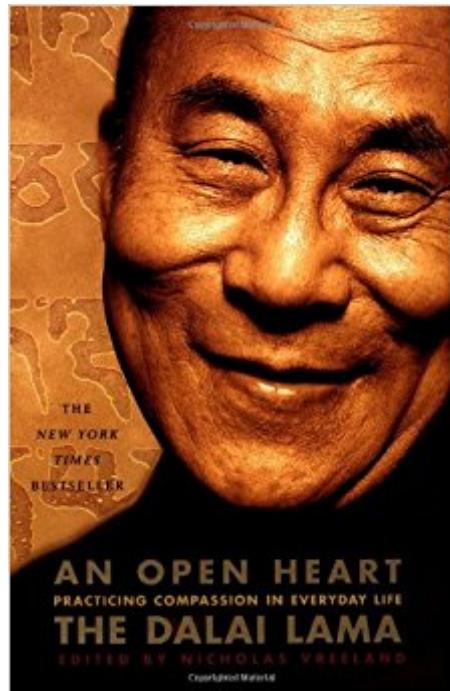


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An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion In Everyday Life



Synopsis

Compassion-sympathy for the suffering of others and the desire to free them from it-is wrestled with in all spiritual traditions. Yet how does one actually become a compassionate person? What are the mechanisms by which a selfish heart is transformed into a generous heart? In this acclaimed bestseller, His Holiness the Dalai Lama writes simply and powerfully about the everyday Buddhist practice of compassion, offering a clear, practical, inspiring introduction to the Buddhist path to enlightenment.

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Customer Reviews

This latest book by the Dalai Lama is a compilation of speeches he gave in NYC in the past. It lists the main traits one should practice to fulfill a healthy lifestyle: compassion, empathy, wisdom, and so on. If you have already read 'Ethics For The New Millenium' or 'The Art of Happiness' you will find that this book repeats much of the material in those books. The main difference I see in this edition is that some basic meditation techniques are covered. Overall, it is a book that reminds us of the most important qualities one should practice to create a centered life. I also recommend "Open Your Mind, Open Your Life: A Little Book of Eastern Wisdom" by Taro Gold which is filled with hundreds of thought-provoking and inspirational quotations.

In 1999, the Dalai Lama gave two teachings in New York City. The Dalai Lama gave the first teaching (which constitutes the Introduction to this book) in Central Park on August 15, 1999 to a

gathering of 200,000 people. He gave the second teaching as a series of lectures to an audience of 3,000 people in Manhattan's Beacon Theater. The individual lecture and the series of lectures each capture something essential about the Dalai Lama's teaching and his manner of presenting it. The Central Park lecture appears designed for a large, lay audience of diverse backgrounds and religious interests. It presupposes no particular knowledge of or interest in Buddhism. In the lecture, the Dalai Lama speaks simply and eloquently about the desire of all people to secure happiness. He talks about how this goal can be achieved, with time and effort, by understanding and curbing our desires for material things, by recognizing the essential equality of human nature and human drives everywhere, and by generating compassion. There is topical material included in this lecture on matters such as protecting the environment, the noise and bustle of New York City, and the sometimes drastic consequences of fanaticism and nationalism. The series of lectures, in contrast to the Central Park lecture, is specifically Buddhist in character. The Dalai Lama tells us that the lectures are based in large part on two Buddhist texts: the "Middle-Length States of Meditation", by an eight-century Indian writer, Kamalashila, and "The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas" by a fourteenth century Tibetan, Togmay Sangpo. In very short succinct chapters, the Dalai Lama's lectures explain the heart of Buddhist practice for a Western audience. They discuss the origin of suffering and unhappiness in our emotions, desires, and angers which color in turn the ways we perceive the world and make us unhappy. The Dalai Lama presents and discusses meditation and reflection as making a beginning toward breaking out of the unhappy character of impulsive, emotion-driven existence. By learning about ourselves, by trying to understand the "emptiness" of reality, and by generating compassion for others, we achieve equanimity and happiness for ourselves. It is the mark of the Dalai Lama's wisdom that he is able to explain deep and difficult teachings in a lucid, inspiring manner. The teachings themselves are difficult to grasp and difficult to implement. The Dalai Lama emphasizes that it will do little good simply to read a book and then forget about it. The teachings need to be thought about and put into practice. Each person must work from where he or she is and strive to make progress. Thus this book consists of a single lecture for those who may have little exposure to or interest in the Dalai Lama's teachings and a more detailed treatment for those with further background and interest. Either way, the book may light a spark in the receptive reader's heart.

An Open Heart is an interesting book and informative book. The Dalai Lama has a strong message for both Eastern and Western Civilizations. For the West he says, I think that anger and hatred actually cause more harm to us than to the person responsible for the problem. He tells us, in

essence, to give being victims to our anger and hate. This message is also being presented more and more frequently by American authors who have been trained in western psychology but have modified their training to incorporate more advanced spiritual concepts. See An Encounter With a Prophet by C. A. Lewis and There is a Spiritual Solution to every problem by Wayne W. Dyer. The Dalai Lama also has a strong message for the East. He provides a new interpretation of The Third Nobel Truth of Buddhism - Suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases. In the past this Truth, also contained in modified form within the Hindu religion, has caused many sincere followers of both religions to content themselves with poverty. He tells his Buddhist followers living in poverty, You yourselves must make effort; you must take initiative, with self-confidence, to bring about change. An Open Heart is definitely a worthwhile read.

Of the 8 books I've read by Ngawang Losang Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, I like this one best (though I haven't read the Practice book others have mentioned). This one includes comments on several Buddhist texts (as have some of his others). However, this one is a bit more practical than the others--it includes some guidance on the 4 Immeasurables practices (loving kindness, compassion, equanimity, and joy--especially in others' happiness), Bodhichitta (Buddha Mind or universal compassion), and Shamatha or Shine (Calm or Tranquil Abiding). The last is the basic form of Tibetan Buddhist (Vajrayana) meditation. It is an essential starting point towards enlightenment--included in virtually all schools of Buddhism from Theravada (SE Asia) to Dzogchen and Mahamudra. All these teachings are presented in His Holiness' gentle, compassionate style, reflecting his own nature. I had the great fortune to meet him for a brief moment in Washington, DC and, IMHO, he is the most present and sincere and real person I've met. The value of his work (s) IMHO is more a reflection of what he is than who he is or what he says or writes.

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