



Meditations of a Buddhist Skeptic: A Manifesto for the Mind Sciences and Contemplative Practice

By B. Alan Wallace

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Meditations of a Buddhist Skeptic: A Manifesto for the Mind Sciences and Contemplative Practice By B. Alan Wallace

A radical approach to studying the mind.

Renowned Buddhist philosopher B. Alan Wallace reasserts the power of shamatha and vipashyana, traditional Buddhist meditations, to clarify the mind's role in the natural world. Raising profound questions about human nature, free will, and experience versus dogma, Wallace challenges the claim that consciousness is nothing more than an emergent property of the brain with little relation to universal events. Rather, he maintains that the observer is essential to measuring quantum systems and that mental phenomena (however conceived) influence brain function and behavior.

Wallace embarks on a two-part mission: to restore human nature and to transcend it. He begins by explaining the value of skepticism in Buddhism and science and the difficulty of merging their experiential methods of inquiry. Yet Wallace also proves that Buddhist views on human nature and the possibility of free will liberate us from the metaphysical constraints of scientific materialism. He then explores the radical empiricism inspired by William James and applies it to Indian Buddhist philosophy's four schools and the Great Perfection school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Since Buddhism begins with the assertion that ignorance lies at the root of all suffering and that the path to freedom is reached through knowledge, Buddhist practice can be viewed as a progression from agnosticism (not knowing) to gnosticism (knowing), acquired through the maintenance of exceptional mental health, mindfulness, and introspection. Wallace discusses these topics in detail, identifying similarities and differences between scientific and Buddhist understanding, and he concludes with an explanation of shamatha and vipashyana and their potential for realizing the full nature, origins, and potential of consciousness.

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Editorial Review

Review

The suggestion brought to the fore by Flanagan and Wallace-that Buddhism may be a source of insight in these areas-is a welcome and tantalizing one.

(Daniel Stoljar *Nature*)

This book is a stirring attack on the hubris and blind spots of the scientific establishment, combined with an engaging presentation of Buddhist wisdom as the antidote.

(Joseph S. O'Leary *Japan Times*)

Review

B. Alan Wallace displays courage in raising central Buddhist themes such as past-life recall, extrasensory perception, other paranormal abilities, and the realization of emptiness and buddha nature. In his description of the tenets and practices of Buddhism, Wallace is a true master. His range and depth of knowledge is astounding and his linking of this knowledge to the practices and views of science is nearly unique.

(Arthur Zajonc, professor of physics, Amherst College, and author of *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind*)

About the Author

B. Alan Wallace spent fourteen years as a Buddhist monk, ordained by H. H. the Dalai Lama. He then earned his undergraduate degree, summa cum laude, in physics and the philosophy of science at Amherst College, and his doctorate in religious studies from Stanford University. His Columbia University Press books are *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism, and Christianity*; *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness*; *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge*; and *Buddhism and Science: Breaking New Ground*. A prolific writer and translator of numerous Tibetan Buddhist texts, he is the founder and president of the Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies (<http://www.sbinstitute.com>).

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