

The Essential Spiral: Ecology and Consciousness After 9/11, by Ian Prattis
(University Press of America, 2002) <http://www.ianprattis.com/essentialspiral.htm>

This is a remarkably personal, honest, and passionate trip into the mindless violent world we have created, and how through meditation and mindfulness practice we can change ourselves and our world. With clarity and vision Ian Prattis illustrates that what the Buddha realized 2,600 years ago is directly applicable to our current quest for peace and justice. This is an uncompromising and direct application of Buddhism to our contemporary situation.

Thich Nhat Hanh's presence is in this book through numerous references to his teachings and writings. Prattis' multidisciplinary approach covers everything from deep listening, problems of unmindful consumption, the global ecological crisis, to globalization. Chapter Seven, the final chapter, is a moving discussion of the Five Mindfulness Trainings as ethical guidelines for all people and faiths. Also included are ten mindfulness meditations. These are detailed and offered for the reader to practice. A comprehensive bibliography is at the end of each chapter. If you have read any of Thay's books, you will move easily into this one where Prattis brings a Western perspective to many ideas, concepts, and practices you may be familiar with. Indeed, he develops and expands on many practices and brings new interpretations and ideas on how to practice and change our lives. He uses many wonderful stories and anecdotes, often from his own life.

This book is a bold, direct, no-holds-barred application of Buddhist practices to both our personal lives and to our world. Prattis is deeply committed to his personal mindfulness practice and his writing reflects his honesty and integrity. He appeals to us, regardless of whether we are Christian, Jew, Moslem, or Buddhist, to develop our own mindfulness practice based on the Five Mindfulness Trainings. This is a powerful, indeed visionary book yet I am concerned about whether his somewhat academic style and direct Buddhist approach will lessen the book's appeal to certain non-Buddhists. How do you get it to the general public, the non-Buddhist? It needs to be read by people not familiar with Buddhism. I'm concerned this book won't get the circulation it deserves.

To some readers, particularly those that are not Buddhist, Prattis may seem to be proposing quite radical practices and methods. Yet, if we truly want to transform the violence, anger, hatred and despair that are in us and in our world, his prescriptions do not seem radical at all. We desperately need a "Consciousness Revolution grounded in mindfulness practice." What would happen if we, as a nation, could stop, breathe, and really look deeply at the causes of violence and terrorism? What would the world be like if we really practiced the Five Mindfulness Trainings? This would be the revolution and transformation we are searching for. As Prattis says, "all that is required is that you do it now."

This review by Order of Interbeing member, David Percival, appeared in the December 2003 issue of The Mindfulness Bell. David practices in New Mexico.