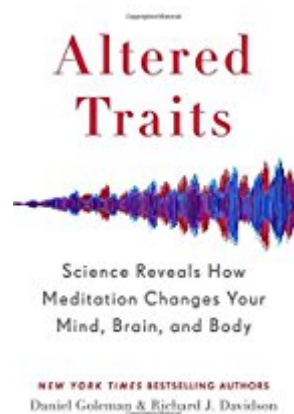


Read Ebook [PDF] Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body By Daniel Goleman, Richard J. Davidson



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Two New York Times–bestselling authors unveil new research showing what meditation can really do for the brain. In the last twenty years, meditation and mindfulness have gone from being kind of cool to becoming an omnipresent Band-Aid for fixing everything from your weight to your relationship to your achievement level. Unveiling here the kind of cutting-edge research that has made them giants in their fields, Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson show us the truth about what meditation can really do for us, as well as exactly how to get the most out of it.

Sweeping away common misconceptions and neuromythology to open readers’ eyes to the ways data has been distorted to sell mind-training methods, the authors demonstrate that beyond the pleasant states mental exercises can produce, the real payoffs are the lasting personality traits that can result. But short daily doses will not get us to the highest level of lasting positive change—even if we continue for years—without specific additions. More than sheer hours, we need smart practice, including crucial ingredients such as targeted feedback from a master teacher and a more spacious, less attached view of the self, all of which are missing in widespread versions of mind training. The authors also reveal the latest data from Davidson’s own lab that point to a new methodology for developing a broader array of mind-training methods with larger implications for how we can derive the greatest benefits from the practice.

Exciting, compelling, and grounded in new research, this is one of those rare books that has the power to change us at the deepest level.

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Review "A happy synthesis of the authors' remarkable careers, which grew from the intuition they shared as students that there was something deep and transformative about meditation, *Altered Traits* tells the story of what has been discovered since and why it matters critically at this moment on the planet." —Jon Kabat-Zinn, author of *Full Catastrophe Living* and *Mindfulness for Beginners* "This exquisite duet between a down-to-earth science writer and path-breaking neuroscientist is a tour-de-force, revealing how training the mind can transform the brain and our sense of self, inspiring us to create a greater sense of well-being, meaning, and connection in our world. Bravo!" —Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., author of the New York Times best sellers, *Mindsight* and *Brainstorm* "This is a book that really can change your life. Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson not only show the power of meditation, but also the smartest way to practice for the maximum possible benefit. *Altered Traits* is your roadmap to a more mindful, compassionate, fulfilling life — who doesn't want that?" —Arianna Huffington, author of the New York Times best seller *The Sleep Revolution* "Here is a message that is both powerful and joyful. Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson reveal groundbreaking science showing how mindfulness and compassion practices can help each of us individually and thus the entire planet. One of the most exciting books I have read!" —Chade-Meng Tan, author of the New York Times best sellers, *Joy on Demand* and *Search Inside Yourself* "In this engaging and well-researched book, Goleman and Davidson help us sort out the many claims now being made about the benefits of meditation. Drawing on their own long personal meditative experience and the ever increasing number of scientific studies, *Altered Traits* breaks new ground in illuminating the power of meditation to transform our lives." —Joseph Goldstein, author of *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening* "One of the world's most eminent psychological scientists and most gifted science writers have written the definitive book on the science of meditation. Rigorously researched and deeply illuminating, *Altered Traits* is a must-read for anyone interested in the hidden potential of the human mind." —Daniel Gilbert, PhD, author of the New York Times best seller *Stumbling on Happiness* "A remarkable collaboration between two brilliant and courageous pioneers, *Altered Traits* shares the scientific basis and practical realities of the remarkable impact meditation has on altering the mind. As I have personally experienced, regular meditation practice brings compassion, calm, and clarity for all of us, from beginners to experienced practitioners." —Bill George, Senior Fellow, Harvard Business School; former Chair & CEO, Medtronic; and author of *Discover Your True North* "Altered Traits is an informative book that is sure to be controversial. Highly recommended." —Success Magazine About the Author Daniel Goleman, Ph.D., known for his bestselling books on emotional intelligence, has a long-standing interest in meditation dating back to his two years in India as a graduate student at Harvard. A psychologist who for many years reported on the brain and behavioral sciences for The New York Times, Dr. Goleman previously was a visiting faculty member at Harvard. Dr. Goleman has received many journalistic awards for his writing, including two nominations for the Pulitzer Prize for his articles in the Times, and a Career Achievement award for journalism from the American Psychological Association. Richard J. Davidson, Ph.D., is the William James and Vilas Research Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, director of the Waisman Laboratory for Brain Imaging and Behavior, and founder of the Center for Healthy Minds at the Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in psychology and has been at Wisconsin since 1984. Davidson has published more than 320 articles, as well as numerous chapters and reviews, and edited fourteen books. His research has received many awards. Excerpt. ©

Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. One bright fall morning, Steve Z, a lieutenant colonel working in the Pentagon, heard a "crazy, loud noise," and instantly was covered in debris as the ceiling caved in, knocking him to the floor, unconscious. It was September 11, 2001, and a passenger jet had smashed into the huge building, very near to Steve's office. The debris that buried Steve saved his life as the plane's fuselage exploded, a fireball of flames scouring the open office. Despite a concussion, Steve returned to work four days later, laboring through feverish nights, 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., because those were daytime hours in Afghanistan. Soon after, he volunteered for a year in Iraq. "I mainly went to Iraq because I couldn't walk around the Mall without being hypervigilant, wary of how people looked at me, totally on guard," Steve recalls. "I couldn't get on an elevator, I felt trapped in my car in traffic." His symptoms were classic post traumatic stress disorder. Then came the day he realized he couldn't handle this on his own. Steve ended up with a psychotherapist he still sees. She led him, very gently, to try mindfulness. Mindfulness, he recalls, "gave me something I could do to help feel more calm, less stressed, not be so reactive." As he practiced more, added loving-kindness to the mix, and went on retreats, his PTSD symptoms gradually became less frequent, less intense. Although his irritability and restlessness still came, he could see them coming. Tales like Steve's offer encouraging news about meditation. We have been meditators all our adult lives, and, like Steve, know for ourselves that the practice has countless benefits. But our scientific backgrounds give us pause, too. Not everything chalked up to meditation's magic actually stands up to rigorous tests. And so we have set out to make clear what works and what does not. Some of what you know about meditation may be wrong. But what is true about meditation you may not know. Take Steve's story. The tale has been repeated in endless variations by countless others who claim to have found relief in meditation methods like mindfulness-not just from PTSD but from virtually the entire range of emotional disorders. Yet mindfulness, part of an ancient meditation tradition, was not intended to be such a cure; this method was only recently adapted as a balm for our modern forms of angst. The original aim, embraced in some circles to this day, focuses on a deep exploration of the mind toward a profound alteration of our very being. On the other hand, the pragmatic applications of meditation-like the mindfulness that helped Steve recover from trauma-appeal widely but do not go so deep. Because this wide approach has easy access, multitudes have found a way to include at least a bit of meditation into their day. There are, then, two paths: the deep and the wide. Those two paths are often confused with each other, though they differ greatly. We see the deep path embodied at two levels: in a pure form, for example, in the ancient lineages of Theravada Buddhism as practiced in Southeast Asia, or among Tibetan yogis (for whom we'll see some remarkable data in chapter eleven, "A Yogi's Brain"). We'll call this most intensive type of practice Level 1. At Level 2, these traditions have been removed from being part of a total lifestyle-monk or yogi, for example-and adapted into forms more palatable for the West. At Level 2, meditation comes in forms that leave behind parts of the original Asian source that might not make the cross-cultural journey so easily. Then there are the wide approaches. At Level 3, a further remove takes these same meditation practices out of their spiritual context and distributes them ever more widely-as is the case with Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (better known as MBSR), founded by our good friend Jon Kabat-Zinn and taught now in thousands of clinics and medical centers, and far beyond. Or Transcendental Meditation (TM), which offers classic Sanskrit mantras to the modern world in a user-friendly format. The even more widely accessible forms of meditation at Level 4 are, of necessity, the most watered-down, all the better to render them handy for the largest number of people. The current vogues of mindfulness-at-your-desk, or via minutes-long meditation apps, exemplify this level. We foresee also a Level 5, one that exists now only in bits and pieces, but which may well increase in number and reach with time. At Level 5, the lessons scientists have learned in studying all the other levels will lead to innovations and adaptations that can be of widest benefit-a potential we explore in the final chapter, "A Healthy Mind." The deep transformations of Level 1 fascinated us when we originally encountered meditation. Dan studied ancient texts and practiced the methods they describe, particularly during the two years he lived in India and Sri Lanka in his grad school days and just afterward. Richie (as

everyone calls him) followed Dan to Asia for a lengthy visit, likewise practicing on retreat there, meeting with meditation scholars-and more recently has scanned the brains of Olympic-level meditators in his lab at the University of Wisconsin. Our own meditation practice has been mainly at Level 2. But from the start, the wide path, Levels 3 and 4, has also been important to us. Our Asian teachers said if any aspect of meditation could help alleviate suffering, it should be offered to all, not just those on a spiritual search. Our doctoral dissertations applied that advice by studying ways meditation could have cognitive and emotional payoffs. The story we tell here mirrors our own personal and professional journey. We have been close friends and collaborators on the science of meditation since the 1970s, when we met at Harvard during graduate school, and we have both been practitioners of this inner art over all these years (although we are nowhere near mastery). While we were both trained as psychologists, we bring complementary skills to telling this story. Dan is a seasoned science journalist who wrote for the New York Times for more than a decade. Richie, a neuroscientist, founded and heads the University of Wisconsin's Center for Healthy Minds, in addition to directing the brain imaging laboratory at the Waisman Center there, replete with its own fMRI, PET scanner, and a battery of cutting-edge data analysis programs, along with hundreds of servers for the heavy-duty computing required for this work. His research group numbers more than a hundred experts, who range from physicists, statisticians, and computer scientists to neuroscientists and psychologists, as well as scholars of meditative traditions. Coauthoring a book can be awkward. We've had some of that, to be sure-but whatever drawbacks coauthorship brought us has been vastly overshadowed by the sheer delight we find in working together. We've been best friends for decades but labored separately over most of our careers. This book has brought us together again, always a joy. You are holding the book we had always wanted to write but could not. The science and the data we needed to support our ideas have only recently matured. Now that both have reached a critical mass, we are delighted to share this. Our joy also comes from our sense of a shared, meaningful mission: we aim to shift the conversation with a radical reinterpretation of what the actual benefits of meditation are-and are not-and what the true aim of practice has always been.

The Deep Path After his return from India in the fall of 1974, Richie was in a seminar on psychopathology back at Harvard. Richie, with long hair and attire in keeping with the zeitgeist of Cambridge in those times-including a colorful woven sash that he wore as a belt-was startled when his professor said, "One clue to schizophrenia is the bizarre way a person dresses," giving Richie a meaningful glance. And when Richie told one of his Harvard professors that he wanted to focus his dissertation on meditation, the blunt response came immediately: that would be a career-ending move. Dan set out to research the impacts of meditation that uses a mantra. On hearing this, one of his clinical psychology professors asked with suspicion, "How is a mantra any different from my obsessive patients who can't stop saying 'shit-shit-shit'?" The explanation that the expletives are involuntary in the psychopathology, while the silent mantra repetition is a voluntary and intentional focusing device, did little to placate him. These reactions were typical of the opposition we faced from our department heads, who were still responding with knee-jerk negativity toward anything to do with consciousness-perhaps a mild form of PTSD after the notorious debacle involving Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert. Leary and Alpert had been very publicly ousted from our department in a brouhaha over letting Harvard undergrads experiment with psychedelics. This was some five years before we arrived, but the echoes lingered. Despite our academic mentors' seeing our meditation research as a blind alley, our hearts told us this was of compelling import. We had a big idea: beyond the pleasant states meditation can produce, the real payoffs are the lasting traits that can result. An altered trait-a new characteristic that arises from a meditation practice-endures apart from meditation itself. Altered traits shape how we behave in our daily lives, not just during or immediately after we meditate. The concept of altered traits has been a lifelong pursuit, each of us playing synergistic roles in the unfolding of this story. There were Dan's years in India as an early participant-observer in the Asian roots of these mind-altering methods. And on Dan's return to America he was a not-so-successful transmitter to contemporary psychology of beneficial changes from meditation and the ancient working models for achieving them. Richie's own experiences with

meditation led to decades pursuing the science that supports our theory of altered traits. His research group has now generated the data that lend credence to what could otherwise seem mere fanciful tales. And by leading the creation of a fledgling research field, contemplative neuroscience, he has been grooming a coming generation of scientists whose work builds on and adds to this evidence. In the wake of the tsunami of excitement over the wide path, the alternate route so often gets missed: that is, the deep path, which has always been the true goal of meditation. As we see it, the most compelling impacts of meditation are not better health or sharper business performance but, rather, a further reach toward our better nature. A stream of findings from the deep path markedly boosts science's models of the upper limits of our positive potential. The further reaches of the deep path cultivate enduring qualities like selflessness, equanimity, a loving presence, and impartial compassion—highly positive altered traits. When we began, this seemed big news for modern psychology—if it would listen. Admittedly, at first the concept of altered traits had scant backing save for the gut feelings we had from meeting highly seasoned practitioners in Asia, the claims of ancient meditation texts, and our own fledgling tries at this inner art. Now, after decades of silence and disregard, the last few years have seen ample findings that bear out our early hunch. Only of late have the scientific data reached critical mass, confirming what our intuition and the texts told us: these deep changes are external signs of strikingly different brain function. Much of that data comes from Richie's lab, the only scientific center that has gathered findings on dozens of contemplative masters, mainly Tibetan yogis—the largest pool of deep practitioners studied anywhere. These unlikely research partners have been crucial in building a scientific case for the existence of a way of being that has eluded modern thought, though it was hiding in plain sight as a goal of the world's major spiritual traditions. Now we can share scientific confirmation of these profound alterations of being—a transformation that dramatically ups the limits on psychological science's ideas of human possibility. The very idea of "awakening"—the goal of the deep path—seems a quaint fairy tale to a modern sensibility. Yet data from Richie's lab, some just being published in journals as this book goes to press, confirm that remarkable, positive alterations in brain and behavior along the lines of those long described for the deep path are not a myth but a reality.

The Wide Path We have both been longtime board members of the Mind and Life Institute, formed initially to create intensive dialogues between the Dalai Lama and scientists on wide-ranging topics. In 2000 we organized one on "destructive emotions," with several top experts on emotions, including Richie. Midway through that dialogue the Dalai Lama, turning to Richie, made a provocative challenge. His own tradition, the Dalai Lama observed, had a wide array of time-tested practices for taming destructive emotions. So, he urged, take these methods into the laboratory in forms freed from religious trappings, test them rigorously, and if they can help people lessen their destructive emotions, then spread them widely to all who might benefit. That fired us up. Over dinner that night—and several nights following—we began to plot the general course of the research we report in this book. The Dalai Lama's challenge led Richie to refocus the formidable power of his lab to assess both the deep and the wide paths. And, as founding director of the Center for Healthy Minds, Richie has spurred work on useful, evidence-based applications suitable for schools, clinics, businesses, even for cops—for anyone, anywhere, ranging from a kindness program for preschoolers to treatments for veterans with PTSD. The Dalai Lama's urging catalyzed studies that support the wide path in scientific terms, a vernacular welcomed around the globe. Meanwhile the wide way has gone viral, becoming the stuff of blogs, tweets, and snappy apps. For instance, as we write this, a wave of enthusiasm surrounds mindfulness, and hundreds of thousands—maybe millions—now practice the method. But viewing mindfulness (or any variety of meditation) through a scientific lens starts with questions like: When does it work, and when does it not? Will this method help everyone? Are its benefits any different from, say, exercise? These are among the questions that brought us to write this book. Meditation is a catch-all word for myriad varieties of contemplative practice, just as sports refers to a wide range of athletic activities. For both sports and meditation, the end results vary depending on what you actually do. Some practical advice: for those about to start a meditation practice, or who have been grazing among several, keep in mind that as with gaining skill in a given

sport, finding a meditation practice that appeals to you and sticking with it will have the greatest benefits. Just find one to try, decide on the amount of time each day you can realistically practice daily-even as short as a few minutes-try it for a month, and see how you feel after those thirty days.

Customer Reviews Most helpful customer reviews 38 of 38 people found the following review helpful. Interesting as long as you know what to expect By Daffy Du *Altered Traits* is the joint effort of two highly respected figures in the world of neuroscience and science journalism, Richard Davidson and Daniel Goleman, respectively. They're also longtime friends who share an abiding interest in the power of meditation. Davidson made headlines several years ago with the results of his study of the brains of Tibetan monks, which showed unequivocally that years of meditation had significantly altered their brains (for the better). Goleman is the bestselling author of *Emotional Intelligence*. *Altered Traits* is a collaborative overview of the history of research on meditation and an analysis of what claims in the mainstream press are legitimate as opposed to those that are overreaching or simply wrong. (The altered traits of the title are those that endure long term, as opposed to those that are transient, taking place during meditation sessions and vanishing shortly thereafter.) The book is written entirely in third person, which is sometimes a bit odd, when it's clearly talking about the experiences of one author vs. the other. I have to admit that I found the first several chapters tedious--the autobiographical stuff about their trips to India and personal explorations of meditation was okay, but there was a lot of detail about early research studies--what worked and what didn't--that got old for me. A different reader might eat it up, however. The book really got interesting when it embarked on Davidson's studies of Tibetan monks, and that's when I didn't want to put it down. This is not in any way a how-to book about meditation. (There are plenty of those, as well as CDs and videos and apps, so that's not its purpose.) What it is is a scientific analysis, albeit designed for a general audience, about which claims about meditation are legitimate, which need more, and better, research and which can be debunked altogether. I've already recommended the book to a friend who recently began meditating at the suggestion of his doctor, but as a science teacher has been skeptical about its benefits. He, I would say, would be the ideal audience for *Altered Traits*. 20 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Excellent! By A reader This is an outstanding book by two prominent researchers who are longtime meditators themselves, and have worked together since student days. In this book, the authors set out to answer probing questions about mediation and its effects on the brain and behavior. They take us back to their own early studies of meditation in Asia (fascinating!) and tell lots of stories from their own long experience. As a longtime meditator myself, I so appreciated reading about the various studies they examined about meditation, whether learned in an 8 week program like the MIndfulness Based Stress Reduction Program; a three year intensive retreat; or over many decades, totaling thousands of hours. Different styles of meditation are covered, as well as their varying effects on emotional regulation, focus memory, and such. The brain itself is also discussed. I also very much appreciated the discussion of what makes a fair and unbiased study, which helps me to better understand the media's coverage of similar studies about health related subjects. This is a fairly densely written book, packed with useful and fascinating information. Each chapter ends with a summary ("In a Nutshell") that will be helpful for future quick reference. There is so much great stuff in this book that I just can't praise it enough. Most highly recommended to those seeking peace, understanding, and order in their lives, as well as a deeper understanding of human nature and potential. 16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Compassion & Meditation Profoundly Change the Brain Structure By SanjeevP Even though we evolved from *Homo erectus* more than 1.8 million years ago, our radar system for existential threats is still overactive and keeps sounding false alarms for flight and fight - causing distress to self and others. Look at President Trump: all the power, wealth, beautiful women - but the man is always pissed off. Distresses the whole world. And look at Dalai Lama. Who would you rather be? This book is about how meditation and compassion have made Dalai Lama's brain different from Donald Trump's brain. Although I read *The Meditative Mind: The Varieties of Meditative Experience* in early 1990's, for me, Daniel

Goleman's book Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ was life-changing and I have been a fan ever since. In this book, with his friend and colleague Richard Davidson, they explore the permanent effects on brain of meditation, compassion, loving kindness and mindfulness. They call them Altered Traits. Enormous changes in emotional brain - amygdala; executive brain - pre-frontal cortex; automatic/habit brain - basal ganglia; and reward/self centered brain - nucleus accumbens. Some of this material was already covered in his earlier book - Destructive Emotions by Daniel Goleman. Many of you may have seen the functional MRI scan images of the happiest man on earth - Matthieu Ricard - from Davidson's lab. Very impressive. Matthieu attributes all that to compassion and altruism. Buddha learnt the power of compassion in 5th century BC. And Francis of Assisi said in 12th century AD "is in giving that we receive". Dan & Richie trace their introduction to meditation and eastern philosophy in early 1970s, when they were in Harvard with Richard Alpert (Ram Dass) and Jeffrey Kagel (Krishna Das). They all went to India, learnt meditation from Naeem Karoli Baba and SN Goenka and ended up spending their lives in meditation in a variety of ways. Davidson is best known for his studies on the brains of Tibetan Monks with fMRI and they explore his findings at length. But also cover the works of Tania Singer, Lobsang Tenzin Negi, Amishi Jha, Sara Lazar and others. Being a long-term meditator with science and medical background, I can see why they get into the nitty gritty of scientific studies with the study design, biases, sample sizes, statistics etc. to establish the reliability or fallacies of research findings. Probably more so because some of the work reported in Destructive Emotions turned out to be non replicable. But for the lay reader, all that makes a dreary read. I read the advance review copy and may be they can tone down technical intricacies in the final version of the book. Otherwise, it is another great book from Goleman that has the potential to be life changing for some. Especially when you find out the monumental effects of compassion on brain. And if that inspires you to sprinkle a little of that compassion in your daily life, wouldn't that make the world a better place? See all 15 customer reviews...

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