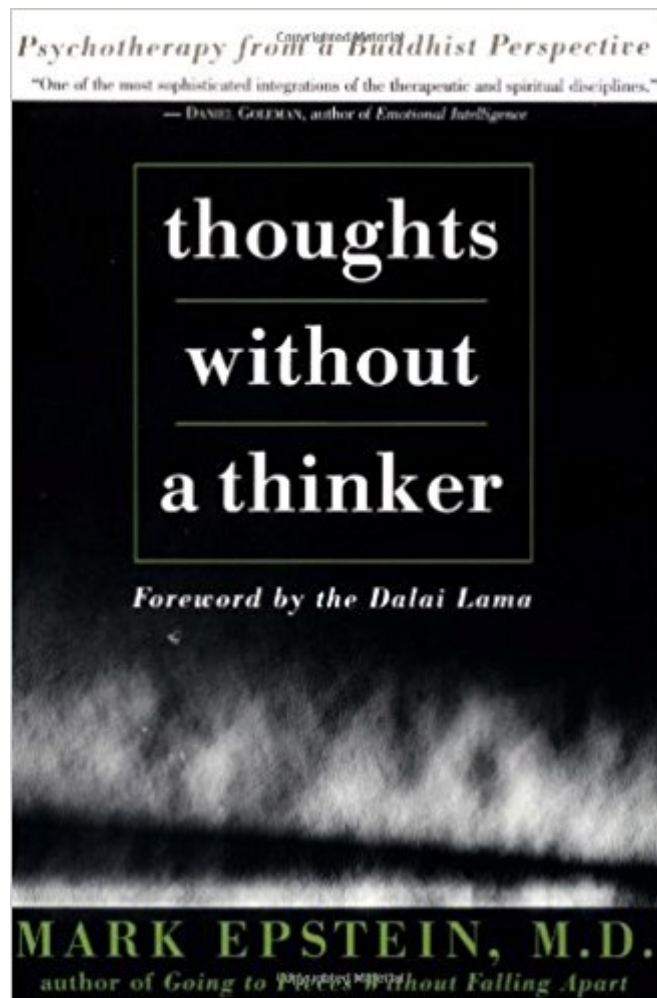




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# Thoughts Without A Thinker: Psychotherapy From A Buddhist Perspective



## Synopsis

Traditional distinctions between matters of the mind and matters of the spirit are increasingly being questioned, and people are searching for alternate perspectives on these issues. *Thoughts Without a Thinker* is a major contribution to today's exploding discussion of how Eastern spirituality can enhance Western psychology. In it, Mark Epstein argues that the contemplative traditions of the East can be extremely beneficial to patients, not just in helping them recognize their problems, but by giving them the strength to heal. Clearly written and very accessible, this enlightening guide explains the unique psychological contributions of the teachings of Buddhism, describes the path of meditation in contemporary psychological language, and lays out the possibility of a meditation-inspired psychotherapy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Drawing upon his own experience as therapist, meditator and patient, Mark Epstein, a New York-based psychiatrist trained in classical Freudian methods, attempts to integrate Western psychotherapy and the teachings of Buddhism. Repressed memories, painful emotions, narcissism and destructive energies can all be uprooted through Buddha's teaching on suffering, delusion, wisdom and non-attachment. Epstein argues that in recognizing his or her self-created mental suffering, a patient can overcome neurotic behaviors and even overcome a deeply ingrained negative sense of self. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Epstein, a New York City psychiatrist trained in classical Freudian methods, has studied Buddhist meditation in India and Southeast Asia. In a highly personal, thoughtful, illuminating synthesis, he draws on his own experience as therapist, meditator and patient in an unusual attempt to integrate Western psychotherapy and Buddha's teachings on suffering, delusion, wisdom and nonattachment. According to Epstein, Buddhist meditative practices can help people release repressed memories, work through painful emotions, uproot narcissism and redirect destructive energies. By recognizing his or her self-created mental suffering, the patient is able to overcome neurotic behavior patterns and may ultimately shed a deeply ingrained negative sense of self. Patients, psychologists and meditators willing to explore the arduous path outlined here will find much spiritual nourishment. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The complex ideas to which I'm referring are ] the roadblocks the Western mind faces in comprehending Eastern philosophy. As usual, Epstein elucidates these concepts with experiences drawn from his own life and work as a psychologist. There is nothing facile about the text, and I admit there are many times when I flip back and go over a passage a second time, but I always come away comforted from reading a book by Mark Epstein. We all suffer from the effects of random chatter in our heads. Epstein shines a light on some of the likely sources of that chatter and helps us to understand that thoughts are not the enemy. It is only our reaction to those thoughts that create the problems from which we all suffer. Highly recommended.

So I ordered this book for a class on Buddhism I took just to get my general education requirements out of the way and honestly it's the best and worse class I've ever done. This book and the class that taught it up at app state literally changed my life I went from a chemistry major with a minor in biology to a double major between chemistry and religion and I can blame it all on this book. So I got the paperback edition and I still keep it in my bedside drawer at home and I still read it from time to time. But this book makes you think about religion in a new way, it tries and makes the reader open up there perspective about how they approach religion and religious thought. As a atheist I have always been a little skeptical about religions but this book went on not to change my mind about my lack of faith but on how I should look at people who do have religions and how there thinking is going to be different then my own because of the simple reason that they have faith. I'm telling you this is a great book, I absolutely love it and its one of the few books I can stand to reread. If you are curious about Buddhist thought, religious thought, or even

religion in general this is defiantly the book you should read.

Epstein, who was exploring Buddhism and studying psychotherapy at the same time, is an ideal person to relate the two. His book is both scholarly and personal as he presents his own struggle to reconcile them. Stating that the Buddha may have been the original psychoanalyst, Part I of the book, "The Buddha's Psychology of Mind," introduces the Buddha's psychological teachings in the language of Western psychodynamics. To begin with, Freud and the Buddha agreed that we can't "find our enlightened minds while continuing to be estranged from our neurotic ones." We must have the courage to experience our suffering. The first truth of the Buddha is (in Epstein's words) "the inevitability of humiliation." Doubts about the self are inevitable. The maturational process is to go into the doubt rather than away from it. Finally, the Buddha had a "vision of a psyche freed from narcissism." Epstein weaves stories of himself and his patients throughout this section. In part II, "Meditation," he explains, in psychodynamic terms, the basic Buddhist strategy of bare attention, showing the relevance these techniques still have for us. "It is the fundamental tenet of Buddhist psychology that this kind of attention is, in itself, healing." The challenge of this method is clear in this sentence: "What the meditator must keep confronting is her own capacity for conceit or pride, her own instinctive thirst for certainty, her own ability to co-opt the meditative process for narcissistic ends. Meditation is a means of indefatigably exposing this narcissism." This section is wonderfully descriptive of the experience of meditation. Part III, "Therapy," uses Freud's treatise on the practice of psychotherapy to consider how to integrate the Buddha's teachings into that practice. What Epstein discovered is that the practice of Buddhist meditation helps develop the presence and the nonjudgmental attention that are crucial for a therapist. This is an exceptional book.

I have recommended this book to therapist colleagues, who have also found it interesting and helpful. It focuses on integrating thinking from psychoanalytic thought and Buddhist psychology. Epstein uses many case examples to illustrate his points. I have read this book multiple times over the past several years. I have the book in print and in CD narrated by the author.

This book can be tough to read in spots if you don't have a basic grasp of psychology and know some of the big names in psychology and what their theories were, but that doesn't take away from the insight and inspiration that this book delivers. I'm an engineer by degree and career path. I know very little about Freud, Winnicott and others, but the way the Buddhist principles were related to all of the scientific theories in the book drove me to do some low level wikipedia research to expand my

understanding of what the book talks about. It unlocked a deeper level of understanding to this material. I am analytical and mathematical by nature, but my spiritual side has always longed to come out. This book provides another bridge in between these two seemingly opposite things and shows how they can work together to achieve a better understanding of my place in the world.

Not for your average reader, as it seems quite technical and based more for an actual therapist to read. It took me about 6 months to read it, as it works well to put you to sleep and I could only do a few pages at a time!

In "Thoughts Without a Thinker", Epstein explains the ailments of mind that humans face, with narcissism at the core. He tells many stories of his experiences in therapy and in meditation in order to show how the two can potentate each other in healing the mind. I highly recommend this book for people who are interested in the true meaning of Buddhism or anyone who wants to know what is meant in the Buddhist sense of the alleviation of suffering.

Inspiring and encouraging from a psychoanalytic perspective, that we, as psychoanalysts can successfully incorporate the key concepts of mindfulness into our regular (therapy) practice. Highly recommend especially for fellow practitioners. L. Ziegler, MA, LPC

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