

Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu

FROM
MINDFULNESS
To
HEARTFULNESS

Transforming Self *and*
Society *with* Compassion

Praise for *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*

“From Mindfulness to Heartfulness is a rare gem—beautifully written, deeply engaging, and filled with valuable and authentic teachings about practical and spiritual paths toward balance and understanding. As Murphy-Shigematsu embraces his vulnerability, he opens up to and reflects upon his life stories, and that can inspire us to do the same—encouraging us toward knowledge and understanding. Just what is needed to bring the increasingly popular mindfulness approach back to its reality core—the blending of heartfulness with mindfulness.”

—**Richard Katz, PhD, Professor Emeritus, First Nations University of Canada, and author of *Indigenous Healing Psychology***

“Through tender teaching stories and an insightful narrative, Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu shows us the ways we can weave together mindfulness and compassion into what he terms *heartfulness*. As master educator, he leads us through the stages of heartfulness from vulnerability and connectedness to acceptance and gratitude. This is an important book. I heartfully recommend it to all who want to join their own personal journey of self-discovery to selfless service and the care for others.”

—**Arthur Zajonc, Professor of Physics Emeritus, Amherst College, and former President, Mind and Life Institute**

“This book has the potential for radical change in the way we live together, and I loved reading it! Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu takes us beyond mindfulness as it is often currently taught—as an instrument for cognitive changes like focus, attention, or stress relief—to the truths of the gentle, appreciative, nurturing heart. He shows us through stories and practices how to expand our contemplative lives from being self-focused to being inclusive, connected, compassionate, and responsible. Immense heartfulness shines through every story he tells, drawing on experiences from teaching children and college students to being with his dying grandmother to his own biracial childhood. Each story is a jewel, opening the heart. He connects heartfulness to social justice, leadership, and education and offers simple, direct instructions for seven heartfelt practices.”

—**Mirabai Bush, Senior Fellow, The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, and author of *Compassion in Action* (with Ram Dass) and *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education* (with Daniel Barbezat)**

“This powerful book is full of love and intimate wisdom. Full of rich stories and deep guidance, it is also a map of the human heart and the best in all of us.”

—**Roshi Joan Halifax, PhD, Abbot, Upaya Zen Center**

“Resonant with Stephen’s kindness, heartfulness, and wisdom and filled with excellent exercises and practical guides, this lovely volume will be a friend and guide to all those intent on creating and sustaining thriving lives, workplaces, relationships, and communities.”

—**Dan Barbezat, Professor of Economics, Amherst College**

“A profound and wise book written by a respected colleague and friend . . . this book humbly reminds us that mindfulness without the heart is lacking and shows the way to live our lives with awareness, compassion, and responsibility.”

—**Frederic Luskin PhD, cofounder of LifeWorks, Stanford University, and author of *Forgive for Good***

“I couldn’t put this book down! Dr. Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu’s *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness* is a profound exploration in heartfelt connection with ourselves and others. Through moving storytelling, Murphy-Shigematsu offers several integral components to cultivating a heartfelt way of being. Drawing on examples from his college teaching, his many talks to corporations and public audiences, and vulnerable moments from his own life, Murphy-Shigematsu illustrates what this heartfelt journey might look like—*he is in it with us*. He models the vulnerability heartfulness calls for, exploring the fraught experience of living a biracial identity in the racial contexts of both the United States and Japan. The insights that result offer a model of compassionate transformation that are applicable in a variety of contexts, including social justice, education, health care, corporations, and community work.

“This book is accessible, mesmerizing, and practical, offering both deep insights to ponder for days and practical tips to enact right now. It promises to become a classic mindfulness resource.”

—**Beth Berila, PhD, RYT 500, Director, Women’s Studies Program, St. Cloud State University**

“Master listener Dr. Murphy-Shigematsu demonstrates his attunement to the needs of a multicultural and stress-filled world by distilling wisdom stories from a range of perspectives to illuminate the holistic dynamics of heartfulness. His intimate stories exemplify how to live with heartfulness. They inspire and empower us to heal through a

mindful awareness that plumbs the personally and socially transformative power of heartfulness.”

—**Paula Arai, PhD, author of *Women Living Zen* and *Bringing Zen Home***

“The focus is not on how you can reduce stress through mindfulness but on teachings that sensitively and carefully show us a valuable way that humans can live good lives.”

—**Roshi Nanrei Yokota, Enkaku-ji Zen Temple Master**

“A moving testament and sharing of the lessons learned from the author’s grandmother, the daughter of a samurai, who taught him the art of living with heartfulness. The book is the distillation of many years of searching for authenticity, making peace with his vulnerabilities, exploring his connectedness with others, and finding his unique purpose in life. I am deeply moved by his stories of integrating the American and Japanese values and his insights on achieving mindfulness. The exercises in the book are a helpful guide for us to find our own meaning in our lives.”

—**Reiko Homma-True, Professor Emerita, Alliant International University**

“Murphy-Shigematsu, through vivid and insightful storytelling, shows how our connections to our ethnic and cultural heritage can guide and enrich our search for both enlightenment and social justice. The beautiful stories here bring vivid color to the practice of mindfulness that may seem like a world of whiteness in which race and culture are dismissed as worldly distractions on the spiritual journey.”

—**Satsuki Ina, PhD, filmmaker, psychotherapist, and community activist**

“Dr. Murphy-Shigematsu’s book offers an insightful new perspective on practicing mindfulness to cultivate heartfelt interconnections instead of just using it for stress reduction. This book is a timely and a much-needed intervention/response to corporate mindfulness. Using cultural and personal stories, Dr. Murphy-Shigematsu offers a moving narrative account of cultivating compassionate wisdom by opening our heart to listen to stories in and around our lives. The book is moving, wonderful, and heartfelt and an excellent guide to fully engaging in life with our heart.”

—**Ramaswami Mahalingam, Professor of Psychology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor**

“Wisdom of the heart. Murphy-Shigematsu’s gentle storytelling deftly illustrates a compassionate centering to the mindfulness movement sweeping across the country. In sharing the wisdom of his grandmother, he reminds us that outward-focused love and compassion are the complements to inward-focused peace and clarity. Significantly, this recentering is developed through stories that are cross-cultural and intercultural, illustrating how heartfulness provides compassionate pathways for navigating increasingly diverse societies. A valuable book.”

—**anthony lising antonio, Associate Professor of Education, Stanford University**

“In a society where supposed ‘intelligence’ is measured by a person’s ability to analyze and compute, Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu reminds us that the depth of our humanity is more than a number, an algorithm, or a test score. In a powerful story only he can tell, Stephen shows us a workable path that crosses cultures, boundaries, and identities that stitches a broken world back together.”

—**Jeremy Hunter, PhD, Founding Director, Executive Mind Leadership Institute, Peter F. Drucker and Masatoshi Ito Graduate School of Management**

“Mindfulness has become a contemporary cliché, all too often taken far from its roots to be practiced in ways that exemplify the very problems of solipsism and disregard it was meant to transform. Encouraging us instead toward heartfulness, Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu returns us to the importance of presence, empathy, and compassion. With humor, humility, and vulnerability, he guides us back toward thinking of how we might live, work, and act together in diverse and inclusive communities.”

—**Jeff Chang, author of *We Gon’ Be Alright***

“Murphy-Shigematsu is a master of storytelling. By artfully weaving together personal threads of his bicultural upbringing with accessible spiritual practices informed by Buddhism and modern psychotherapy, he becomes our friend and Sherpa, guiding us to reaching our highest human potential. Heartfulness is a life-changing philosophy, intended to heal not only individuals but communities at large. Reading this book will make you a better person.”

—**Isabel Stenzel Byrnes, bereavement counselor and author of *The Power of Two***

From Mindfulness to Heartfulness



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Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu



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To my grandmother



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Preface

“She waited for you,” the priest told me. I believe she did.

It had been a long trip to get there and my Grandmother Mitsu had been on a much longer journey in this world. She was 111, though the priest pronounced her 113 by the Buddhist way of counting age. Her old body had finally broken down and I couldn't just let her go, so I went to Japan.

With a heavy feeling that this was my last time to see her, I made the long trip across the ocean. When I finally arrived in her room and saw her tiny body, my heart sank, as she appeared to be unconscious. I stared at her for a while, thinking that I had come for nothing. But when I spoke to her, “Grandma,” she opened her eyes and looked into mine. “It's me,” I said. “Stephen.” She recognized me and her eyes closed. We did this a few more times before she appeared to fall into a deep sleep. Wanting to get away for a moment from the enormity of the situation, I went outside into the falling darkness, wandering through neighborhoods filled with sights, sounds, and scents of home — fish grilling, television news blaring, students bicycling home.

When I returned, her condition had markedly changed. The nurse said that she was rejecting food and even water. The doctor was called and after examining her told me that she was “nearing the mountaintop” — an unfamiliar expression but one I instantly understood. He left the room and I waited alone by her side. The only sound was the rhythm of her harsh breathing. After a few hours, I grew weary and fell asleep.

A short while later I awoke to a strange silence. I knew that

it was over. Her long time in this world had ended. As I gazed at the lifeless body, I sensed that she was no longer there.

The funeral ended with family members placing flowers on Grandmother's body, especially around her face, before the coffin was closed. We then moved to the crematorium. There we watched as the body was rolled into the oven and the switch turned on. None of this was horrifying. I sensed no life in the body, no grandmother. Whatever form she was now in, it clearly was not attached to that body.

My mother could not make the trip to Japan, so as the only grandson I was the designated person in charge of the ceremonies. Many people came up to me and reminded me what a big heart Grandmother had. I saw how she had always been so attentive and aware of the needs of others, so compassionate in giving, and so responsible in serving the interests of the family and community.

When I was leaving for the airport, the priest told me once again, "She waited for you. It is good you came. It gave her peace and she was able to let go."

It's still a mystery that she waited for me. Maybe grandmother wanted to give me the final message that everything was all right. She was okay. I would be okay. We were connected so deeply. When I was a lost young man in my twenties, I felt called to be by her side and lived with her in the Japanese countryside as I regained my strength to go on. Grandmother cared for me and taught me many things about life. I absorbed some of her tremendous life energy. She taught me about the beauty of a way of being in which I needed to accept who I was, be grateful for it, and responsibly do what I could with what I had. My life was transformed in what my awed father called "a metamorphosis!"

Grandmother's passing birthed a renewed sense of being called back home; to connect with my heritage; to remember who I am. Reflecting on her life, I remember how much Grandmother lived with her heart. At the funeral, so many people spoke of her with the word *kokoro*, expressing a broad sense of wholeness, with heart, mind, and spirit. Her being expressed mindfulness, compassion, and responsibility, and the closest word in English that describes her is "heartfulness."

It has become clear to me that for many years I have been teaching what I learned from my grandmother about the art of living with heartfulness. At first, I called it storytelling, or narrative. Then it became emotional intelligence. More recently it was labeled *mindfulness*. All these words describe a way of living that is heart-centered, beyond a focus on mind. I saw that I had been teaching about heartfulness in diverse contexts, without calling it by that word.

The responses to a heartfulness approach tell me that it has meaning in people's lives. The training that I do with American, Japanese, and Singaporean government employees is described as "staying in your heart" rather than "disappearing from your brain." College and high school students call my classes transformative, with life lessons that remain with them. Doctors, counselors, and coaches alike declare that heartfelt courses empower them with both empathy and respect.

Heartened by this response, I am propelled by the urgency of doing something, no matter how small, to heal personal suffering and to revive our sick society and destructive world. If we are awake and aware, we know that we live in a dangerous time in which our lives, the lives of our children and of future generations, and even the survival of the planet

are threatened. Despite being in the midst of material abundance and achievement, I am surrounded by anguished youth — some rushing blindly and heartlessly on their race to nowhere, others dropping out, numbed and disillusioned. My peace is shattered daily by the sharp blast of the train's whistle, reminding me daily of the five teens from my son's high school who took their own lives in a single year on the tracks near our home.

My sense of helplessness is a reflection of the vulnerability that many face in the world and provides a way of recognizing that our safety now depends on our loving and caring for the peoples of the world just as we love and care for our own families. Our survival depends on our willingness to transform ourselves into active global citizens. I see that my grandmother's teachings have meaning today in how to live a meaningful life, and I have been sharing them with people in many parts of the world.

I have put together some of Grandmother's teachings in this book, along with those of other mentors and guides. It is full of stories, as they make learning easier, and Grandmother loved telling them, as do I. My hope is that these stories will have meaning for you and help you to understand, and possibly even integrate, heartfelt principles into your life. Practice is necessary, so each chapter concludes with exercises that will help you to make the principles part of your daily activities.

Aging helps me overcome the fear that my words will not be listened to or will be misunderstood, and that what is most important to me must be made verbal and shared. I trust that a caring writer can bring new life to people by his honest self-portrait, as a service to those searching for some light in the

midst of darkness. I believe that it is necessary for those of us who write, to live and speak the truths that we believe and know beyond understanding. We survive by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing.

I tell my story of learning from Grandmother's wisdom in the belief that what is most personal is most universal. Yet it's just our story, hers and mine, and I've chosen to live like this. It's my belief that everybody's life can be like this, if they too choose to make it so, to reflect about what they've been through, and to share that with others. I am tempted by the desire to appear wise but strive to tell only what I know — no more and no less.

The stories I tell in this book show how I am here today and who I have become because of the love of Grandmother and of others who have given their lives for me. Throughout my life I've been blessed with countless teachers, some of whom are honored here and others who remain nameless. My story is their story, as my life has relied on their love and guiding light.

The song "Ripple" ends with the words "If I knew the way, I would take you home"¹ — a reminder that we each must find our own way home. I am always on my way home. The path of heartfulness, though constantly challenging, has guided me, filling my life with wonder, truth, and beauty. I believe that it will also serve as a guide to finding *your* way home — transforming yourself and society with compassion, and making peace in yourself and in the world.





INTRODUCTION: HEARTFULNESS

When we speak of mindfulness, it is important to keep in mind that we equally mean heartfulness. In fact, in Asian languages, the word for “mind” and the word for “heart” are usually the same. So if you are not hearing or feeling the word heartfulness when you encounter or use the word mindfulness, you are in all likelihood missing its essence.¹

— JON KABAT-ZINN