



The Meditative Mind: The Varieties of Meditative Experience

Daniel Goleman , Ram Dass (Foreword)

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From the *New York Times* Bestselling author, a classic interpretation of all varieties of meditation.

"Goleman's wide-ranging meditative experience imbues the volume with an authority and authenticity . . . and continues to make his writings some of the liveliest available on meditation."--*Publisher's Weekly*

The Meditative Mind is an essential traveler's guide to the topography of the spirit for every spiritual seeker.

For the beginning meditator, the book provides a comprehensive, accessible overview of the different kinds of meditation, from Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi, Jewish, and Christian to Transcendental, Tantric, Kundalini, Tibeta Buddhist, Zen, and those developed by Gurdjeff and Krishnamurti, and introduces the reader to the basic elements of their practice.

For the experienced meditator, Goleman explores the distinct levels of consciousness developed as a result of long-term application.

The Meditative Mind: The Varieties of Meditative Experience Details

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Francesco Caslini says

Tanta teoria, tante citazioni delle fonti. Conoscendo l'autore, mi aspettavo qualcosa un po' più accessibile -e un po' più occidentale, lo ammetto. Insegna molto, motiva un po' meno. Un ottimo libro per chi ha già una conoscenza di base.

Tracey says

Good book on meditation.

Russ Ridlington says

A very good description on all the main paths of meditation. Every religion has some form of meditation although in some it is secretive or not utilized. Meditation has the power to change the individual who in turn changes the world. I highly recommend this book, particularly if you are of a faith that does not place enough emphasis on this important life practice.

Craig Shoemake says

First published in 1977 under the title *The Varieties of Meditative Experience*, Goleman's book is a clear and straightforward presentation of various meditative disciplines organized around the map of consciousness explicated in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*. Part I details this map, describing the paths of serenity (samadhi) and insight (vipassana). The various jhanas (meditative absorptions) are described, as are the insight knowledges. The tone throughout is professional, understanding and clear, though lacking the feel of a first-hand account. Two notable mistakes are made in this section, one being the consistent misspelling of pañña as puñña (I get a little worried when an author misspells key terms), the second being the placement of nirodha-samapatti ("cessation of feeling and perception") as above, or superior to, that of nibbana. There is no justification for this given the evidence of the Pali Suttas, where n-s is described rather as a kind of "super jhana" attainable only by anagamis and arhats. It is not, in itself, liberative.

Part II is a survey of meditation paths--Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and many things in between. Even Gurdjieff and Krishnamurti show up here. While at times illuminating--it's certainly a good, quick cross-section of the many traditions available--the underlying assumption of the discussion is in line with the old saying that "all paths lead to the mountain top," something this reader, at least, is not convinced of. (This position is explicitly affirmed in part III, entitled "Meditation Paths: Their Essential Unity.")

Why I am not convinced of this can perhaps be illustrated by a passage from the section on Jewish mysticism. "The end of the Kabbalist's path," Goleman writes, "is devekut, in which the seeker's soul cleaves to God" (p. 52). And in the paragraph below that, in a passage quoted from Gershom Scholem, devekut is

defined as a state of mind wherein "You constantly remember God and his love, nor do you remove your thought from Him...to the point when such a person speaks with someone else, his heart is not with them at all but is still before God." Now this is fine as far as it goes, but it in no way approximates the view of things that result from the attainment of nibbana as described by the Buddha and his disciples in the Pali Suttas, and which the Visuddhimagga seeks to elaborate. Consider this from Samyutta Nikaya 22.58(6): "A bhikkhu liberated by wisdom, liberated by nonclinging through revulsion towards form [feeling, perception, volitional formations, consciousness], through its fading away and cessation, is called one liberated by wisdom" (from The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, pp. 900-1). In other words, enlightenment consists not of being attached to something (to a god or gods real or imagined), but rather through the cessation of all attachments.

In other words, there is no reason to believe the Jewish holy man--the zaddik--or the Christian saint or the Muslim sufi attains what the Buddha attained. In fact, the experiences of the Kabbalistic meditators are examples not of nibbana (nirvana) but of the higher jhanas--equivalent, according to Goleman, to the Sufi fana--and Goleman seems to admit this much when on page 62 he says that Sufi practice "culminates in baqa, abiding in some degree of fana [jhana] consciousness while in the middle of ordinary activity." This is precisely what the Hindus call sahaj samadhi, "open eyed samadhi," and though a high attainment, it is not the equivalent of the Buddhist nibbana. In fact, as the suttas make clear time and again, contemplatives before the Buddha were prone to believing in their own enlightenment specifically as a result of their attainment of those sorts of states. Goleman's book, however, does nothing to illuminate this problem; it merely perpetuates the popular and fatuous notion that all religions are, at their heart, one and the same.

If I seem overly critical in the above passages, I don't want to give the impression that the book is in any way a failure. Its positives far outweigh its negatives, and even considering my critique of Part III, Goleman is right in asserting correspondences between meditative traditions. They are certainly there, and they need to be understood and appreciated; there is much that contemplatives from different cultures can share with and learn from one another.

For many people, Part IV will prove the most interesting, where Goleman looks at the psychology of meditation. Here he is in his element (he is, after all, a psychologist), and he offers a good introductory survey of the Western attempt to come to grips with issues of mind and consciousness. A number of scientific studies of meditation are discussed, though one is left with the overwhelming feeling that so much more can--and should--be done. However, if one remembers that the book is almost a quarter century old, one can rest assured that since its publication much has indeed been done.

Liudmila Gamaiunova says

A classic work, and probably the first comprehensive book on contemplative practices. I think this book will gain popularity in upcoming years with growing interest in various contemplative practices and their effects on health.

Paul says

A brief, clear, and authoritative survey of the major meditation systems of the world, along with a look at the psychology of meditation and prospects for how Eastern and Western approaches might help us learn more about these altered states of consciousness.

Gerard Chiva says

Interesting review of different meditation schools and practices. Essentially the foundations are the same for all schools.

Christopher S H says

I think this is a fair intro to meditation (why I picked it up.)However, as others have said, it contained a lot more information than one might find necessary or even desirable. The comprehensive explanations of meditation in different traditions was interesting and spoke to the skeptic in me, they showed the universality of meditative practice. I could trust Goleman as an expert by the time I had come to the end which is why I could finally take his simple instructions on how to begin meditation seriously.

I could have read the same implementation advice online in one of many places but for me Goleman's extensive catalog informs and supports meditation's form and function as a practice, and allays many loud doubts that would've distracted me, had I not been given such a well mapped lay of the land.

Michael says

I started reading this book thinking it was going to be a lightweight skim over various meditative traditions, and indeed, it does contain that in the central chapters, but found there was more to it as I got towards the end. Goleman laid out his main thesis (along the lines of 'there are more similarities among the religious meditative traditions than there are differences') at the beginning of the book, and then set out to demonstrate the point, with frequent references back to his guiding template, the Visuddhimagga. I got the feeling that there was quite a bit of trying to make alternative approaches fit the Visuddhimagga mould where it wasn't always that obvious, but it was, nevertheless useful to see how the traditions agree with each other on some important points (without necessarily knowing it, or liking the fact!).

The book is of its time, and there's certainly a thread of excitement about the exploration that was happening in the 70's and 80's into Eastern meditative methods, as well as an unconscious nod to the 'one big melting pot' zeitgeist that was current. One thing I found interesting was the descriptions of the trials and experiments involving meditators that were happening, as Western scientists and explorers of the mind were grappling with the integration of mainstream psychology and the recently discovered centuries-old wealth of Eastern study of the mind.

The last part of the book is the 'meat', for me, in which Goleman goes into some depth about the psychology underlying Buddhism, in particular as described in the Visuddhimagga and Abhidhamma. I thought I was going to flick through this book and put in my shelf, never to open its pages again, instead of which I will be re-reading it again very soon, and would recommend, in particular, any student or teacher of meditation and mindfulness-based programmes to read it too.

Molly says

This is heavy going, not an introductory work. I have read about as much of it as I'm going to read. I will admit to a bit of skimming here and there, but also say in my defense that I read lots of it very closely. I don't recommend it as a book to read to find out about meditation.

Jen says

I had to read this for my yoga training this month. It read more like a textbook than a user-friendly guide, but it was informative and gave a historical and psychological basis for the many different types of meditative practices.

Erin says

A good introduction to meditation as it is practiced by various traditions around the world. What for me was helpful was the analysis of how different meditation practices relate, where they overlap, and where they seem to diverge. A good book for those who have some experience with meditation and are trying to understand those who do other practices.

David says

First and last parts of book were great but middle part was not very intriguing.

Naval Pandey says**Meditation - an exercise worth trying**

It is a good read which will help one establish a belief in practices of meditation. Rather than just theorizing the significance of meditation, author has provided practical implications with decent set of examples
