

Whitney

School in Worcester and author of, *Wherever You Go There You Are*, and *Meditation is Not What You Think*, describes meditation as “an inward gesture” of the heart and mind toward acceptance of the present moment, “accepting whatever is happening simply because it is already happening, and not taking it personally, or noticing how personally you are taking it and letting even that realization be held in awareness.”

Why value meditation? Why “practice” awareness? Kabat-Zinn suggests choosing mindfulness because we so often do the opposite: “We evaluate, we judge, we digress, we categorize, we react emotionally and so quickly that the moment of ‘pure seeing,’ the moment of ‘pure hearing,’ is lost.”

The mind grooves its own patterns. When we are unaware of our anger, anger takes over and we groove the habits and behaviors of anger. When we are unaware of anxiety, anxiety takes over and we groove the mindless habits of anxiety. Without awareness, we get caught in our own traps of emotion. Ultimately, something so simple as sitting and allowing ourselves to separate out our inner self from all the thoughts, opinions, judgments, and feelings we experience can be a dramatic choice towards inner and outer health.

Kabat-Zinn: “Ultimately, it is a radical act of sanity and love—namely to stop all the doing that carries us through our moments without truly inhabiting them, and actually drop into being, even for one fleeting moment.”

The good, and maybe unexpected, news is that meditation is not a technique but a way of being and you have everything you need already inside you. Some unique and exciting local opportunities exist to help you find inner space by doing nothing: in community college, in the hospital setting, and in schools.

Dan Huston, a communications professor at NHTI in Concord, has been teaching his “Communicating Mindfully” course for more than two decades, an application of mindfulness that may be unique in the nation in higher education. For Huston, a difficult divorce spurred him toward his own mindfulness practice, combined with reading *Journey of the Heart* by John Welwood, a book on mindfulness to help people navigate challenges in committed relationships. The book changed his life.

Huston: “It not only helped me communicate more effectively with my now ex-wife, but also with family, friends, and colleagues. It helped me manage difficulties, and it ‘woke me up’ to the beauty of life.” When asked to teach communications, Huston began applying mindfulness techniques to help his students. During the next decade, Huston expanded mindfulness communications courses, wrote a course textbook and set the stage for the

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integration of mindfulness communications offerings, courses now infused with NHTI degrees in Information Technology, Human Services and Addiction Counseling.

Huston then created an 11-credit Mindfulness Communications Certificate program at NHTI—inspired by the requests of companies recognizing the significant role mindfulness training played in enhancing emotional intelligence and improving graduates’ performance in the workplace. In addition, this year, Huston formed the first “Mindfulness in Society” Conference, to be held Sept. 8, at NHTI.

Another productive outlet for those interested in cultivating mindfulness

are two courses taught at St. Joseph’s Hospital as part of their Community Education series, taught by Cheryl Lucas, trained in the MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) at the Center for Mindfulness at the U-Mass Medical Center in Worcester. “Mind-Body Healing” is a one-day course, Sept. 26 or Nov. 14, from 4-6 p.m. “Mindfulness Fundamentals Stress Reduction” is a four-week evening course, 6:30-8 p.m., Oct. 25-Nov. 1-8-15.

Lucas has observed participants effectively apply mindfulness training to deal with chronic pain, rheumatoid arthritis, insomnia, grief or depression, and stress reduction. Lucas says mindfulness helps a person develop a “dimensionality of experience.” To deal with pain, a participant learns to notice the ebb and flow of the pain. Simply by noticing the pain, the pain changes, and awareness changes. PRI (Pain Reduction Index) research shows mindfulness resulted in a 30 percent reduction in physical pain, and a 77 percent reduction in psychological pain.

An exciting partnership between the YMCA of Greater Nashua, Rivier University and Hudson Memorial Middle School applies mindfulness to transform education in the classroom.

Joseph Manzoli, Jr., Chief Operating Officer of the YMCA of Greater Nashua: “We have always focused on healthy mind, body and spirit. Through our studies, we learned that we have the relationship between success and happiness backwards. We think, ‘If I work hard, then I’ll make more money and

then, I’ll be happy.’ But research shows the opposite to be true: happy people are more successful.

There are things that can be done to improve levels of happiness and mindfulness is one way.”

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After three years, Manzoli explained the results thus far: “Through (objective third-party) assessments in partnership with Rivier University, we have found that 69 percent of students saw a significant increase in self-esteem, 60 percent increased their level of happiness and 52 percent increased levels of grit, or the ability to overcome obstacles. Additionally, rates of detention and suspensions at Hudson Memorial have decreased by 48 percent after the first year of the program.”

This year, the program will expand to include four Hudson elementary schools: H.O. Smith, Library Street School, Nottingham West, and Hills Garrison. This is thanks to a Title IV grant resulting from further collaboration between the Y and the Hudson School District.

Kabat-Zinn: “Awareness itself is the teacher, the student and the lesson.”

There is yet another upcoming opportunity to pursue the study of meditation and mindfulness: The “World Summit on Stress, Mindfulness and Philosophy” Conference will take place Monday and Tuesday in the Crowne Plaza, Boston.

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