

*Inner Practice of Medicine: Guide to Becoming True Stewards of Health*

Review by Nikita Joshi, MD

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*Wendy Lau**Mountains Walking LLC, 2023**162 pages, \$12.99**ISBN-13: 979-8988547129*

Dr. Wendy Lau's book *Inner Practice of Medicine* stands unique among the field of publications for wellness and burnout in health care. She draws on her experience as an emergency physician, but more importantly, her experience as a Zen Buddhist chaplain, which makes her contribution to the field insightful and rare. The combination of Western medicine with Buddhist principles comes out in every page and allows the readers to gain a deeper and more personal perspective of their own relationship to wellness and burnout. A beautiful moment is shared in the book as a moment of true clarity while serving people in Nepal at an outdoor clinic. "Her wizened face was smiling shyly, framed by bright mountain sun and the vast Himalaysa behind her. I realized she was giggling, tickled by my touch. And although we didn't speak the same language, we had a moment of connection that led to us both laughing hysterically." (page 69)

Over 6 chapters, Dr. Lau lays out her understanding and the principles that she has gained from her own journey and through the coaching of countless other physicians, most acutely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapters are grouped to allow the reader to understand his or her current state of being and mindset and how to recognize and separate the inner and outer self. Understanding one's relationship with morbidity, mortality, and grief literally and figuratively is important as pushing these feelings to the subconscious can lead to unhealthy responses. Dr. Lau also reviews the concepts and pathway of moral injury evolving into moral resilience by also describing moral residue, moral adversity, and moral outrage. The final section reviews compassion for others but also for the self. "I realized that so much of what I truly considered healing came less from following formulas and protocols, and more from being in touch with the human connection that deeply embraces both joy and suffering." (page 83)

Each chapter has suggested exercises for the reader to engage with to allow for a deeper understanding of the concepts and of themselves. Exercises include closing eyes and contemplating on statements and feelings or writing

reflections of recent medical experiences. Chapter 5, which is dedicated entirely to developing compassion, describes an exercise in a concept called GRACE, which stands for G - Gathering Attention, R - Recalling your Intention, A - Attuning to Self and then to Another, C - Considering what will Serve, and E - Ending. Throughout, Dr. Lau suggests that this book can be read as a private experience or in a group setting through the strategic use of the exercises to facilitate sharing and dialogue.

Dr. Lau also suggests that although she is inspired by her background in Buddhism, this book has principles that are universal and can be applied to anyone regardless of religious beliefs or backgrounds. Additionally, this book relies heavily on the experiences within health care from the COVID-19 pandemic and most especially of those who worked within the pandemic in some of the hardest hit areas within New York City. However, the concepts of burnout are pervasive and make this book still relevant to all within emergency medicine.

Ultimately, the book concludes that compassion, connection, and community are vital to healing. In addition, other important factors include the awareness that these concepts are not easy to attain and that it takes courage, which Dr. Lau herself had to recognize and overcome. "In honesty, it took me so long to find the courage to put this book out into the world because of my fear of being judged by my peers for publishing something that is not typically medical. Publically to say out loud the underlying feelings that many of us have been trying to voice for many years took courage." (pages 110 to 111)

Dr. Lau's final parting words in her book summarize her intention, "My hope is that on the day of your retirement you will be able to look back on the work you have done and see how it has nourished the people you have served as well as yourself and your community of fellow physicians." (page 130)

*Nikita Joshi, MD**Department of Emergency Medicine, Alameda Health System, Oakland, CA*<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annemergmed.2024.01.006>