

Mindfulness Starts Here: An Eight-Week Guide to Skillful Living

Lynette Monteiro

Frank Musten

Friesen Press (Jul 30, 2013)

Softcover \$30.99 (184pp)

978-1-4602-0936-3

Monteiro and Musten help reprogram your brain to become more aware and focused, with practical spiritual exercises.

Most people focus on happiness and try to block out life's darker moments. Lynette Monteiro and Frank Musten suggest that we should instead work to "cultivate steadiness in the face of challenges." *Mindfulness Starts Here* pushes readers to pay specific attention to the present world without judgment or anger.

The guide can be read alone or paired with an eight-week mindfulness program. Instead of replacing therapy, the volume offers readers a chance to learn how to deal with life's obstacles and to "turn into the skid," or use such experiences as teaching moments. Such focus helps individuals move from one moment to the next without dwelling in negativity.

Certain pieces of human existence are universal. Regardless of age, background, and health, everyone has to grapple with loss, disappointment, and mistakes. The authors point out that wellness does not mean the absence of struggle. Rather, it is recognizing struggle as a "tipping over," remembering where we felt balanced, and returning to that point.

Intended to be read in sequence, the ideas presented here build upon one another. Earlier chapters focus on identifying common reasons for why people feel frazzled, depressed, or dragged off course. As the chapters proceed, readers are given tips for how to treat the body well, deepen the body's sensations, and interrupt an autopilot that sometimes perpetuates negative thinking.

Practical exercises are included to help readers better understand how to live in the present, cope with speed bumps, and live an intention-filled life. Such practice may mean reading Rumi's poem "Guesthouse" to process how to greet things like joy and depression, or it may mean meditating, identifying common thoughts, and noting recurring themes. To set the right stage or circumstances, one may be instructed to avoid the phone or to consume a piece of fruit during the exercise. End-of-chapter charts help readers track their progress.

Each lesson or idea is easy to understand, thanks to rich metaphors, acronyms, and exercises. For example, to better explain how to understand life's experiences, the writers use the acronym BEST (Body, Emotions, Sensations, and Thinking). Mindful individuals are aware of their physical responses, feelings, signals between brain and body, and thoughts.

Much of our inner dialogue tends to be harsh. *Mindfulness Starts Here* is intended to help reprogram such thoughts by encouraging readers to take care of their mental and physical health. With intention, awareness, and focus, people can relieve stress and live a mindful life.

LISA BOWER (November 19, 2013)

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