



Modern Mindfulness: How to Be More Relaxed, Focused, and Kind While Living in a Fast, Digital, Always-On World

Rohan Gunatillake

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In *Modern Mindfulness*, Rohan Gunatillake argues that to lead more mindful, calm and happy lives, switching off is the last thing we need to do. Instead he gives readers ideas, principles, and techniques to bring awareness, composure, and kindness whatever they are doing. Filled with over sixty practical exercises, the author's mobile mindfulness approach gives the benefits of meditation to even the busiest of lives.

Ideas from *Modern Mindfulness*:

- Learn to fade out instead just falling asleep
- Learn to watch TV mindfully (yes, it's possible!)
- Make mobility part of mindfulness (we're always on the move!)
- Use technology for good instead of evil (no need to do a digital detox).
- Learn to "whack-a-thought" and stay centered.

Modern Mindfulness: How to Be More Relaxed, Focused, and Kind While Living in a Fast, Digital, Always-On World Details

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Author : Rohan Gunatillake

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From Reader Review Modern Mindfulness: How to Be More Relaxed, Focused, and Kind While Living in a Fast, Digital, Always-On World for online ebook

Jason Scott says

Audiobook. Written by the guy who created the Buddhify app (that I used to use before I switched to Insight Timer).

He has an interesting take on mindfulness and bringing it into the modern world. The exercises he lays out in the book are very different from what you see in other mindfulness books, in that he's looking for ways to tie mindfulness to the modern world we live in. Meditation is something you can do while walking, commuting or sitting on your computer. He also has a good suggestion for creating triggers that remind you to practice mindfulness, eg: if someone is wearing red then practice lovingkindness towards them. When you see someone happy let their happiness infuse you.

He says that the formal practice of sitting in stillness should be secondary to the mobile exercises because the point is to practice. Formal practice is still important, but it is more important to have any practice.

The six core techniques are relaxation, focus, being present, coping, connection and going deeper and for each core technique he gives 10 exercises that are quite different than what you'd see in other books.

There's some great points like taking note of the emotion you are feeling when you pick up your phone or you go on social media (eg: boredom, loneliness) and then sit with that emotion instead of using your device.

He also makes an important point that for a lot of modern meditators their introduction to meditation is through an app on their phone and they are missing out on the benefits from the traditional forms of meditation that involve a group and a mentor.

He had a powerful story from his own life, where he talked about when he got pinned to a wall by a rolling car and had to wait a long time for help to find him, and how he went into his body and emptied his mind.

It's narrated by the author and he has an excellent voice for this kind of book. Because it was an audiobook, the format didn't work great for taking note of the exercises he was suggesting. It's geared towards a beginner, but it is still refreshing because it has a different point of view than traditional meditation. Also, it is focused on urban commuters with office jobs.

Stephany says

I really downloaded this on a whim. And I'm glad I did. I've been trying to get more centered and be more mindful and make time for being centered and zen, so this seemed like a good download. I really loved the layout of the book, the tips and hints to be more mindful when surrounded by technology, and the practice meditations. I took a lot of notes during this read to refer back to. I'd highly recommend this for anyone wishing to find a moment of peace, clarity and how to be kind to others and yourself.

Angelynn says

This book took me by surprise—and in a good way! I began this book under the impression that the author would talk about how “too involved” we are with our electronics, and that in order to be mindful in a modern-day world, we have to have periods in which we retreat from our electronics. I was totally wrong. This book took an unexpected turn for the better; it basically said that in this day and age, we must embrace and use technology to help us be mindful, as well as eliminate the division between “digital life” and “real life” and just see life as...life. What I absolutely loved about this book was how it not only emphasizes the importance of “formal practice” (i.e., sitting alone in a room with your eyes closed, focusing on your breathing), but also introduced me to the idea of “mobile practice”. With about 60 practices discussed in this text, I was able to learn how to oftenly do mindfulness practices on my walk to/from work, sitting in my office, sitting on my couch in front of the TV, seeing random people in public, being outside admiring nature, and in many other situations. In addition to doing my everyday “formal practice”, I plan to use some mobile practice exercises to increase the amount of time I am mindful throughout the day, and the suggesed meditation practices he introduced were very helpful. I will admit that while reading some of the practices, I knew right away that I could not see myself doing them, but nevertheless, I plan use and/or tweak some of the exercises to best suit my own life.

In addition to this book being helpful in everyday practice, I enjoyed reading some brief history of how mindfulness and meditation came to play in the Western world from the Asian countries. It made me realize that mindful is ever changing and it always has been.

Reading this book has got me even *more* interested in mindfulness and meditation, so much that I hope one day to attend a retreat or program so I can immerse myself more. Overall it was a great read, and I recommend to people interested in being mindful in this day and age!

Frieda says

The author shows how you can incorporate more awareness in your everyday dealings just by focusing the brain more on your surroundings rather than constantly allowing your mind to drift to all sorts of thoughts. Rather than setting aside time to meditate in the traditional fashion, he teaches you to meditate anywhere - on the subway commute to work, in the shop while on line, etc.

It's a good read for anyone who feels like their mind is always buzzing and wants to learn how to calm it down.

Erica says

My face as I listened to this book:

It was the word "Modern" in the title that grabbed me. I wondered what new mindfulness practices were being explored in our fancy digital age.

The answer: None that you'll find here.

I was surprised when the author stated, late in the book, that he was born in 1980. That makes him 38 this year. I would have pegged him as being at least ten years younger because he has a noticeable gap in his knowledge base and yet he's published this book regarding said knowledge base which is what made me think he was young, a rookie making a common mistake formed in youthful exuberance.

And, yes, 38 is still young but it's also old enough to know better than to say things like, "I am a long-time student of mindfulness," because, dude, no, you're not. Even if you've been studying mindfulness since birth, which I highly doubt as evidenced by so much missing information, 38 years is not a long time to be a student of mindfulness because everyone is always going to be a student of mindfulness. There are no masters, you can't graduate this course. Everyone doing it is always learning, the amount of time you've put in is meaningless.

In truth, this book wasn't written as a guide to be more relaxed, focused, and kind, it's the backstory to the mindfulness apps the author has created. Understanding that explains why this comes across as information being relayed by someone who just recently learned the information and now feels he can teach it like a pro. It also feels like a report that was written via a few days of internet research that was used to pad one specific, narrow area of life experience.

I was put off from the outset when he defined mindfulness and meditation for his reader, saying they're historically different but the words are now interchangeable and he will use them as such.

Just to be clear, I am not a student of mindfulness and I suuuuck at meditation. I am irreligious and have zero spirituality. Even so, I've been introduced and re-introduced to these concepts throughout my life and I think anyone with even a passing familiarity with these ideas understands that meditation is an exercise and mindfulness is a result. I think people also generally understand that there are many ways to achieve mindfulness and there are many results to meditation and that the two are not the same thing, they are only related. They are not interchangeable and to state that they are comes across as lazy.

Also, please remember: mindfulness is the upgrade term for "intentional awareness" which was an upgrade term for something else and so on. It's not a new concept and it didn't stem from Buddhism or any other religion that advocates meditation and a connection to everything in the world. Healers and philosophers and monks and midwives and wise women from many countries throughout history have talked about creating space to let your mind wander, to notice things around you, to study things that can't be seen or felt.

Meditation shows up throughout the ages in a variety of ways, from sitting alone in nature in the lotus position to walking alone across the moors to complex rituals regarding food preparation to seeing shapes in clouds with friends. The one commonality, however, is that meditation and higher awareness is often naturally practiced among children but is a luxury only adults with leisure time can perform.

I think this book is supposed to speak to the adults who feel they don't have leisure time because they're overworked and overstressed but it ignores the fact that leisure time doesn't mean being able to carve out an hour of quiet time every day. Leisure time is the purview of those who are at or near the top of Maslow's needs pyramid.

Here are the stated reasons this approach to mindfulness is different from everything else out there:

- 1) It's mobile because no one has time to sit and meditate anymore;
- 2) The structure of the book lets you cherry pick lessons as needed;
- 3) It explores mindfulness in relation to technology.

Here are the reasons those reasons don't wash:

- 1) Mobile mindfulness is not a new thing just invented by this guy;

- 2) Right. That's not actually different from other books featuring meditation exercises;
- 3) It's an apologetic for technology along the lines of "Technology is an integral aspect of our lives, not something separate from reality, so learn to use your technology to achieve mindfulness because it's completely not true that the only way to meditate is to put away the phone or to take technology breaks." Technology addicts, this is your book!

Here are some things he says -- followed by my issues with his statements:

- That many people are turned off by mindfulness because of its relationship with religion and/or spirituality and this mode of mindfulness will let you experience meditation without the trappings of formality and religion -- Then he goes on to express that formal meditation is still super important and you should know the spiritual background of mindfulness and here's a whole chapter on that which you can skip if religion icks you out but, really, you should know this stuff if you're ever going to be good at being mindful.
- He came to meditation through curiosity but *most* people have to get there through crisis -- Though probably not intentional, he just put a barrier between him and anyone who has decided to try meditation or mindfulness because they're at odds with their lives right now. Stating that you're exploring mindfulness because you're a naturally curious person suggests that you're coming at this from a better, more open-minded position, which is obviously good, because coming at it from a crisis stance means you're looking for a fix and you're desperate and your mind is in chaos, which is obviously bad.
- "Stress is just a part of life. It is simply part of the package that starts with birth and ends with the other thing." -- The other thing? Seriously? It's called death. It's not Voldemort, you can totally call it what it is, it's not going to summon death to your door. Come on, dude, if you're writing about health, don't avoid the final outcome to everything we do.
- "This may sound like a self-indulgent exercise, but in the same way as we occasionally have a bubble bath instead of a shower there are times when what looks like indulgence is just self care" -- Ummmm...ok, so it's cute that marketing is all about self care = pampering but that's not at all what self care is. Sure, sometimes you need to unwind with a bubble bath because you're stressed out, and that's sort of the point he's trying to make with his statement, but baths and chocolates and shopping for shoes, the "Treat yo'self" mindset, is not taking care of yourself, it's treating yourself. While it's important to make that kind of space for yourself, there is a big difference between self-care and treating yourself and not knowing that difference is why so many people are in crisis. Saying that just because it looks like self-indulgence doesn't mean it's not valuable to your health is misleading and irresponsible. To bolster my point, Here is a TED Talk on why self care is so important and here is a Thought Catalog article about what self care really looks like. Please note the lack of bubble baths.
- "It just works." -- At least three times in this book, the reason you get a result from an action is "it just works." Some practices are based on "a very ancient technique" (which is why "it just works") and at one point, you're told to "Notice how you know to do that" because there are simply no scientific - physiological, psychological, or otherwise - explanations for this mystical stuff, which is probably why you have to be spiritual to get it, but if you're not, don't worry, this book will get you there anyhow.
- "There are a lot of insights to be gained when start to see the patterns of what does and does not make our minds stick" -- You will have to figure those out on your own, though. No, he hasn't covered this previously and no, you're not sure what he's suddenly talking about and no, he's not going to guide you, he's not going to let you know what you're looking for. You'll understand your insights when they come to you now stop asking questions and move along.
- "If it makes any sense of all, see if you can hear the Sound of Silence. But if that doesn't mean anything to you, then don't get caught up in it." --

Here are some things he does not explore:

- That meditation is a luxury, that not everyone can afford to learn it. It would be great if we could because

he's right, if everyone could be more mindful and kind, we wouldn't have all the problems we have today. Probably.

-That, except for the advice to use technology to help with mindfulness (Focus on the podcast, listening intently and concentrating while sitting! Feel the way your phone feels as you play with it. It's part of the "mobile mindfulness" practice), he's giving all the same advice every book on mindfulness gives and every book on intentional awareness gave before that and what all those ancient practitioners also told their leisure-ridden followers to do. This is the same stuff every dissatisfied first-world person is told, just with the addition of the internet.

-Issues surrounding meditating while walking. He doesn't really explain the mechanics, though he gives some exercises, doesn't share how it works just that it does and that it used to be important but then the picture of meditation changed so no one walks and meditates anymore. But that's not true. Meditative walking is a popular trope for the academic and artistic sorts, the harried professor or frustrated sculptor or the one-case detective who can go for a walk to clear his thoughts and gain insight. Also not touched upon: this is not an activity in which just anyone can engage. Some people can't do the walking part. Some people can't do the meditating while walking part because they need to use all their senses to remain on alert in their surroundings. This exercise is for comfortable, mobile people who have safe spaces to walk.

-Being grateful toward someone before you go to sleep is also known as a bedtime prayer. He never says that but that's what the bedtime prayers are made of - gratefulness for the day, gratefulness to be alive, hoping that you say alive while sleeping, and wishes for a good tomorrow. Similarly, his practice of shooting nice thoughts at people - May you be well/May you be happy = the peace be with you thing at church. Separating these exercises from religious practices is harder than it seems.

-Being aware of everyone who has touched your food before you eat it will not necessarily help you appreciate your dinner more. Seriously, this exercise is not going to work well for a lot of people because thinking about all the people involved in food production is going to make you worried for the environment, make you worried about how wasteful we are, and make you worried that you have e-coli or hepatitis because of all the mishandling of food that goes on. He often mentions that if an exercise seems particularly un-doable, then don't do it because there's no point in making your mind feel worse. When he uses these kinds of examples, though, he is exemplifying not being mindful and what's the point of that kind of example in a book about gaining greater awareness? Pretty much, if he can't be mindful, he certainly can't teach me to be mindful.

So just who is the audience for this book?

Not me, obviously.

I suspect this is aimed narrowly and specifically at well-off, gainfully employed, secular millennials who are at odds and can't figure out why, who aren't making meaningful connections with others and can't figure out why, who can't destress despite vacations or shopping and can't understand why, and who have just recently discovered mindfulness through one of the author's apps but who don't want to do what other guides have told them to do (i.e. put down your phone)

But wait! I do have some positive things to say. There were a few areas that sparked interest and made me want to do some further thinking/research:

-Social meditation. It's true that we generally think of meditation as something you have to do alone or with a teacher but there is value to learning to meditate with others, to be part of a group all engaged in the same exercise with the goal of achieving a group result.

-The idea of technology creating mindfulness in their products. What would that look like? Would a rice cooker ask you to play a game with it while it cooked stuff, have you do a humming exercise, talk to you in a soothing voice explaining what it's doing with the rice and the water to make your food? How could your car make you more aware? How could operating systems be built with mindfulness in mind? This was the most fascinating thing he discussed and there were, like, maybe two pages on the subject (I listened to the

audiobook so I don't have any idea how long this really went on, page-wise)

-Start 'em young. If mindfulness is built in early, it will be easier to maintain throughout the rest of life. This comes up at the very end, though, and it just barely addresses that this is not a practice all adults have access to. Still, awareness, compassion, consciousness were all things that were taught in elementary school and through PBS programs. Are kids still taught to wiggle their toes and notice how that feels? To listen to sounds and notice how they feel when they hear those sounds? To look at a partner's eyes while talking? To recognize emotions in themselves and in others? Are those still exercises that happen? I don't know but there are so many opportunities to teach mindfulness without the act of meditation in a school environment and this idea fascinates me.

All in all, I would recommend taking a meditation class, seeing a therapist, or even watching professionals talk about mindfulness on the internet instead of reading this book because there's nothing here you can't find better elsewhere.

Meg says

The most realistic, applicable guide to mindfulness I've read.

Chris Abraham says

5 stars. This book introduced the concepts 'mindfulness' and 'meditation' in a way which was welcoming, giving me the feel that meditation was something 'doable'. Earlier, the term 'meditation' used to intimidate me, giving off the impression that one had to be super-still in a quiet isolated place to derive benefits from it. This book cut through all those myths. Six 'core techniques' and sixty 'exercises' related to insight-oriented meditation have been detailed here. A very practical approach to meditation keeping in mind the demands of the modern life. Nobody is busy. It's all about priorities. Meditation is a part of my daily routine now, much like brushing my teeth. Not something to look forward to, but something which makes you feel uneasy if you don't do it. Much love.

Betsy Harloff says

I am no stranger to meditation but I have not practiced regularly for some time. I got this book as a refresher and was looking for it to give me some new tips and tricks. I came away from reading this book with some new great tools to help foster meditation in more of a modern way, while still making time to practice traditionally. The author mentions many fun meditation games you can play with others as well as introducing the shooting people with kindness game. That is a fun game I have been playing since I read that chapter. Great read!

Elena says

I do not meditate, not in a classical way and not even in the "portable" way the author presents. But I was still interested. Reading about (and sometimes trying to apply) creative ways of finding paths around

obstacles is my hobby.

Somaya AlGhazali says

Simple and effective.

The best book for me this year.

Kazen says

My job can be stressful so my friend recommended a meditation app, something I could do during stolen moments that would help me gain a little peace. I sat down in the hospital coffee shop and... I tried. I really did. But I had to crank up the sound to drown out a crying baby, people were looking at me funny, and I kept opening one eye to make sure my purse was still there. Still lots of stress, not so much peace.

Gunatillake outlines a method that doesn't require quiet or closed eyes or even stillness. There are exercises you can do while walking, commuting, and sitting at your computer. Modern life feels hectic but there are many moments we can leverage to get back in touch with our body and mind.

There are six core techniques that start with simpler, easier to grasp topics (relaxation, focus, being present) and move through more complex ideas (coping, connection, going deeper). Each has a guided meditation which, to be honest, I was skeptical of, but ended up liking them more than any audio meditations I've tried. Here's part of one I read while commuting by train:

...there is no need to judge our posture as to whether it is slovenly or sublime, just pay attention to it as it is.

Pay attention in as simple and direct a way as possible right now.

Take as long as you need.

I was standing and that was okay. I was slouching, and that was okay. I could look out the window while taking stock of my body for as long as I needed without anyone mumbling in my ear about the next thing. All okay, all relaxing and peaceful.

After each core meditation there are ten related mobile exercises and they are my favorite part of the book. Many are linked with some kind of trigger that act as reminders throughout your day to check in and be mindful. For example, now and then eat breakfast with no distractions, concentrating on the experience of eating. When you pick up your phone note why you reached for it - boredom? loneliness? - and try sitting with that emotion instead of checking twitter. When you see someone on the street who's happy let that feeling resonate with you and celebrate with them.

I now have ways to be mindful when I step out the door, when I have a minute between patients, and when my mind is racing on the bus ride home. It's exactly what I wanted and needed.

Some more of the good - Gunatillake keeps mindfulness and religion in separate boxes, which this agnostic appreciates. And he points out that some techniques won't work, and that's okay:

Sometimes we can look the difficult directly in the face and other times we need to play the relaxation card, moving our attention somewhere more tolerable. This is not a failure; it is wisdom.

In the introduction he says that formal practice (sitting and concentrating on the breath) is secondary to the mobile exercises. This made me very happy... until chapter eight or so, when the story changes to 'but really, formal practice is important and the base of mindfulness, so make sure you do it'. I may have been more receptive to this switch if I were working through the books and techniques slowly, but it was a frustrating change when reading the book in one go.

My other critique is that Gunatillake's scope is narrow, with meditations centered on experiences of white collar workers commuting via public transportation. He assumes that everyone works at an office and is surrounded by concrete which is distancing if, like me, you don't. "I don't know if you've noticed yet but meetings at work are really boring," he says, so clearly he's never met with a bunch of interpreters! (Seriously, it's our job to a) talk, b) care, and c) do what needs doing. It makes for great meetings.)

Anywho... people who live in the country will laugh at the idea of "spend[ing] a short time experiencing a park or a green space", and there's a lack of techniques tailored to service jobs or manual labor or even driving. It doesn't take away from the exercises but it feels like a missed opportunity.

That being said I really like *Modern Mindfulness*. I'm looking forward to going back through it slowly and spending a week or two on each core technique while building up my mindfulness muscle. If you've been meditating for a while you may not squeeze as much out of the pages but it was just what this neophyte needed.

Thanks to St. Martin's Griffin and NetGalley for providing a review copy.

Kristine says

Modern Mindfulness by Rohan Gunatillake is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in early January.

Not long before New Year's Day 2017, I made it my resolution to put aside digital screens and focus more on face-to-face contact. Luckily, this book is much of the same mindset while also acknowledging that digital contact is an unavoidable part of daily life. Where some people may believe that mindfulness may be too impractical or difficult to achieve, Gunatillake simplifies daily activities to be done on the move, encourages readers to remain in the present moment, and offers tips and ideas to create a personalized technique.

Annie Kay says

I so wanted to like this book. I kept going back to it. But each time I did, I honestly felt a bit insulted - ha! it increased my suffering...so, I am a 55 yo woman who's meditated for decades, loves the spiritual aspect of it,

might be a hippie, (these are both IDed as problems with mindfulness - the God problem, the hippie problem). And being an older meditator, whom the author says is a late-adopter of technology. So I just stopped. I'm obviously not in the author's sangha.

Maybe a young person new to meditation would like this...

Connie says

This book was certainly meant for me! I looked longingly at the title when I added it to my to-be-read list as I said to myself, "If only there were enough hours in the day to read this book and add yet another thing to my day that I need to do." Years ago, during a brief period as the stay-at-home mom to a toddler, I added meditation to my day while my young son napped. With the addition of a second child and going back to work, I gave up the practice because I didn't have the time anymore. That's been years ago, and I remember fondly those moments of quiet. I also remember how much easier it was not to lie awake late at night stressing over things, how I handled every problem better.

Much to my surprise, this book offers suggestions that can be added to even the busiest schedules. Instead of taking the time to find a quiet place and sit with closed eyes, the author, Rohan, says that any activity we are engaged in can be used as the basis for developing awareness, calmness and kindness. One thing I really like about this book is that it is set up so the entire book can be read straight through, or I can go to a chapter that has practices for where I currently need help. The chapters are: Relaxation, Focus, Being Present, Coping , Connection, Going Deeper, Mobile Mindfulness and How to Design Your Own Meditations. Each of the chapters with meditations contains 10 to try.

For me, some of these were like old friends that I have been happy to be reunited with. I have added some deep breathing exercises, followed by a full body scan at bedtime, so I can be fully relaxed and fall asleep faster. I also like how the author suggests we look for areas in our body that we tend to tense up when we are feeling stressed. I've noticed that I tense my face around my lips, and I am really working hard to stop doing that! The chapter on connection seems to me to especially needed in our country right now. There is so much arguing! A little compassion for others is a wonderful thing.

I highly recommend this book. I think it would benefit everyone.

Rachael Fryman says

Highly recommend this book for anyone thinking of trying meditation or mindfulness. I plan to purchase this book in a physical copy to annotate and reread the information here! I can't wait to incorporate some of these meditation practices into my daily life!
