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Article 100

The Navigation Tools of Spiritual Mindfulness

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Mindfulness is a primary tool to help clients get in touch with their inner selves. Although mindfulness originates in the Buddhist doctrine of faith, practices from Jewish and Christian scripture, as well as patristic fathers and mothers, support the same principles. Mindfulness provides a door to the exploration of the core principles of The Four Noble Truths. Stated simply the Four Noble truths are: a) to live life is to suffer, b) attachment is the cause of suffering, c) there can be an end to suffering, and d) follow the path of the Middle Way or the Eight Fold Path (Gunaratana, 2002; Kumar, 2002). Life is suffering; this truth is seen repeatedly in the Gospels. Two examples among many that could be cited are the paralyzed man at the pool in John 5:6, and the woman with the issue of blood in Luke 8:45.

Key Concepts in Mindfulness

Meichenbaum (2008) stressed the importance of acceptance as a technique in the healing of life's traumas. Both Buddhist and Christian beliefs adhere to the concept of acceptance. The Noble Eight Path starts with a Right View as the first principle. The elements of the Noble Eight Path are as follows: a) Right view, b) Right intention or resolve, c) Right speech, d) Right action, e) Right livelihood, f) Right effort, g) Right mindfulness, and finally, h) Right concentration/contemplation (Lama, 2001). This is not blindness but becoming aware of your body and its feelings-- physical, mental and spiritual. This enlightenment leads to *Sati*, or the activity of mindfulness. This in turn brings *Vipassana*, or insight that enables one to take right efforts and actions to inner awareness which leads to a right effort and right concentration in the ability to lessen suffering.

Through Mindfulness we awaken to the possibility of becoming one with the Buddha and his nature (Harris, 2009). In Jewish or Christian faith this is sublimating our

desires to those of God's plans and purposes for our life. Maguire (2000) defined *shobogenzo* as a way of the Buddha to be able to forget the self. To study the self is to forget the self. *Thi* is seen in Matt. 19:30 which tell us that "he who would be first must be last." Buddhists believe this leads to being enlightened by "10,000 things." Buddhists refer to this as Bodhisdva or the "Buddha- to -be," the enlightened one (Armstrong, 2001). To achieve this means to cultivate the six *Paramitas*, or "self perfection." The six *Paramitas* are *Dana*, generosity or joy; *Shila*, morality and purity; *Kshanti*, patience, the shining light; *Virya*, energy, brilliance and meditation, concentration which leads to *Prajna*, or supreme wisdom (Armstrong, 2001). These are very similar to I Corinthians 12 which speaks of the "Gifts" for each individual but the greatest of these is Love.

Mindfulness then allows us to experience *Jhana* (empathy), the love to walk beside individuals in their time of suffering. This *Karuna* (compassion) becomes an experience of enlightenment as we are leaving behind egoistic and narcissistic behaviors. In leaving behind "self" we become "centered" on the needs of others. This is a value neutral, non-judgmental process. It accepts the moment (here and now) in the process with objectivity. This in turn allows the self or soul to grow inwardly to self actualization and inward meaning and self realization. Mindfulness then provides a lens (insight) to develop *Anatta* (selflessness; Armstrong, 2001).

Another paradox of mindfulness is that it allows the individual to experience the bliss of emptiness which is the true starting point of individuation, and counseling. Emptiness is another aspect of forgetting self. In Tibetan Buddhism, this quietness is known as "emptiness"; in Japanese Zen, this is "no-thought-ness".

Jonas (2006) discussed emptiness in the Greek language. *Hesychasum* is translated as quiet which leads the Christian to *Apatheia*, to be – a deep calm. Jesus emptied himself, *Kenosis*, Philippians. 2: 5 "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Galatians expands this theme in 2:20 "...it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me..."

Mindfulness gives us the opportunity to engage in motivational, positive psychology that is solution-focused in times of crises. For example, in working with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), it enables the client to step back and lessen the potential negative effects of PTSD. This releases the individual from reactive anxiety producing modes of behavior, allowing the client to engage in metacognitive skills (monitoring and control) in utilizing his stream of consciousness. In so doing he creates an openness to become receptive to whatever happens in his "new" field of awareness. Acceptance frees him from the consequences of the negative. The client is then able and ready to accept the First Noble Truth that life is suffering. He is ready to begin to utilize the "tools" of The Noble Eight Fold Path (Thompson, 2003). Following these eight steps of The Noble Eight Fold Path allows the client to enter the world of St. John of the Cross and empty his/her life of self centeredness and ego-centricism. St. Ignatius of Loyola called this "holy indifference."

Jesus presented a model in Luke 17:33 of "losing your life to gain your life" and to experience rebirth in the here and now and for eternity. This becomes a true Gestalt, inward mindfulness and inward awareness of your true self. This includes your feelings of consciousness, inward and outward.

The James Joyce character Stephen Dedalus, speaks of St. Thomas of Aquinas believing that beauty is wholeness (congruence), harmony (mindfulness), and radiance

(selflessness; Joyce, 1914/1992). Only that which is done for Jesus will have eternal permanence. Jesus told the woman to go in the peace that radiates wholeness and completeness, with a new narrative, a new story and a new *logos*.

Mindfulness allows the individual to live a life of psychological well-being, a life of wholeness, harmony, and radiance. One is on the path to becoming a Buddha, an Enlightened One. Mindfulness in Christian discipleship, in counseling, creates an inner awareness of what it means to be a true follower of Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come” (II Cor. 5:17). In the counseling setting, mindfulness techniques provide clients with skills to enhance inward focus and create better self-awareness.

Uses of Mindfulness Techniques

Mindfulness techniques provide a method of altering the connection between inner thoughts and feelings and outer words and deeds. Methods such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, 2004), and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002) have been demonstrated to have significant positive impact on clients with a variety of presenting problems. Mindfulness techniques have been recommended for treatment of depression (Segal et al., 2002), acceptance (Hayes, 2004, Robins, Schmidt, & Linehan, 2004), substance abuse (Luoma, Kohlenberg, Hayes, Bunting & Rye, 2008), eating disorders and obesity (Lillis, Hayes, Bunting, & Masuda, 2009, Wilson, 2004), and trauma (Follette, Palm, & Hall, 2004, Follette, Palm & Pearson, 2006).

Depression

Depression can be treated with medication, counseling, or by combining the two. Segal et al. (2002) noted that these treatments had been proven to effectively combat depression in many clients. They also noted that for a significant number of clients, the positive effects of treatment were temporary. Why do some clients recover from depression and others have recurrent depression (a new episode) or relapse (worsening of a previous episode)? Must antidepressants be administered for up to 5 years after a patient gets better? Or must a client remain in counseling for years after the initial episode has subsided?

It was in pondering the answers to these questions that Segal et al. (2002) developed their method of MBCT directed specifically at depression, and more pointedly, at preventing relapse. Drugs were developed to inhibit neurotransmitters. Many of the therapy techniques were developed to treat symptoms. What might the results of a short term treatment option focused on mindfulness training bring about? The eight session program that developed showed a significant reduction in depression relapse, particularly in study participants who had a history of three or more depressive episodes.

Acceptance

Acceptance is defined as “taking what is offered.” In ACT, acceptance is viewed as “the active nonjudgmental embracing of experience in the here and now” (Hayes, 2004, p. 21). To practice acceptance, a client must first be able to be present in the here

and now and set aside judgmental thoughts. Acceptance comes about when a client can see their circumstances in a new light without their own inner judgmental thoughts or the outer judgmental thoughts of others.

Robins et al. (2004) explained acceptance as “both an outcome and activity in DBT” (p. 38). Focusing on the present in a realistic manner without the lens of past and present judgments is a key concept in acceptance. Radical acceptance is “the fully open experience of what is” (p. 39). In practicing radical acceptance what is experienced simply *is*. The experience is not bad or good, it is not right or wrong; it simply is. It can be incredibly freeing for the alcoholic to make the statement “I am an alcoholic” and accept that statement as true without their own judgments of being bad and wrong or the judgments of others as being hopeless.

Substance Abuse

Luoma et al. (2008) conducted a study exploring the usefulness of ACT with substance abuse clients, particularly in reducing self-stigma. By changing the relationship between thoughts and actions, clients learn to accept their thoughts and experience their emotions in the present moment without guilt or shame.

Luoma et al. (2008) conducted a week long study with clients already enrolled in a substance abuse treatment program. The outcome of their study showed a decrease in internalized stigma as measured on a pre-study and post-study assessment. There was also a marked decrease in shame.

Obesity

Advertisements for weight loss products, programs, and even surgeries abound in all forms of media. The occurrence of obesity in adults, as well as children, is on the rise. A critical point in dealing with weight loss issues is the fact that for many, even significant weight loss can be temporary. It is not uncommon for individuals to lose weight and then subsequently regain the same amount they have lost or even more. Those who are unable to maintain weight loss often have fewer coping skills and frequently turn to eating as a coping skill when confronted with difficult emotions or stress (Lillis et al., 2009).

Mindfulness training offers a possible solution to obesity and other eating disorders. Offering the client an opportunity to experience acceptance through mindfulness techniques can reduce stigma, associated distress, and improve quality of life, whether or not weight loss is a target of the technique. Lillis et al. (2009) found significant positive change up to three months later in those who had participated in a six hour mindfulness and acceptance based workshop.

Trauma

Victims of trauma oftentimes develop coping skills that help them avoid situations which might likely expose them to further trauma. For example, trauma victims that have been involved in a major automobile accident on a freeway, may develop routes that avoid freeways or may even cease to drive a car. Many treatments for trauma related disorders focus on controlling the symptoms or further developing coping skills. Follette et al. (2006) noted that avoidance or suppression of the negative emotions associated with the trauma may lead to dissociating from the trauma or a numbing effect.

Mindfulness training can assist clients in being present in the here and now and teach them ways increase their awareness of how past traumas are impacting their current emotions. Follette et al. (2004) noted that for the trauma victim, “acceptance involves the conscious abandonment of behaviors that function as experiential avoidance, and the willingness to experience one’s own emotions and thoughts as they occur” (p. 198). Learning to be present in the present rather than constricted by the past offers hope to the trauma victim.

Christian Contemplative Practices

Mindfulness techniques include activities such as focused breathing, relaxation techniques, journaling, and other “in the present” techniques. Although, many mindfulness techniques have their roots in eastern religious practices, contemplative practices within the Christian tradition as well as the Jewish tradition have similar effects on the individual.

There are a number of contemplative practices that have a marked history with Christian tradition. The practice of prayer, in particular centering prayer, offers a method of quieting the body and the mind to allow the individual a deeper level of self-understanding (Bonhoeffer, 1954; Keating, 1994; Pennington, 1999). A labyrinth is another method of quieting, whether it is a path that one physically walks or a diagram that one traces with a finger or a stylus (Geoffrion, 1999, 2000). Exploring historical figures and writings can create a connection between the past and the present (Tyson, 1999). Study, or contemplation, of sacred writings can bring an individual to a closer connection to their purpose (Bonhoeffer, 1954, Geoffrion, 2000, Keating, 1994).

Centering Prayer

Keating (1994) compares the practice of centering prayer to moving toward the center of a circle. He diagrams this as moving from an outer circle he terms *ordinary awareness* into a slightly smaller circle he terms *spiritual awareness* into an even smaller circle he terms *true self* and finally toward a solid dot at the center of the circles which he terms *divine presence*. Keating also compares this process to an archeological dig in which one begins the spiritual journey in a present moment and works at brushing away the layers to discover “our deepest and earliest wounds in need of healing” (p. 83).

Bonhoeffer (1954) wrote of the need to be in community and the need to be alone and how the two needs relate. “The mark of solitude is silence, as speech is the mark of community. Silence and speech have the same inner correspondence and difference as do solitude and community. One does not exist without the other” (p. 78).

Labyrinth

A labyrinth is a single path that leads to a central point. A labyrinth can be distinguished from a maze in that a maze has intentional false paths. In the act of walking a labyrinth a participant is encouraged to shed their troubles and increase their awareness of the present moment and the presence of God (Geoffrion, 2000).

The power of the labyrinth is the path to the center. For those who are not able to physically walk the path of a labyrinth with their feet, they may “walk it” with their eyes by simply following the path with their eyes. Other possibilities exist, as one can simply

trace the path on an image of a labyrinth with their fingers or perhaps with a stylus (Geoffrion, 1999). Reaching the center of a labyrinth, be it a walking path or an image held in the hand, is a method of centering that can connect the participant to themselves and to a higher power. The exercise of walking a labyrinth includes the walk into the center, quiet time in the center, and the walk out of the center.

Historical Study

Another method for deeper spiritual connection both to oneself and to God is by studying the writings by and about spiritual leaders from the past (Tyson, 1999). Finding commonalities with those who have found a place in the history of a faith can have an empowering effect on the reader. It can also be empowering to discover differences of opinion between reader and ancient. Whether we agree or disagree with historical figures is of little consequence what matters is that the contemporary reader gives thoughtful internal discussion to the topic at hand and arrives at a confident opinion.

Many faithful followers of a religion make it a point to share experiences with those who have gone before. Many Christians of western European descent may travel to monasteries of historical significance to their faith. Lutherans may find it inspiring to visit Martin Luther's church at Wittenberg. Methodists might find it inspiring to visit Wesley's church at Epworth. Many Jews make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in their lifetime.

Music is yet another way that contemporary faithful can connect with those of a previous era. Listening to Handel's *Messiah*, or a prelude by Bach touches the soul. In the same way chants of the Jewish faith or musical chimes of eastern tradition build an auditory bridge to a past time. Sharing experiences either in reading, geography or music joins together souls across time.

Scripture

Christians study the Bible, and Jews study the Torah. For centering or contemplative practices the focus is more on meditative practices than true study of the word (Keating, 1999). The centering practice is much more focused on what the story or verse is saying specifically to the reader. At times the verse may ring true with a distinct meaning in the here and now for an individual that has no meaning for the masses. One Bible technique that has a powerful centering effect is to meditate on the same verse from different versions of the Bible allowing slight differences in wording to wash over the reader and leave nuances to the meaning.

It is also possible to incorporate two or more of these centering techniques together. For example, one might meditate on a quote from a religious leader of days gone by as you focus in on centering prayer. Another possibility might be using a Bible verse as a chant as one makes their way along the path of a labyrinth (Geoffrion, 2000). Whether used independently or together, these methods of centering can assist in the quest for mindfulness.

Jewish Kaballah

Centering prayer, walking a labyrinth, historical study and use of sacred writings are not exclusive to the Christian tradition. In truth, these spiritual techniques can be used

by the followers of any faith or by those who feel a connection to a higher, yet, unnamed power. Within the Jewish tradition is a similar movement called *kaballah*. Like the Christian techniques previously discussed, kaballah has an ancient history and a few who continue to follow in this contemporary age. Ribner (2000) defined kaballah as “to receive” (p. xv). Kaballah has elements of meditation, unity, forgiveness, study of mystical texts, and sexuality (Feldman, 1999; Ribner, 2000). Ribner’s definition of kaballah, “to receive,” seems identical to Hayes’ definition of acceptance, “to take what is offered.”

The methodologies of mindfulness, the contemplative practices of Christianity, and the focused exercises of kaballah all share a common goal. The goal is to reach a place within the self that a connection can be made to an accepting, nonjudgmental higher power and that connection can be used to gain a new insight to the self of the individual. Once accomplished, the individual can begin to leave behind their own self judgments, stigmata, and shame.

Conclusion

Mindfulness techniques have been shown to have a powerful positive impact on assisting clients with a variety of presenting issues. DBT, ACT and MBCT all trace their roots to eastern religions. Similar practices also exist within Christian tradition and Jewish tradition. It would be a moot point to attempt to discover the true origins of mindfulness practices. The fact that the Jewish faith predates Buddhism does not mean that Jewish mindfulness practices predate Buddhist mindfulness practices. It is most likely that Christianity, the youngest of the three faiths, adopted or adapted its contemplative practices from one or both of the earlier religions. The powerful point is not which came first, but rather the strong commonalities between the three.

When using mindfulness techniques with a client who professes a particular faith background, it might be useful for the counselor to employ some of the faith based practices listed above. The most important factor to consider is the client’s comfort level of utilizing a particular technique. Any technique that adds stress to the session or to the client at home is not accomplishing the goals of mindfulness activities.

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