

Introduction by MARK WILLIAMS, author of
Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World



Practising Happiness

How Mindfulness Can Free You
from Psychological Traps and
Help You Build the Life You Want

Ruth A. Baer

Ruth A. Baer is professor of psychology at the University of Kentucky. She has written and published extensively on mindfulness and is the editor of two books for professionals: *Mindfulness-Based Treatment Approaches: Clinician's Guide to Evidence Base and Application*, and *Assessing Mindfulness and Acceptance Processes in Clients: Illuminating the Theory and Practice of Change*. She teaches and supervises several mindfulness-based treatments, including Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention. She lives in Lexington, Kentucky, with her husband.

Praise for *Practising Happiness*:

‘Ruth Baer is . . . an experienced clinician, internationally-renowned researcher, mindfulness practitioner and brilliant teacher who combines warm humour, deep intelligence and empathic gentleness of heart.’

Mark Williams, Professor of Clinical Psychology and Wellcome Trust Principal Research Fellow, Oxford University,
co-author of *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a*

Frantic World and The Mindful Way Through Depression

‘This book is like a mindfulness walk. It seamlessly integrates the best of mindfulness training from the major evidence-based care approaches, giving it a sense of breadth of vision, as if you can see across vast distances on your walk. It gently and calmly steps through many domains of self-exploration (rumination, emotion, self-criticism, values, and so on) and yet it never wanders. Each step is small but each step is purposive, as if you are being guided on your walk by a very wise person who knows where she is going but is willing to let you set your own pace in getting there. And when you are done you feel alive and whole, as if you have come home, and you are simply happy to be there. This is a walk worth taking – and a book worth reading. Highly recommended.’

Steven C. Hayes, Foundation Professor of Psychology, University of Nevada, author of *Get Out of Your Mind and into Your Life*

‘Anyone who struggles with difficult emotions or gets trapped in rumination will benefit enormously from this book. Written by one of the leaders in the secular approach to mindfulness, Ruth Baer guides readers through the different facets of mindfulness and explains how these can be used and practised to help us find inner calmness, reduce self-criticism and attain happier states of mind. Knowledgeable, accessible

and practical, this book will be of immense help to many people in how to deal with our rather chaotic, emotional minds.’

Paul Gilbert, Professor of Clinical Psychology,
University of Derby,
author of *The Compassionate Mind* and *Overcoming Depression*

‘*Practising Happiness*, Ruth Baer’s latest book, is an open invitation to finding out for yourself how mindfulness can add immeasurably to your quality of life. Written with a reassuringly supportive tone, this workbook moves seamlessly between the problems and the promises each of us encounters as it describes how awareness, willingness and kindness can open truly new vistas of well-being.’

Zindel V. Segal, University of Toronto, co-author of
The Mindful Way through Depression

‘Bringing attention to our experience with compassion, patience and equanimity can be radically transformative. You will be in the hands of a gentle, authoritative guide as Ruth Baer draws on her extensive clinical, scientific and personal experience to set out a path of mindfulness practice and inquiry. *Practising Happiness* is an accessible and practical guide to the transformative power of mindfulness in everyday life.’

Willem Kuyken, Professor of Clinical Psychology,
co-founder of the Mood Disorders Centre,

University of Exeter and the Exeter Mindfulness Network,
co-author of *Collaborative Case Conceptualization*

‘In this wise and compassionate book, Ruth Baer integrates up-to-date research, effective contemporary mindfulness-based approaches and her own deep knowledge and understanding of the psychology of human distress and of mindfulness meditation practice. Lucid and compelling, the book offers a practical step-by-step guide to awareness, insight and transformation through mindfulness, enlivened by vivid personal stories and delightful touches of humour. A pleasure to read.’

Melanie Fennell, University of Oxford,
author of *Overcoming Low Self-Esteem*

‘This is one of the most carefully designed and written handbooks on mindfulness to date. The author is a senior mindfulness researcher who has sifted through the burgeoning scientific literature to present the essential psychology and practice of mindfulness in a palpable, jargonfree, highly accessible manner. Strongly recommended for anyone, regardless of background or experience, who wishes to live a happier, less encumbered life.’

Christopher Germer, clinical instructor, Harvard Medical School,
author of *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*

‘For many, happiness is an elusive state. Each fleeting moment leaves us clamouring for more. Chasing after happiness can become an exhausting and discouraging enterprise, as our most familiar strategies often backfire. Fortunately, this book offers an extremely effective alternative. Drawing on her extensive experience practising and researching mindfulness, Baer provides compassionate and practical advice to those seeking to enhance their sense of satisfaction and purpose. Full of extremely practical tools and engaging case examples, this book provides us with the guidance we need to truly enjoy all that life can offer.’

Susan M. Orsillo, Suffolk University, co-author of
The Mindful Way through Anxiety

‘Practising Happiness weaves together the rigour of science, the beauty of art, the wisdom of reflection and decades of lived clinical experience to offer us one of the most compelling books on how to cultivate greater happiness and wellbeing in our lives. Dr Ruth Baer lucidly and brilliantly offers a book that has the power to transform our individual and collective lives.’

Professor Shauna L. Shapiro, Santa Clara University,
co-author of
The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions

‘In *Practising Happiness*, Ruth Baer draws from decades of her own and others’ research, as well as her personal experience, to provide concise, accessible tips

for living a meaningful, satisfying life. She clearly illustrates the natural human habits or ‘traps’ that can interfere with our wellbeing, while providing simple, step-by-step guidance to promoting new habits that will enhance and expand readers’ lives. Vignettes and worksheets bring concepts to life and help readers apply them immediately to their own lives. This book may be life-changing for those who have never practised mindfulness, and will also provide valuable structure and guidance for those who have practised but not yet seen the benefits they seek and useful reminders even for seasoned practitioners. I highly recommend *Practising Happiness* and plan to buy copies for many people I know.’

Lizabeth Roemer, University of Massachusetts Boston,
co-author of *Mindful Way Through Anxiety:
Break free from chronic worry and reclaim your life*

Practising Happiness

Ruth A. Baer



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requiring medical attention should consult a qualified
medical practitioner or suitable therapist

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Acknowledgements

Immersing myself in the leading research-based mindfulness programmes has convinced me that each has important wisdom to contribute to people wishing to improve their lives. This book is heavily indebted to the following colleagues who pioneered the development and scientific study of mindfulness-based treatment approaches: Marsha Linehan for dialectical behaviour therapy; Jon Kabat-Zinn for mindfulness-based stress reduction; Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale for mindfulness-based cognitive therapy; Steve Hayes, Kirk Strosahl and Kelly Wilson for acceptance and commitment therapy; Jean Kristeller for mindfulness-based eating awareness training; Sue Orsillo and Liz Roemer for acceptance-based behaviour therapy; Alan Marlatt, Sarah Bowen and Neha Chawla for mindfulness-based relapse prevention.

I thank all of you for your innovative thinking, compelling research, insightful books, outstanding training workshops and friendly support of my professional development. It has been a privilege to learn from you. Your influence pervades my work, this book, and how I've come to see the world.

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and Joseph for making IMS an ideal environment for this purpose.

I am indebted to the students in my classes for doing their mindfulness homework in the spirit of interest, exploration and open-mindedness, and writing wonderful accounts of their experiences, some of which I adapted for this book. I also thank the many clients in the groups we run in our clinic, for their courage and willingness to engage with the mindfulness practices and discover their benefits, even in the midst of stress and pain. Their progress inspires me to share what I've learned.

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academic who has written for the non-academic audience.

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Most of all, I'm deeply grateful for the love and support of my husband Terry Schoen, who makes the journey joyful no matter what the weather on the mountain.

Foreword

Why can't we be as happy as we'd like to be? It turns out that we often trap ourselves into ways of thinking and feeling that create persistent unease. If this was not bad enough, the very ways we try to escape entangle us even more. We brood about our past mistakes and worry about our ability to cope in the future. Clinical levels of depression and anxiety, or problems in controlling emotions or impulses, can take over our lives. Happiness can seem very elusive indeed.

It is rare to find a book that would help virtually everyone who reads it and puts its advice into practice. The book you hold in your hand is just such a rarity. Ruth Baer has brought together a number of different approaches that have been proven by careful research to release those who suffer from some of the most common emotional difficulties from the traps that emotions can set. These approaches have also been found to bring about a transformation in life that allows peace and well-being to be felt deeply, sometimes for the first time in years.

How can this be? The secret is in the title. Note that it does not refer to the pursuit of happiness, the quest for happiness, or the goal of happiness, but to the *practice* of happiness. This is fundamental. As it turns out,

happiness is not to be a goal to be pursued, but rather a byproduct of a certain way of living your life. As one psychologist has expressed it, it involves getting ‘out of your mind and into your life’ (Hayes, 2005). The essence of the mindfulness and acceptance approach to daily living involves practising fully inhabiting your life by learning, day by day and moment by moment, to first notice and then turn towards the present, with all its joys and discontents, nostalgia and regrets, plans and worries, thoughts and imaginings. It’s learning that you have potentialities you never dreamed of, but that making them real involves learning, piece by piece, how to drop the myriad ways in which you try to protect yourself.

By trying to avoid or suppress discomfort whenever it arises, you get into a habit of withdrawing from your life, and you can find that you have become a stranger to your best and wisest self. This book offers you the chance to come home to your life through mindfulness.

Mindfulness is one of many translations of an ancient word that means ‘lucid awareness’ or ‘non-forgetfulness’. Mindfulness training is the practice of remembering to wake up, moment by moment, to what is arising in the inner and outer world, as best you can. Developing such awareness takes gentle but firm persistence, as the mind quite naturally acquires most skills by making most of our behaviours automatic and habitual. Habits are normally so useful: if we still had to think deeply about how to balance when we walk or how to keep an automobile in the correct part of the highway, we’d have little energy or mental space to think of anything else. But

habits are hungry: any behaviour we repeat more than once is fair game – a suitable candidate for becoming a habit. This is not itself a problem. What *is* a problem is that the part of the mind that is freed up when actions become habitual typically is not then employed to appreciate the present moment or think great or creative thoughts; rather it drifts off into daydreams, brooding about the past or worrying about the future, ruminating about our unsolvable problems or those of others, or trying to work out the meaning of life. When your mind wanders about in this way, happiness seems to elude you, and if you then turn your attention to *why* you feel less happy than you'd like to, this can make you feel even worse. So you distract yourself as best you can, and postpone happiness for another day, without realising that it was right in front of you all along. It turned out that while you were searching for the meaning of life, you missed the experience of being alive.

This is why happiness, seen narrowly as a goal to be pursued, is an illusion. Yet none of us is immune. It is an illusion that catches us in its snare again and again. We need a reliable guide to help us navigate through this path, and Ruth Baer is just such a guide: an experienced clinician, internationally renowned researcher, mindfulness practitioner and brilliant teacher who combines warm humour, deep intelligence and empathic gentleness of heart. Expect a good read, and enjoy reading this book: but also expect her to invite you to practise some new things as an experiment. This is where the action starts – and where you can begin to reclaim your life. I

wish you well as you embark on this adventure in practising happiness.

Mark Williams

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Principal

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