

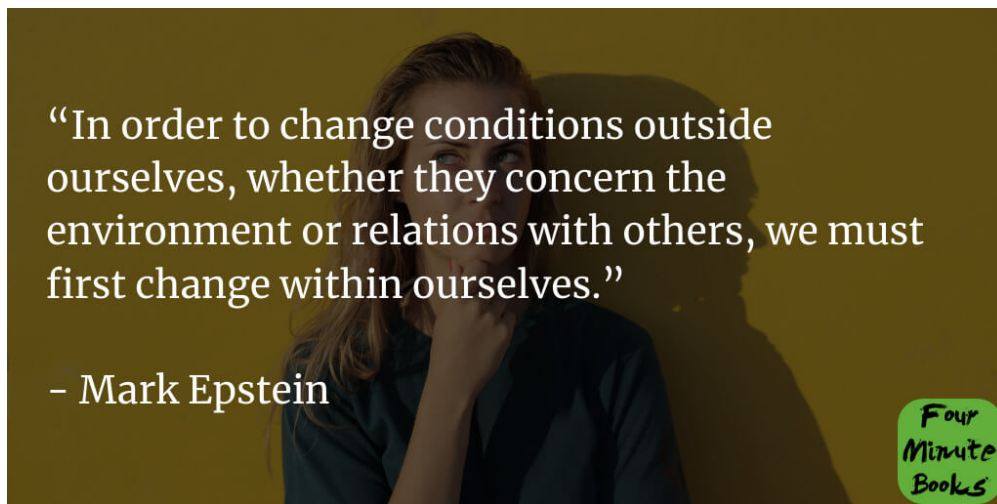
# Thoughts Without A Thinker Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Thoughts Without A Thinker* helps you get more peace, overcome mental illness, and ease suffering by outlining the principles of Buddhism, mindfulness, and meditation as they relate to psychoanalysis.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



You want to live a fulfilling life or to achieve “self-fulfillment.” Everything you’ve learned growing up teaches that this is the secret to being happy and successful.

But what if you’re struggling with it because you misunderstand what the self even is?

While there are many potential causes for mental illness, one of the top contenders according to psychoanalysis is a mistaken idea of self. To understand that, you could look to Sigmund Freud, who many consider the first to unpack this mystery.

The truth is that this problem of the self had a solution long before, in ancient India, within the teachings of the Buddha. That doesn’t completely discredit Freud, and utilizing both his methods and Buddha’s ideas helps us uncover the full picture.

That’s what Mark Epstein does in his book *Thoughts Without A Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective*. You’ll be surprised to learn that the solution to your ego problem lies in letting go of your grip on the idea of self and how doing so will completely transform your life for the better.

Here are just 3 of my favorite lessons from this book:

1. Your incorrect sense of self is what's causing your psychological disorders.
2. The teachings of Buddhism will help you separate from the idea of the self and thus alleviate mental illness.
3. Learn to be okay with all of your emotions, good and bad, with the power of mindfulness.

Are you looking forward to finding more peace in emptiness? Let's get right to it and find out how!

## **Lesson 1: Your psychological disorders come from a misguided sense of self.**

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When you were a kid, everybody expected you to behave as they thought you should. That meant acting against your nature at times. You couldn't do what your instincts said because you had to follow society's expectations to fit in.

This discrepancy between who we are and who we think we should be warps our sense of self. We might have to put on a face to pretend certain emotions when we feel the opposite inside. To be accepted, we often have to be someone we aren't.

The end result is some pretty deep psychological trauma in the form of either an inflated or deflated sense of self. Think of it as a see-saw balancing on a fulcrum. True balance is in the middle, but most of us fall too heavily on one side or another.

**Depression comes when we have a deflated sense of self, with narcissism on the other end of that spectrum.**

Narcissists suffer because they're too focused on themselves. They are prideful, arrogant, and delusional. It's no surprise this is so common in a world that emphasizes selfie culture and individualism.

On the other hand, those with depression don't care enough about their identity. They think they don't matter and entertain dark thoughts as a result.

Neither of these is healthy, but there's a solution as you're about to learn.

## **Lesson 2: Become free from the self and alleviate mental illness with the teachings of Buddhism.**

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Do you ever wonder what your friends are thinking about themselves? What if you could have the same view of yourself also? It might be a lot easier to let selfish or self-deprecating thoughts go, wouldn't it?

This is what Buddhism teaches you how to do through meditation. I've been trying it out myself for a couple of years and each time I spend some time just observing my thoughts and feelings it always helps me relax and let go of my worries.

Mindfulness is the cure for all problems with the self. But you have to go into it with the right perspective. A man once asked Buddha if the self exists and he declared that responding would only support the misguided idea of the self.

In other words, finding emptiness can free you, but holding onto it too tightly as a goal can make things worse. **Instead, consider it more like seeking to free yourself of attachment.** Try to become a fly on the wall, just observing your own thoughts.

Compassion is another teaching of Buddhism that helps us beat our problems with the self. According to the Dalai Lama, this is the core of this belief system and is the path to true happiness.

After all, it's almost a sure bet that you'll keep your ego at bay when you're too focused on helping others to worry about yourself!

### **Lesson 3: Mindfulness will help you learn to be at peace with your emotions, both good and bad.**

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Can you imagine being a musician that finds certain sounds annoying? This was the case for John Cage, who couldn't stand some of the odd noises he wanted to use in his different music style.

Cage decided to apply the Buddhist skill of bare attention, which is learning to accept things as they are without judgment. By doing this, he learned to use sounds he previously couldn't, and his career grew.

You can use this same skill in your life to help you deal with difficult emotions and experiences. **The more you practice bare attention, the more you'll come to realize that it's a much more peaceful state than getting caught up in every feeling you have.**

Consider one of the author's patients named Sid. He'd developed an obsession with a girl and called her so much it was becoming harassment. That's where bare attention came in to help.

Sid worked on allowing himself to feel whatever he needed without trying to change or respond to his emotions. By letting it all wash over him like rain, he learned to cope without resorting to his previous unhealthy behavior of calling this girl too much.

The next time you feel something you want to call unpleasant, pause for a moment. Refrain from judging it as good or bad and just let it be what it is. You'll be surprised at how much better you feel!

## Thoughts Without A Thinker Review

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I've really enjoyed learning more about Buddhism from multiple books recently, and *Thoughts Without A Thinker* is one of my favorites of those. It's nice to have my beliefs, especially about myself, challenged and reframed in a way that helps me feel more at peace with who I am. Mindfulness is such a useful tool for so many reasons, and I'm glad I got to learn even more about it from this book.

## Who would I recommend the Thoughts Without A Thinker summary to?

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The 23-year-old that's always stressed and anxious about school but doesn't know if meditation can help, the 53-year-old who struggles with depression and wants some help, and anyone that could use a little less selfishness and a little more peace in their life.