

Advances in Mental Health and Addiction

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Mindfulness and Buddhist-Derived Approaches in Mental Health and Addiction

 Springer

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ISBN 978-3-319-22254-7

ISBN 978-3-319-22255-4 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-22255-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015952311

Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

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Printed on acid-free paper

Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland is part of Springer Science+Business Media
(www.springer.com)

*To Dr. Giulia Cavalli, for her help with
introducing people in Italy to the practice
of authentic mindful living*

E.S.

To the simple monk, Venerable Edo Shonin

W.V.G.

To Fiona, Alyssia, Lucas, and Daniel

M.D.G.

Foreword

In the *Parables of Leadership*, Chan Kim narrates a parable that he first heard as a youth from a Korean master in the temples of Kyung Nam province of Korea. As the parable goes, to prepare his son to succeed him, the king sent the young prince to a renowned master to learn the fundamentals of being a good ruler. The master sent the young prince alone to the local forest and instructed him to return in a year and describe the sounds of the forest. When the young prince returned, the master asked the prince to describe what he heard and the prince replied, “Master, I could hear the cuckoos sing, the leaves rustle, the hummingbirds hum, the crickets chirp, the grass blow, the bees buzz, and the wind whisper and holler.” On hearing this, the master sent the young prince back into the forest to listen to the unheard sounds of the forest. The young prince wondered what else there was to hear, but he followed the master’s instructions and he began to listen more intently to experience the sounds of the forest. When the young prince returned, the master asked him what more had he heard. The prince replied, “Master, when I listened most closely, I could hear the unheard—the sound of flowers opening, the sound of the sun warming the earth, and the sound of the grass drinking the morning dew,” and the master nodded in approval. It was only by cultivating mindfulness that the young prince was able to hear the unheard.

The concept and practice of mindfulness has been in the lexicon of all wisdom traditions in one form or another since the beginning of such traditions. Although individuals in the West have been searching for and/or practicing some form of mindfulness for many years, the practice of mindfulness meditation came into its own in the West when Jon Kabat-Zinn formulated and introduced Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) about 35 years ago at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Mindfulness meditation has slowly gained traction since then and, in the past decade, we have witnessed increasing public and media attention, some favorable and some critical. But what is certain is that mindfulness has taken hold of people’s imagination in innumerable fields—medicine, psychology, psychiatry, nursing, occupational therapies, social services, pediatrics, oncology, diabetes, health and wellness, economics, and politics, among many others.

Recent events—wars, medical epidemics, and natural disasters—have heightened our sense of suffering in this world. But suffering has been with us since the beginning of time and there is great need for simple ways by which we can overcome or lessen suffering, regardless of its origins. While we may not be able to overcome the pain associated with various conditions we suffer from, surely we can lessen the suffering that such pain engenders. This quest for finding solutions to our suffering has been embraced by academic and scientific communities in their search for treatments, programs, or regimens that will provide lasting relief. What we need is a resource that informs us of the current status of what we know about these treatments, programs, and regimens, the research evidence that underpins these approaches, and newer approaches that are in development which appear most promising. Fortunately, we now have this resource and we are indebted to the editors of this book for bringing together a stellar group of scientifically and clinically enlightened contributors who have sifted through the growing literature to inform us of the state of the art of mindfulness and its applications.

Mindfulness has always been a difficult term to define in the context of science. Louis Armstrong, a prominent American jazz musician, once observed that, “If you have to ask what jazz is, you will never know.” The same could be said of mindfulness. But the notion of experiencing mindfulness to know what it is, as opposed to operationally defining it, is anathema to the scientific mind. Of course, there have been various attempts to define mindfulness, an ill-translated Pāli word *sati*, a relative of the Sanskrit word *smṛiti*, which is traditionally translated as, “that which is remembered,” or recalling to one’s mind. In the context of Western science, there does not appear to be much consensus on how it can be defined in a unitary manner. For example, Jon Kabat-Zinn has defined it as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.” The great mindfulness meditation master, Munindra, suggested that in the context of daily life, mindfulness is the “. . . experiencing from moment to moment, living from moment to moment, without clinging, without condemning, without judging, without criticizing—choiceless awareness. . . It should be integrated into our whole life. It is actually an education in how to see, how to hear, how to smell, how to eat, how to drink, how to walk with full awareness.”

Over the years, Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR became mainstream and a small number of related mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) emerged. To varying degrees, these MBIs were found to have a positive effect on individuals who had various diseases and disorders—both medical and psychiatric, physical and emotional. Such was the effectiveness of these interventions that they were ruled to be evidence-based, and mindfulness-based treatment guidelines were included by various professional associations in several countries. The first generation of MBIs was uniformly secular in their presentation, often eschewing the spiritual bases of mindfulness meditation practices. The recent advent of the second generation of MBIs has explicitly included other practices, most often Buddhist practices, which place these MBIs squarely in the spiritual realm. While one does not need to be a Buddhist to engage in these MBIs, the developers of these MBIs offer them as being more broad-based

and better equipped to produce transformational changes in the practitioners. These MBIs were developed to enable the practitioners to embody the teachings rather than focus on health and wellness as the primary outcomes.

There is natural tension between the secular and spiritual MBI traditions, but it need not be if the essence of both approaches is to be on the journey of life itself. The editors and contributors of this book cover a broad swath of the current mindfulness canvas—from assessment, diagnosis, and treatment to patient engagement in the practices. Taken as a whole, this book paints a very positive picture of the current status of the field and promises even more in the future.

Augusta, GA, USA
2015

Nirbhay N. Singh
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