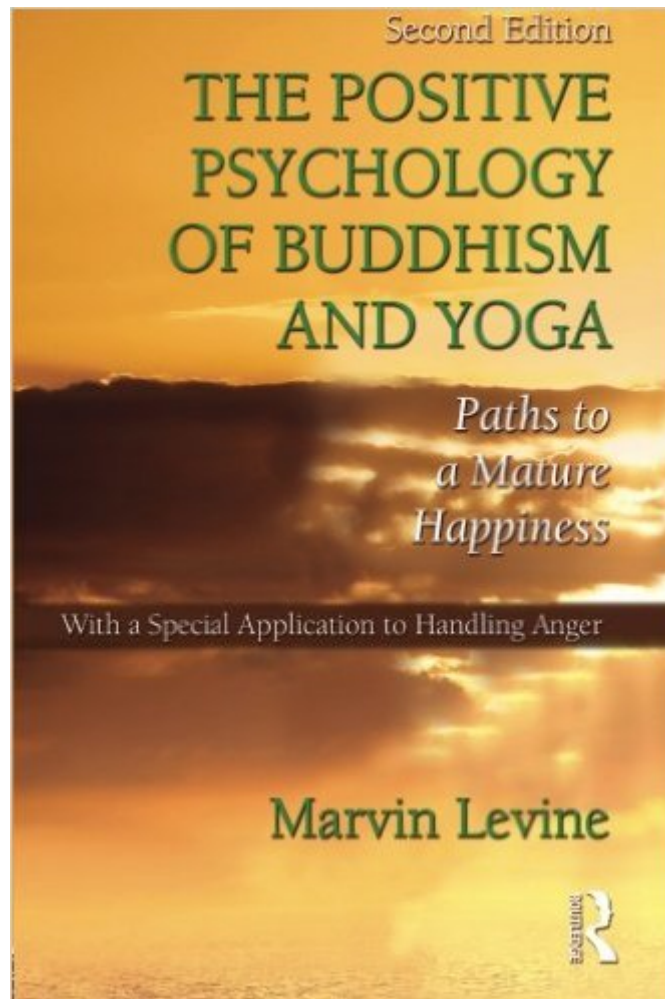


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The Positive Psychology Of Buddhism And Yoga, 2nd Edition: Paths To A Mature Happiness



Synopsis

This book describes Buddhist-Yogic ideas in relation to those of contemporary Western psychology. The book begins with the Buddhist view of the human psyche and of the human condition. This leads to the question of what psychological changes need to be made to improve that condition. Similarities between Buddhism and Western Psychology include: Both are concerned with alleviating inner pain, turmoil, affliction and suffering. Both are humanistic and naturalistic in that they focus on the human condition and interpret it in natural terms. Both view the human being as caught in a causal framework, in a matrix of forces such as cravings or drives which are produced by both our biology and our beliefs. Both teach the appropriateness of compassion, concern and unconditional positive regard towards others. Both share the ideal of maturing or growth. In the East and the West, this is interpreted as greater self possession, diminished cravings and agitations, less impulsivity and deeper observations which permit us to monitor and change our thoughts and emotional states. Buddhism, Yoga, and Western Psychology, especially the recent emphasis on positive psychology, are concerned with the attainment of deep and lasting happiness. The thesis of all three is that self-transformation is the surest path to this happiness.

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Customer Reviews

As a physician who has treated clinical anxiety and depression for the past 15 years, Levines book caught my eye at our local library. For the past several years I've incorporated many buddhist and yogic principles into my own life. I've read multiple authors and as many different approaches to

practicing these disciplines. After years of self-study and several retreats, I have a plethora of scattered info. and techniques that allow me to practice meditation and heighten my awareness to enrich my day and overall life. Throughout this time I have always been amazed at how buddhism and the hindu principles behind yoga overlap into the modern day Cognitive-Behavioral psychotherapy, of which I rely heavily in my clinical medical practice. So when I started to read Levine's book I soaked it up like a sponge. He takes all three disciplines and, with clever flare, shows how they do overlap and provides practical ways of application . His style and presentation is that you do not have to know anything about any of these three methods to have a working and usable understanding of all three at the end. Separate scholars in these three areas may find this approach too abbreviated, as Levine does hit the highpoints of each topic. He acknowledges this several times throughout the book. However, it depends on what your goals are with techniques such as these. My goal is not to know every "nook and cranny" about theses three topics. Nor is it to become a disciple of any of them [although I have to understand Cognitive-Behavioral psychotherapy in my practice]. My goal-----is to better understand my day and life in order to draw deeper joy and dimension from both. And I don't care what method I use to do this [a hybrid of all three is fine with me]. Finally, the real gem of this book is near the end when Levine pulls all three topics together with two schematic type diagrams[Figures 22.1 and 25.1]. In these he uses terminology[from all three] to construct the "mental tracking" that occurs of the Unenlightened and the Enlightened Mind. When I first saw these two diagrams I felt they were clever. When I started to use the diagrams in daily personal problem solving, I became aware of how ingenious they are. Up to this point Enlightenment was a lot of vague and "flowery" concepts from other authors. I sort of knew what it was and sort of thought I was heading in that direction. Levine's very practical diagrams made this much more concrete. It also drove home the idea of evolution. Another words, you develop a mindset and parameters for Enlightenment and apply these principles to issues throughout your day and life. Hence, Enlightenment is not something you reach, it is something you practice. Levine's way may not be exactly what the Buddha and Yogics had in mind, but it sure works. This book is a very "highlighted" and treasured part of my "personal growth" library. A true classic for me!

This book is both a wonderful introduction to the psychological frameworks of Buddhism and Yoga (B&Y) and--most importantly--a practical guide to applying these systems to develop greater emotional maturity and overall wellbeing. According to Levine, the path to mature happiness developed in the ancient philosophies of B&Y requires calming one's conditioned beliefs and

"passions" to allow greater control by the "anterior mind" (the "mind's eye" capable of observing, contemplating, and directing the mind). At the extreme, an "immature" individual is entirely conditioned by his or her culture, language, and biology--yielding the positive functions of anterior mind nonfunctional. Much like a little child, such a person's mental state is completely at the mercy of the external environment. He/she feels alright when a craving or ego desire is fed--but falls into tantrums and anguish whenever a craving or desire cannot be satisfied. Moreover, perception and interpretation of external events are distorted by the conditioned mind and its many unchecked passions (ego needs, cravings and attachments, fears and aversions, antipathies and resentments). The result is a life filled with suffering and illusion. Fortunately, children typically do learn to moderate their most selfish behaviors as they grow to adulthood: "[P]art of growing up entails learning some self-transformation" (p. 54). Nevertheless, Levine points out that our American vision of "normal" allows for a mix of mature and immature behavior. "Normal" adults experience disquieting feelings (anger, pettiness, impatience, envy) quite regularly: e.g., when "stuck" in a traffic jam or when passed over for promotion at work. Because such unhappy events are common, many of us spend a great deal of time and energy feeling upset about one thing or another. Levine points out that we don't have to live that way. Through the cultivation of positive attitudes (harmlessness, truthfulness, trustworthiness, sexual restraint, nonmaterialism) and practices (mindfulness, yoga poses, meditation), the anterior mind is freed more and more to reflect upon one's own mental processes and even transform them for the better. Thus the daily agitations diminish and we feel a greater sense of equanimity and happiness. Viewing these ancient philosophies through the lens of American "positive psychology," Levine succeeds in developing a powerful "Yogic" model of cognitive processing that shares much with Albert Ellis (e.g., *A Guide to Rational Living*), Aaron Beck (*Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders*), David Burns (e.g., *Feeling Good*), and Martin Seligman (e.g., *Authentic Happiness*). As such, this highly readable book makes a major contribution to American "Cognitive Therapy." But while mainstream cognitive approaches are limited to diverse techniques for coping with irrational thoughts or troubling events, the Yogic approach described by Levine is comprehensive and holistic. I have begun working with these ancient ideas and practices -- my early results suggest a potential to transform every aspect of one's life (mental, emotional, spiritual)!

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