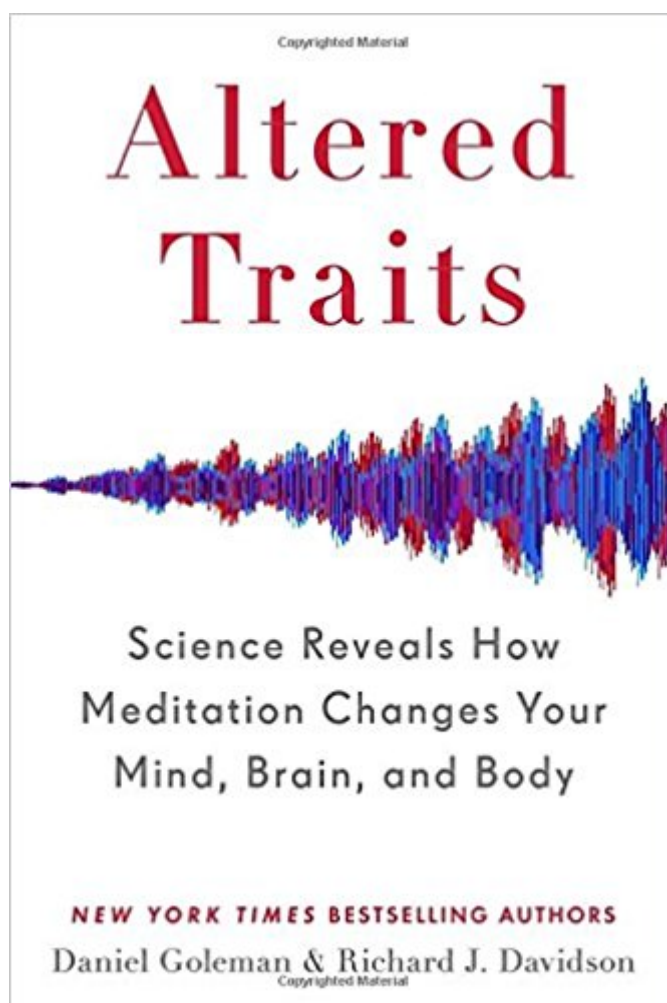


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Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, And Body



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

“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*

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. ã ã 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.

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*.

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 meditation 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.

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. Distressing 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 *Emotional Intelligence* 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. Daniel Goleman, 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 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.

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