



Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond: A Meditator's Handbook

Ajahn Brahm, Jack Kornfield (Foreword)

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Meditation: it's not just a way to relax, or to deal with life's problems. Done correctly, it can be a way to radically encounter bliss and to begin - and sustain - real transformation in ourselves.

In *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, self-described meditation junkie Ajahn Brahm shares his knowledge and experience of the jhanas - a core part of the Buddha's original meditation teaching. Never before has this material been approached in such an empowering way, by a teacher of such authority and popularity.

Full of surprises, delightfully goofy humor, and entertaining stories that inspire, instruct, and illuminate, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond* will encourage those new to meditation, and give a shot in the arm to more experienced practitioners as well.

Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond: A Meditator's Handbook Details

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From Reader Review Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond: A Meditator's Handbook for online ebook

Carson Lybbert says

An excellent introduction to the purpose behind mindfulness meditation, "Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond: A Meditator's Handbook" is very well written. I loved this book so much! I recommend this book to anyone and everyone who would like to learn more about meditation and how it can improve your well being!

Yogesh says

Awesomeness!!! A must for every Meditator on this Planet!

Piece by piece taking you by your hand Ajahn Brahm leads us into Jhanas and Insight which takes us towards powerful mindstates and Happiness is the end result! Bliss upon Bliss upon Bliss!!!

Pamodha Wasala says

The content of this book was what made me spend more time with meditation. The main subject of the book is how basic mindfulness of breathing meditation can be used to reach deep states in meditation such as the various Jhanas/Dhyanas. Even though I was raised as a Buddhist, only after coming across the content via excerpts of this text which made me do daily meditation practice. Because how much you are willing to spend time with depends on how well you value it and Ajahn Brahm has elucidated how vital meditation is within Buddhism.

In addition to the main content on Anapanasati and Jhanas, Ajahn Brahm also explains about his unique method of Loving-Kindness meditation (Metta Bhavana), instructions on walking meditation and a brief overview of insight meditation.

I have bought this book several times and have sent those copies to my close friends.

Eric says

There are a couple of useful insights in meditation to be found here. But only in the context of a pretty dogmatic and traditional expose full of religious buddhist technicalities about 'jhana', with all its fixed steps, stages and obstructions. Not a book for the non-believer.

Michael Ho?da (Holda) says

Four types of Bliss to enlightenment.

To do no evil; To cultivate good; To purify one's mind: This is the teaching of the Buddhas.

Wolfgang Nitzsche says

Ich habe eine Menge Meditationsbücher gelesen, in der Regel beschreiben diese aber nur Entspannungstechniken, vage Anleitungen zu Stille und innerer Ruhe. Anders dieses Buch, es beschreibt sehr detailliert einen Stufenweg der Meditation. Jede Stufe ist exakt beschrieben und abgrenzbar. Alle notwendigen Informationen und Voraussetzungen werden genau beschrieben, alle möglichen Hindernisse erwähnt und Hilfen zur Bewältigung gegeben. Man merkt Ajahn Brahm's Buch an jeder Stelle an, dass dies nicht nur theoretische Anweisungen sind, nach dem Motto "so müsste es funktionieren", nein Ajahn Brahm hat diese Schritte selbst getan und kann aus einem Fundus reichhaltiger Erfahrung schreiben.

Wie weit eine berufstätige Person mit Familie dabei voran kommen kann, ist eine andere Sache. Es ist aber mit Sicherheit eines der wenigen Bücher die verlässlich, detailliert, auf eigene Erfahrung beruhend bis in die höchsten Stufen der Meditation führen kann. Eine absolute Empfehlung!

Kathy Ridges says

This book is a masterpiece of Buddhist meditation guidelines. It cannot be improved. It takes you through all the stages and gives helpful examples, too.

'When mindfulness rests comfortably on the breath without any interruption, and the sensation of breath becomes calmer and calmer, then happiness and joy will always arise.' (p88) This book is a must for any serious mediator.

Ulf Wolf says

Over the years as a practicing Buddhist I have read my share of books and manuals on meditation, especially those dealing with or touching upon *ñ?p?nasati* and *Jh?na*. Initially I read these many books to learn from experienced meditators what to do and then, after I had accumulated quite a store of them, I re-read them to reconcile their different and sometimes conflicting messages.

Is *Jh?na* attainable these days, in this noisy, me-me-me world of ours? Some books hold that this is no longer possible (maybe one in a million, if that, can truly attain these deep absorptions, they say); other books skirt the issue altogether; while Ajahn Brahm courageously holds that: "Yes, it is possible." And not only possible, but attainable by anyone, given the right intention, a virtuous life, and perseverance.

This book is a meditation manual, and now, looking over my book shelf of its many siblings and cousins, I clearly see that if I could only bring one of them with me to that clichéd desert island, this would be the one.

Ajahn Brahm is an intelligent man, and he reasons very clearly. His analysis of the applicable Pali Canon references and his reconciliation of apparently conflicting passages deserve applause.

His approach to *Sam?dhi* and *Jh?na* is logical and practical, and—above all—both understandable and

doable. Setting out from the basics of meditation, navigating through the handling of hindrances, then treating mindfulness and the beautiful breath with both clarity and contagious enthusiasm, he leads you all the way from your initial sitting down and letting go of past and future, to—down the path a ways—enlightenment and Nibb?na.

This is a book (a manual, a friend) that invites and encourages practice, and as such (despite Jack Kornfield's somewhat guarded introduction and recommendation) is what, in my view, the world desperately needs today.

In two words: Highly Recommended.

Linda Vituma says

N?ksies vien uztic?ties Ajahn Brahm un cer?t, ka vi?a rakst?tais tieš?m reiz noder?s. K? karte, k? atg?din?jums, lai pal?koties uz jau noietu ce?u, kuram nav gala, kuram nav rezult?ta, kuru gr?ti v?rdos aprakst?t. Karte budisma m?c?b?.

John Wright says

An instruction book. It is suggested that one not move to the next section until one is able to meditate at the level described in the section you are reading. Three years, and less than a quarter through. Maybe will not get to the end in this lifetime.....

Athanasius says

A 'lion of the dhamma', Ajahn Brahm stands at the vanguard of authentic Buddhist practitioners, and is spreading the truth of meditation (as taught by the Buddha) and the place of samadhi (jhana) in the noble eightfold path.

With so many lay-practitioners writing books about the subject when they themselves are amateurs at best, it is a true boon to the serious buddhist to have an 'instruction manual' on meditation written by a meditation master.

In a time rife with so much false dhamma and obfuscation, Ajahn Brahm is a beacon of light. I cannot recommend this (or his other books) highly enough.

Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu!

Tisaranavamsa says

A very articulate user's manual for understanding aspect of concentration (samadhi) in Buddhism.

A must read.

Bobby says

I think many would disagree with Brahm's position that accessing jhana is the only path to liberation (the allowance of Kornfield's caveat in the introduction though seem to perhaps indicate that Brahm is willing to make some kind of concession on this point) - but regardless, this book contains some of the most detailed - and yet accessible - text/chapters concerning meditative states preceding first jhana - including - simply put - how to effectively deal with nimittas when they start to arise as meditative states deepen. Recommended - though I would pair this book with others to offer a more balanced view - try Shaila Catherine's Focused and Fearless - Catherine offers an excellent guide to cultivating the jhana factors.

Natalie says

This book is a trip. It argues that jhana is the ONLY path to nibbana--a provocative thesis to say the least. The other fun part about this book is the use of Western science to legitimate/"prove" Buddhist cosmology (i.e., karma, rebirth, deva realms, etc.), which is uber-juicy considering that Brahmavamso was a theoretical physicist before he ordained.

From a less academic standpoint, this book is a great introduction to the path set out in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga--which can be, to say the least, a little challenging to read. He's fun to read, though perhaps a little fundamentalist, no?

Wt says

In this book, Ajahn Brahm reveals a blissful path to Nibbana through the development of the jhanas. The jhanas are seldom taught nowadays, and even more seldom taught is the progression from jhana to the "attainment of extinction" (nirodha-sam?patti) or "cessation of apperception and feeling" (saññ?vedayitanirodha) which is Nibbana. Using language and instructions that are down-to-earth, accessible and even fun, Ajahn Brahm teaches how we can progressively develop the 4 fine-material jhanas and the 4 formless jhanas up to the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, and then how to go beyond even this state to the cessation of apperception and feeling (saññ?vedayitanirodha) itself. This entire process from jhana to nirodha-sam?patti/saññ?vedayitanirodha is often described in the sutta pitaka, sometimes referred to by the name "nine successive stages" (nava anupubbavih?r?), and it leads to either the fruition of non-returnership or the fruition of arahantship. To see this magnificent and profound path revealed in all its radiance, and revealed to be attainable, virtually does away with speech and commentary for quite a while.

Ajahn Brahm plays up the blissful aspect of this path through the jhanas, citing many instances in the sutta pitaka where the Buddha explicitly stresses and praises the pleasant and happy nature of jhanas and their cultivation. This makes it seem as if the Buddha really valued jhana and the bliss of jhana above all else. However, these citations should ideally be placed in their proper context - in these suttas, the Buddha was directly addressing Jain ascetics and ascetism which he stresses is painful, unnecessary and unprofitable. Even so, that message - that there exists a blissful path to enlightenment through the jhanas - is equally important for our times, when science, materialism, skepticism and the guilt complex has made us all a little

wary and pessimistic of spiritual bliss, fearful and forgetful of spiritual happiness.

Ajahn Brahm interprets and presents the Anapanasati Sutta in a way that will be new and challenging for many people who are used to other interpretations of the sutta like Buddhadasa Bhikku's. Where Buddhadasa Bhikku's interpretation of the Anapanasati Sutta reveals the 16 steps of Anapanasati as a clear, logical and progressive vipassana practice on the 4 satipathanas that culminates in nirodha-upassana (contemplation on extinction), Ajahn Brahm's interpretation reveals the 16 steps of Anapanasati as a progressive development of the jhanas all the way to nirodha-sam?pati (attainment of extinction). Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's application of Anapanasati relies more on the deliverance of wisdom (pañña-vimmutti). Ajahn Brahm's application of Anapanasati relies more on the deliverance of mind (ceto-vimmutti). Both seem capable of delivering the supramundane fruits if practiced correctly.

If Ajahn Brahm had just taught the path to deliverance through the jhanas, I would have given this book 5 stars and the review ends here. Unfortunately, Ajahn Brahm felt so strongly that enlightenment - including the first two stages of enlightenment - could only happen with and through the jhanas that he categorically denied any validity to other paths that do not rely on jhana. His attachment to his view is SO strong, it leads him to virtually overlook suttas, including some which he himself cited, which can be found on reading to directly attest to the existence of the path of pañña-vimmutti conferring deliverance through wisdom alone, WITHOUT jhana. The ignoring of non-jhanic paths results in some gross inconsistencies in his presentation of enlightenment (esp. the first stage of stream-entry and the Noble Eightfold Path) that contradict scriptural evidence as well as logic.

For example, on pg. 223, Ajahn Brahm mentions the Mah?vedalla Sutta's discussion of "right view", which he considers "another saying for the attainment of stream entry," which he in turn equates with jhana. Actually, the relevant passage of the sutta states : "Friend, right view is assisted by five factors when it has deliverance of mind for its fruit and benefit, when it has deliverance of wisdom for its fruit and benefit..." This is basically saying that right view is supported by five factors when right view is directed towards i) deliverance of mind that confers the fruit of liberation through the jhanas, ii) deliverance of wisdom that confers the fruit of liberation through insight. This passage can just as equally be interpreted as an acknowledgement that jhana mastery is not the only path to deliverance, and that there can also be a path of (dry) insight.

Ajahn Brahm then goes on to equate "samatha", one of the five conditions listed as supporting the two triggers to right view, as "jhana". He tops it off by saying "The second of Ven. S?riputta's triggers for stream winning [he is referring to yoniso manasikara or wise reflection, the 2nd trigger for Right View which he conflates with Stream-Entry]...comprises the three supporting conditions of virtue, jhana and insight, all rolled together as yoniso manasik?ra." So, he is basically saying that jhana = stream-entry (the fruit), = right view (the initial path factor), = samatha or serenity (the condition that supports the second trigger for the first path factor to arise), = samadhi or concentration (second factor of 3-fold training often equated with the Noble 8-fold path), = the entire path ("virtue(sila), jhana(samadhi), insight(panna) all rolled together as one"), = yoniso manasikara or wise consideration (the 2nd trigger of the 1st path factor, but which in Ajahn Brahm's logic becomes "virtue, jhana and insight all rolled together as one"). Too much SIMPLIFICATION, CONFLATION and "rolling together as one" going on here, don't you think?

Here's a refutation: 1) Granted that the Path, with Right View as its first factor, arises upon Stream-Entry. This does not mean that the Path, Right View, or Stream-Entry are automatically equivalent or REDUCIBLE to Jhana. 2) Samatha is rightly translated as "tranquility", which does not have to equate with or AMOUNT to jhana or absorption. 3) Samadhi or concentration is of 3 kinds - momentary concentration, access concentration and absorption concentration, and only absorption concentration amounts to jhana, so samadhi

is not necessarily jhana. 4) The path (consisting of sila/virtue, samadhi/concentration and panna/insight) does not have to include jhana, because samadhi can refer to momentary or access concentration, which is enough basis for developing insight. Even if samadhi refers to jhana, one cannot therefore say that the path IS jhana, because there are factors other than samadhi involved. 5) Wise attention, yoniso manasikara, does not have to DEPEND on jhana, only on an adequate amount of tranquility, and it can operate PRIOR to stream-entry and PRIOR to the Path, because it is only a SUPPORTIVE CONDITION for right view. I am sorry to say this, but this is worst case of bad translation, blatant conflation and loose juggling of Pali terms and logic that I have ever come across, and it should not have happened. With such over-simplification, we really have to wonder: Is this what can happen when the one-pointedness of jhana is not matched by the power of dissection conferred by Insight??!

One more example. On pg. 225, Ajahn Brahm grudgingly turns to consider the question of "stream winning without Jhanna?" He says: "I cannot see a possibility of penetrating to the full meaning of anatta, dukkha and anicca without the radical data gained in a jhana experience. Yet, there are some stories in the Tipitaka that suggest it might be possible." He gives "the most compelling passage" which concerns the 31 murderers sent by Devadatta to kill the Buddha. Ajahn Brahm's blind-spot becomes very visible to readers here. There are INNUMERABLE passages in the Sutta Pitaka that attests to stream-entry without jhana. For example, the story of Susima in the Samyutta Nikaya (S II, 127) recounts the declaration of final liberation by a number of bhikkus in the presence of the Buddha at Rajagaha. Upon being queried later by Susima about their jhanic attainments, these same bhikkus told him that they are "liberated through wisdom alone". Susima then goes and checks with the Buddha about how this can be, and the Buddha there and then leads him through a series of questions and answers that shows Susima using his (Susima's) own example and understanding how one becomes liberated through wisdom alone, without jhanic attainments.

Really, how much clearer can it get that "liberation by wisdom alone" is not only possible, it has been DONE, verified as DONE, checked and double-checked, stamped and double-stamped, with the Buddha's own stamp of approval itself? Rather than accept the liberating power of insight, Ajahn Brahm chooses to attribute stream-entry without jhana to the power of FAITH alone (pg 226). Faith? When the Buddha has repeatedly taught people not to rely on faith and belief, but to rely on one's own discrimination, experience and insight? To quote Dr. Rahula in "What the Buddha Taught": "Buddhism is always a question of knowing and seeing, and not that of believing. The teaching of the Buddha is qualified as Ehi-Passiko, inviting you to come and see, but not to come and believe." Without insight, surely faith can never confer the fruit of liberation, however strong it is. So, WHY should a learned member of the Sangha deduce that it was faith and not dry insight that delivered the fruit?

Ajahn Brahm related an incident where Ajahn Chah asks him "WHY?" after he has just come out of a beautiful meditation, and he was stumped for an answer. He says "I don't know". Ajahn Chah then tells him, "If anyone asks you 'Why?', the answer is "There is nothing." He then asks him if he understands and Ajahn Brahm says "Yes". But Ajahn Chah corrects him, saying "No you don't." Ajahn Brahm says that this episode with Ajahn Chah "summed up what this chapter on deep insight is all about." Perhaps, but could Ajahn Chah also be pointing to something else that he totally missed? Was Ajahn Chah pointing to the nothingness (cessation) obtained through insight, was he pointing to the nothingness that the jhanas must ultimately culminate in, was he pointing also to the nothingness of jhana? Was he telling Ajahn Brahm not to cling to Jhana, not to make a big deal out of jhana, because it is nothing? (This BTW is the same pointing out a "dry vipassana" instructor would give to a student who starts to get light, rapture, happiness and etc - to disregard them because they are nothing but subtle defilements of the mind). If so, Ajahn Brahm never understood his master fully. Instead, he assumes that he does, and that it is us, the reader, who doesn't understand (see pg. 209). Make no mistake, much of what Ajahn Brahm says, including about the "dumping down" of Nibhaana, is very true and very important. This book is brave in its critique and vision, but the author becomes a little

rash in his assertions, and his dogmatic adherence to his particular view and experience shows a lack of balance and impartiality - shows an imperfection of wisdom therefore. Could this be due to a failure to fully grasp that "Why?" directive given by Ajahn Chah many years ago?

Reflect on this: Just because Ajahn Brahm did not or could not attain stream-entry through dry insight, does it mean that nobody attained or can attain stream-entry through dry insight? Does he know the accumulated insight and virtues of everyone else? How does he know HOW MUCH insight it takes for another person to become enlightened? Some people just hear the dhamma and they SEE it and they get enlightened. Some people have to suffer greatly in life and then they see the dhamma and get enlightened. Some people have to practice vipassana before they see the dhamma. Some people have to develop jhana and then do vipassana, then they see the dhamma. Some people do vipassana first, they see the dhamma, and that seeing gives them the purity and focus of mind to develop the jhanas successfully. The fact is, there are different kinds of people with different capabilities of insight and with different potentials for liberation in the world. The Buddha taught 40 kinds of meditation with innumerable possibilities for skillful combination and application because he recognized the different propensities, potentialities and needs of different people. The "one path" does not mean that there is only one path (satipathana or jhana), it means the path that leads to one goal of Nibhaana. So there are several "one paths" in the Dispensation of the Buddha, all leading to Nibhaana." Unfortunately, Ajahn Brahm does not think this way, because he doesn't know and doesn't use this kind of wise reflection (yoniso manasikara) that operates independently of jhana, and which leads to right view.

For those still confused over jhana and dry insight, let me just point out that without the power of jhanic absorption (up to the 4th jhana at the very least) to drive it, Anapanasati or any Satipathana method might (only) reach up to the first two levels of enlightenment - stream-entry or once-returner. Without crowning insight to finish it, the development of jhanas might (only) lead to rebirth in the pure abodes in which one can complete the practice to gain liberation. But if one develops the jhanas and then undertakes dhamma-upassana (investigation of dhamma), this can lead to both cetto-vimutti and pañña-vimutti, delivering the final two supramundane fruits - non-returner or arahantship, with arahantship being full enlightenment and final liberation in this very life. Don't you agree, that ANY one of these fruits are supremely rewarding to get, coming as it does with the iron-clad guarantee of final liberation? Why should those who get a fruit insist "my apple is best, only apples can satiate all hunger, and you can only get an apple by picking it up with your left hand," when there are apples, pears, melons and grapes on the table ready for the eating, and just as many ways to get them as there are hands, mouths and people?

I guess this book is an example of the jhanas' great ability to expand horizons of understanding, even as they harbor a great ability to create blind-spots. OVER-reliance on jhana is not a good thing, if it can create such subtle attachment to views and blind-spots in understanding. I deduce: Jhana by itself really does not guarantee wisdom! So, if your question is "WHY should I read this book, can it lead me to final liberation?" My answer is: "THERE IS NOTHING you can achieve WITHOUT INSIGHT!!!"
