

*A Heart Full of Peace*  
Written by Joseph Goldstein  
Reviewed by Elizabeth Keeble



Joseph Goldstein is one of the major luminaries in the western Buddhist community. A co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts, alongside Jack Kornfield and Sharon Salzberg, he was also instrumental in setting up the Barre Centre for Buddhist Studies. In recent years, he helped co-found the Forest Refuge, a retreat center for long term retreatants, also in Barre.

A gifted author as well as speaker, “A Heart Full of Peace” is Goldstein’s most recent publication. This is a small but immeasurably important book. In it, Goldstein is offering a simple, doable practice for how we, as ordinary beings, can make a very real difference in our world. These practices are Buddhist in base, but the principles they express are without religious affiliation.

The book has two sections, the first offering a practical exercise designed to encourage the growth of compassion and an open heart. The practice involves repeating phrases wishing ourselves and others well, with the understanding that simply through the power of repetition, our inner reality will begin to shift. This very concrete and practical approach is then followed by descriptions of the various attitudes we can foster to open our hearts to ourselves and the world around us.

In the second section, Goldstein moves on to the discussion of what he calls the practice of freedom. Referring to another Buddhist practice, he talks about the tremendous strength of our thoughts to direct our behaviour, often unconsciously. He suggests that, as we observe our breath entering and leaving our body, we develop the ability to become aware of what we are thinking. This awareness then gives us the possibility to alter our habitual reactions. We now have choices, and with choice comes freedom.

At no point does Goldstein suggest that these shifts in approach and attitude are easily accomplished. This is work, absolutely, but the results are truly life altering. And as our own lives alter, so does the world around us.

“A Heart Full of Peace” is very easy to read. Drawing from his deep understanding and experience of the meditative path, Goldstein is able to distill into clear, accessible language, the obstacles we all face living in a world severely challenged by war, violence and hatred. With tremendous wisdom and the occasional flash of self-deprecating humour, Goldstein has a gift for speaking directly to the heart. He addresses the difficulties of living a conscious life in a consumer-based society with intelligence and practical guidance. Without shying away from the reality of the struggles that surround us, he presents options and ideas with clarity and optimism.

***Joseph Goldstein will present a talk and workshop in Ottawa on June 20 and 21, 2008, as a fundraising event for True North Insight Meditation Centre, [www.truenorthinsight.org](http://www.truenorthinsight.org)***