

Book Review by Dr Andrew Clark

Mindful Emotion: A Short Course in Kindness

Dr Paramabandhu Groves and Dr Jed Shamel

Published by Windhorse Publications 2017 (ISBN: 978-1-909314-70-2)

This book grew out of an eight week course developed by the authors called Kindness Behaviour Training (KBT). The course seeks to address what the authors identify as a missing element in the explosion of mindfulness courses, namely kindness. Kindness is defined as ‘the motivation for the well-being of oneself and other people, coupled with a willingness to act on that desire.’

Both authors have many years of clinical experience working within NHS mental health settings as well as rich experience of living within the Buddhist Triratna tradition. The combination of these experiences allows the authors to write with authority, warmth and wisdom about helping people from all walks of life cultivate kindness towards themselves and others.

As befits a course book, the book has a strong educational ethos, with a clear layout, guidance on how to use the book and numerous practical exercises to enable the reader to embody what the book is teaching. Like many good teachers the authors use multiple analogies to communicate their message. The overarching analogy for the book is one of cultivating the ‘garden of the mind’ to encourage the growth of kindness. The chapter headings make use of this analogy, e.g. ‘Preparing the earth’; ‘What about the weeds?’; ‘The finest flowers: gratitude and generosity’. Having more time to work in the garden following my recent retirement from the NHS, this analogy felt very resonant for me - but it may not work for every reader.

Each chapter begins with an apposite quote (the text is sprinkled with many inspirational quotes) and an ‘at a glance’ summary of the chapter. The text is clear and guides the reader through the practice of Mindfulness (Chapter 1); Working with our tendency to avoid pain (Chapter 2); Developing a meditation practice focussed on kindness (Chapters 3 and 4); Practical ways to develop gratitude and generosity (Chapter 5); To use our imagination (Chapter 6); To nurture our sense of our common humanity (Chapter 7); To forgive (Chapter 8). Each quality is clearly defined and explored. The authors give welcome attention to aspects of these qualities that may be given less

attention in comparable texts. For example, they highlight the value of beauty and the mutually reinforcing relationship between beauty and kindness. They also emphasise the importance of kindness and truthfulness in speech – a timely call in an era when there is so much false speech.

One of my initial reservations about the authors' approach was the claim in the first chapter that the medium from which kindness grows is mindfulness. I see kindness more as an innate quality of the heart, growing out of what one might call 'heartfulness' rather than mindfulness. However, as I ventured deeper into the text, these initial reservations subsided. In the final chapter, the authors write of the importance of listening to our heart – the seat of our intuition - and provide a practical exercise to embody this. They quote the Sufi poet Rumi's piercing observation that 'Your task is not to seek for love but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it'. This is where mindfulness practice and all the related practices from other spiritual traditions are so helpful.

Overall, I enjoyed this book and continue to savour some of its pearls of wisdom. It has something to offer both 'beginners' and more seasoned practitioners of mindfulness as well as those from non-Buddhist traditions of contemplative practice. It could easily be used as a course book in a clinical setting.