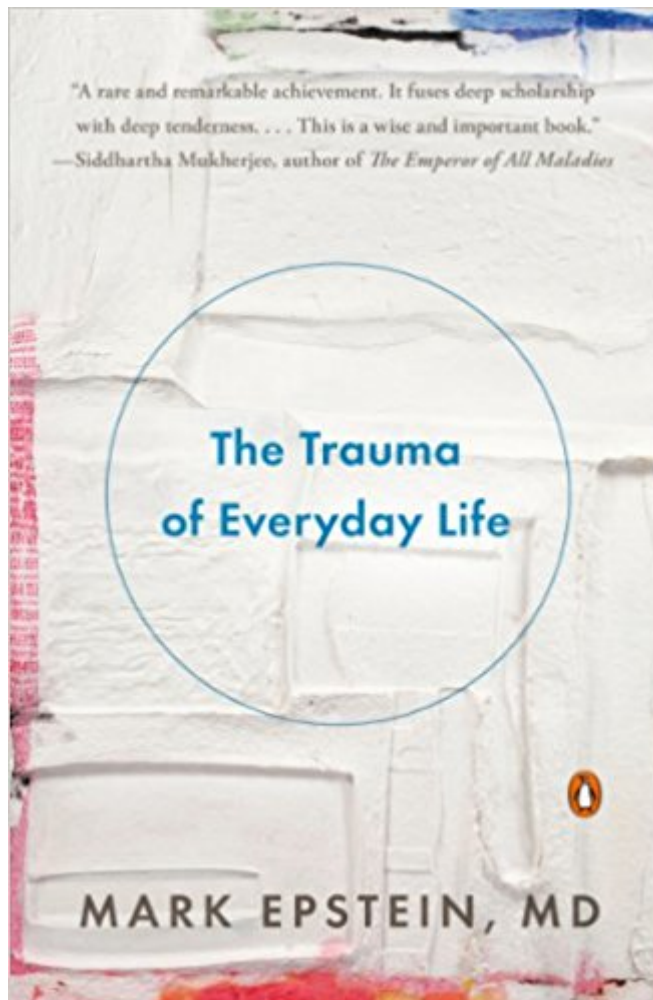


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# The Trauma Of Everyday Life



## Synopsis

A revolutionary reexamination of trauma's role in the life journey, opening the door to growth and healing. Trauma does not just happen to a few unlucky people; it is the bedrock of our psychology. Death and illness touch us all, but even the everyday sufferings of loneliness and fear are traumatic. In *The Trauma of Everyday Life* renowned psychiatrist and author of *Thoughts Without a Thinker* Mark Epstein uncovers the transformational potential of trauma, revealing how it can be used for the mind's own development. Western psychology teaches that if we understand the cause of trauma, we might move past it while many drawn to Eastern practices see meditation as a means of rising above, or distancing themselves from, their most difficult emotions. Both, Epstein argues, fail to recognize that trauma is an indivisible part of life and can be used as a lever for growth and an ever deeper understanding of change. When we regard trauma with this perspective, understanding that suffering is universal and without logic, our pain connects us to the world on a more fundamental level. The way out of pain is through it. Epstein's discovery begins in his analysis of the life of Buddha, looking to how the death of his mother informed his path and teachings. The Buddha's spiritual journey can be read as an expression of primitive agony grounded in childhood trauma. Yet the Buddha's story is only one of many in *The Trauma of Everyday Life*. Here, Epstein looks to his own experience, that of his patients, and of the many fellow sojourners and teachers he encounters as a psychiatrist and Buddhist. They are alike only in that they share in trauma, large and small, as all of us do. Epstein finds throughout that trauma, if it doesn't destroy us, wakes us up to both our mind's own capacity and to the suffering of others. It makes us more human, caring, and wise. It can be our greatest teacher, our freedom itself, and it is available to all of us.

## Book Information

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books (July 29, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143125745

ISBN-13: 978-0143125747

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 82 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #57,329 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #103 in Books > Religion &

Spirituality > Other Eastern Religions & Sacred Texts #135 in [Books](#) > Self-Help > Relationships > Love & Loss #200 in [Books](#) > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling > Neuropsychology

## Customer Reviews

“Epstein’s book is a guide to viewing trauma realistically, not striving to avoid it or even suss out its cause, but use it as a means of understanding “the texture” of our own suffering. If, as the Buddha said, life is suffering, why not suffer wisely?” —Nancy Haught, [The Portland Oregonian](#)

“Mark Epstein’s book is a rare and remarkable achievement. It fuses deep scholarship with deep tenderness—in the spirit of the greatest Buddhist teachers—to investigate the nature and psychic repercussions of trauma. The fact that Epstein can effortlessly transit between the ancient truths of Buddhism and the most contemporary understanding of trauma is a testament to his agility as a thinker. This is a wise and important book.” —Siddhartha Mukherjee, author of [The Emperor of All Maladies](#)

“This daring psychobiography of the Buddha divines in tales of his life the sources of his early emotional pain and finds in the Buddha’s methods a balm for the human psyche. In a breathtaking display of the therapeutic art, Epstein does ingenious psychodynamic detective work, deducing what ailed the Buddha, and why his remedies work so well. [The Trauma of Everyday Life](#) reads like a gripping mystery one told by your warm and reassuring, but utterly candid, analyst. What’s true for the Buddha, Epstein explains, applies to us all.” —Daniel Goleman, author of [Emotional Intelligence](#)

“Written with authentic originality, from the author’s own inward struggles and achievements, it is the most loving, gentle, brave, insightful, and exquisite presentation of the all too fully human process of enlightenment I have seen. Reading it engages us to look deep within to the heart as we expand our mind to appreciate the Buddha’s example in the only real way—with the joy of natural relational knowing. Buddha would have loved it! I love it! I recommend it—a transforming pleasure!” —Robert A. F. Thurman, Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Buddhist Studies, Columbia University; author of [Essential Tibetan Buddhism](#)

“Mark Epstein is one of the very few writers who has been able to make the connections between psychoanalysis and Buddhism seem not merely interesting, but somehow riveting and useful. Written with Epstein’s characteristic lucidity and passion, this inspired and illuminating book clarifies a lot of our presuppositions about trauma and, indeed, about everyday life. It should be of considerable interest to a great many people.” —Adam Phillips, author of [Missing Out](#) and [Winnicott](#)

“In this intriguing and deeply moving meditation on the human condition, Mark Epstein offers a psychoanalytic reading of the Buddha’s life that illuminates the same

tragedies and joys that are just as much part of our life today.â Stephen Batchelor, author of *Confession of a Buddhist Atheist* â Mark Epstein has managed to bring to life a sensitive and subtle understanding of human suffering and how traumatic the human condition is, and how transcendent and liberative it can be. His exploration of the subject draws beautifully and candidly on his own life, his own meditation practice, and his love for the Buddhaâs life story and embodied wisdom teachings. He weaves these threads and themes together with his love of Winnicott and psychotherapy in the most magical of ways. It is a remarkable and poetic achievement and goes to the heart of the relational nature of human awareness, reflected, as he shows, in our own implicit memory.â Jon Kabat-Zinn, author of *Full Catastrophe Living* and *Mindfulness for Beginners* â As always, Mark Epstein meditates on experienceâhis own and that of othersâwith exemplary intelligence, sensitivity, and tact. It is hard to imagine a book this year with more lucid and bracing wisdom.â Pankaj Mishra, author of *An End to Suffering: The Buddha in the World*

MARK EPSTEIN, MD, is a psychiatrist in private practice in New York City and the author of a number of books about the interface of Buddhism and psychotherapy, including *Thoughts Without a Thinker* and *Psychotherapy Without the Self*. He received his undergraduate and medical degrees from Harvard University. [MarkEpsteinMD.com](http://MarkEpsteinMD.com)

I cannot give this book enough praise. It is a rare gem of intelligence, compassion and clear understanding of the human predicament. No one escapes every day life, and no one escapes its trauma, but what we do about it marks us as remaining in ignorance of reality or having the courage to seek a true ontology of being. Most lives are spent in patterns of escape that in their turn are increasing the stress on both ourselves and the environment. Epstein's work plums the depths of dislocation and confusion within societies and individuals, and makes a clear analysis of the hidden trauma that drives us all. Epstein doesn't set out to change the world, but if enough people read and applied the wisdom of this work the world might just change for the better.

Our culture denies us the structure to identify and truly feel our feelings, especially those associated with loss and grief. Epstein, in writing about *The Buddha*, explains the importance of acknowledging all our feelings, even the most painful ones. It is the only way we grow as human beings, move through life and become more empathetic and connected to others. I have been lucky to see another great therapist of our time, Michael Eigen, who is quoted in the book. As a culture that is the most

addicted, most medicated, most in debt, most obese, as Epstein says, the only way out of trauma is to feel it.

This book will do you a great service: it will provoke you to change your footing in relation to the inevitable sufferings of your life in a redemptive and restorative way. It suggests that you cannot evade or hide from suffering, but that you must face and re-frame it so that it doesn't deform other aspects of life. The summary is dry and uninviting, but the book itself is rich and inspiring. I would wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone who has experienced birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age, illness, and the suffering and death of loved ones.

Dr. Mark Epstein never disappoints. His Buddhist wisdom, mental health training and his experience with real world examples is an amazing combination. Dr. Epstein drives his point home - trauma spares no one and it's everywhere. Maybe we all need to learn to treasure trauma, because it gives us a rare opportunity to practice patience, test our faith and eat a heapin' helping of humble pie. Thanks Dr. Epstein for another outstanding book and more please.

The entire book is great, but the best chapters are 10-12; the meat of the matter. Dr. Epstein does a most scholarly job of psychoanalytic deconstruction of the Buddha's early childhood and how the early loss of his mother stimulated his search for enlightenment. Such losses frequently characterized the lives of Buddhist masters (for example, Dogen) throughout the centuries; principally, because such losses were so common. Dr. Epstein explicates how loss is a constant companion of our lives, and how the Buddha's teachings address the daily, moment to moment navigation of this pain, as well as how the mind turns such pain into "suffering". We recently welcomed him for a presentation to our local psychoanalytic community and he is an excellent speaker. Dr. Michael Kampschaefer Oklahoma City

Not only did I learn a great deal about the life of the Buddha, Mark added the analytic filter which broadened and deepened my understanding of Buddhism and therapy. I love Winnicott and his thinking was woven in as well. Mark's personal additions were useful but imbalanced with the rest of the book's structure. An important read for therapists and anyone working on learning and growing.

Impressive, insightful, well-reasoned book, which is filled with poignant (as well as some trite) stories! Nevertheless, the book is too focused on our stories and our obsessions with them. In typical

psychotherapist fashion, the book unfolds as though insight into our history and stories is the answer to our problems even though some key insights in the book indicate otherwise. The book devotes so much to our cognition of our histories and our reconsolidation of memories in a less dissociative manner that it basically ignores how one establishes the mode for holding and remembering our experiences in a way which makes such restructuring possible. Thus, while the book cleverly establishes parallels between psychotherapy based particularly on modern knowledge of child development and the Buddha's teachings, the book nearly totally ignores hugely important aspects of the Buddha's teachings about what must be cultivated in ourselves to make such things possible. Instead, the book briefly states that the Buddha found a method to cultivate balance and equilibrium that is receptive to pent-up feelings and repressed memories which need be aired and resolved for our wellbeing. The method is left unexplained and glossed-over, which might explain why the author joyfully gives an account of a well-adjusted client having a minor but healthful insight who continues to be a patient for well more than a decade! The book falls back on the classic western approach of attempting to "grasp" and rationally solve the problem, here one of suffering. Wonder why we are out of touch? This is a huge omission, but the book nevertheless is very insightful and well worth reading. I felt less burdened afterward.

Epstein is brilliant and compassionate.

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