instead. Like an expert researcher, he begins peeling back the layers of complexity that have been growing over the initial meaning of wellness since it was coined a few decades ago. The book doesn't offer just history and philosophy, though. It also goes in-depth on how individuals can take charge of their health and be ferocious advocates for their own wellness.

Sometimes, this spin through history can be a little dizzying, since Spiegel can shift quickly from one thought to another, occasionally without enough bridge-building in between. For example, at one point he pings between discussing Galileo and the Age of Enlightenment, while only a few paragraphs later, he's discussing ecology, prairie dogs, and Rachel Carson's exposé about toxic pesticides. More often, though, the method works, and overall the book is an artfully written stream-of-consciousness treatise by an author who shows a passion for nearly every discipline.

Spiegel's *Heart of Wellness* is a fascinating and unusual guidebook that stands out from the many wellness titles found in the self-help section.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (September 28, 2016)

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