

‘Finally a study of Buddhist mindfulness groups that does not treat meditation as self-evidential and naturally effective, but paints a much more complex picture. Less dramatic than the Buddha’s enlightenment, we learn of practitioner’s informal affiliation, their silent conversion, or their disengagement with meditation. Instead of following the well-trodden path of evaluating benefits of Buddhist meditation, Rahmani offers insights into practitioner’s careers highly relevant for readers interested in late-modern forms of spiritual practice.’

—JENS SCHLIETER, Professor and Co-director of the Institute for the Science of Religion, University of Bern

‘This innovative book is a welcome addition to the literature on *conversion*, a process whereby people change their religions and usually their lives. Rahmani’s careful attention to the narratives of those who engage in and disengage from Vipassana meditation sheds light on the complex relationships between self and spirituality.’

—PETER STROMBERG, Professor of Anthropology, University of Tulsa

‘Highly innovative, brilliantly written, and based on solid research, *Drifting Through Samsara* is one of the best books on (de)conversion that I have read in the last fifteen years. The book addresses an important lacuna in the conversion literature by theoretically expanding religious disaffiliation. Rahmani’s research findings challenge the conventional religious exit literature by showing that authenticity discourse is not a motive for disengagement, but rather an effort to reconstruct an alternative universe of discourse. Tacit conversion is a great new concept to capture how many converts deny and conceal their conversion experience, and why they do that.’

—HENRI GOOREN, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan

In *Drifting Through Samsara*, Masoumeh Rahmani provides a fieldwork-based study of Goenka's Vipassana meditation movement in New Zealand. This group is distinguished by its refusal to identify as Buddhist and by a rich rhetorical repertoire for repackaging Theravada Buddhist teachings in pseudo-scientific and secular language.

Drawing from qualitative research, the book examines the way the movement's discourse shapes unique processes and narratives of conversion and disengagement. Rahmani argues that conversion to this movement is tacit and paradoxically results in the members' rejection of religious labels and categories including conversion. Tracing the linguistic changes associated with the process of conversion and increased commitment, she outlines three main disengagement pathways: (1) pragmatic leaving, (2) disaffiliation, and (3) deconversion.

Rahmani finds that as a consequence of its linguistic strategies, deconversion is a rare exit pattern from this movement. In general, however, the themes and characteristics of both disaffiliation and deconversion fit the contours of exit from other traditions, even though conversion was tacit in the first place. The book thus questions the normative participant recruitment approach in conversion studies and argues that a simple reliance on the informants' identification with or rejection of religious labels fails to encompass the tonalities of conversion in the contemporary spiritual landscape.



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is a lecturer in religious studies at the School of Social and Cultural Studies in Victoria University of Wellington. She gained her doctorate from the University of Otago in 2017 and previously held a research associate position in the Brain, Belief, and Behaviour lab at Coventry University. Her research interests include religious change, meditation movements, atheism and unbelief, and Asian spiritualities in non-Asian contexts. Her latest longitudinal project explored the diversity of 'unbelief' in the mindfulness subcultures of the UK and the US and examined the influence of the practice on the worldviews of nonreligious/atheist practitioners.